Study on Performativity of Site-Specific Performance Related to Using Technology

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Abstract—A site-specific performance is a genre and a phenomenon that has recently emerged as a recent paradigm of performing arts: a communality. It basically involves performativity of audience and use of the latest technologies. This study aims to figure out novel methods of communication and the relationship between performativity within a performance and technologies that are used by analyzing "Lost Missing and Forgotten" which is a collaboration of two choreographers from Finland and Korea created in 2012. Three principles of performativity which have been borrowed as key tools for this study are role reversal, community building and contact. Based on these three principles from "The Aesthetics of Performativity" written by Erika-Fischer Lichte in 2017, performativity of performers and audience and influences of technologies to the performance have been addressed. The study results show that technologies can act as an environmental factor that determines the engagement level of audience throughout a performance which is basically a tour around a forgotten place, Dae lim plaza in Jongro. Additionally, there were audience engagement through role reversal, community building through strolling and participation in a performance by contact. To summarize, it is important to understand that recent trend of audience engagement and use of technologies throughout a performance is changing the conventional paradigm in the performing arts scene. This study also has an artistic significance as it shows how development of technologies such as VR and AI can realize its full potential to audience in terms of contemporary arts.

Keywords: performativity, site-specific performance, contemporary arts, technology

I. INTRODUCTION

Walter Benjamin underlines a city not as an individual but as a repository of collective memory [1]. When we think of performance venues, we often think of proscenium stages or black box theaters. As Benjamin said, a site-specific performance chooses various places within cities or villages we live in other than a typical theater as a venue. It namely derived from a performance 'for' a specific place and 'about' a specific place. Also, it is sympathy for the place that forms the basis of a site-specific performance. As every city has its own history which is a repository of collective memories, a site-specific performance uses it as a main subject.

Site-specific performance can be defined in connection with various concepts such as a ritual, influence of contemporary arts to the society or return to the past [2]. In this modern worlds, change of the conventional paradigm in the performing arts scene and development in technologies should be taken into account as well [3]. Considering that communality has been emerging as a trend in the contemporary arts scene, Dae lim plaza in Jong ro can be a meaningful case as it is a social issue itself in terms of a heterotopic place that exists but does not exist at the same time. Located in a run-down region, it can be either artistically excavated or renovated. This study aims to figure out a relationship between performativity and technology analyzing "Lost Missing and Forgotten" which has been created as a collaboration of two choreographers from Finland and Korea respectively in 2012 premiered in Daelim plaza for Seoul International Dance Festival.

Role reversal, community building and contact are three principles of performativity that are stated in "The Transformative Power of Performance" written by Erika-Fischer Lichte in 2017 [4]. This study aims to analyze the performance with these three principles and investigate technologies that have been used throughout the performance.

"Lost Missing and Forgotten" has been created by Finnish choreographer Sari Palm green and Korean Choreographer Na Hoon Park as an international collaboration for Korea-Finland Connection project and was premiered in Seoul International Dance Festival invited by Seoul Section of CID-UNESCO. Supported by Dance Info Finland and Korea Arts Management Service, two choreographers from each country created the piece residing at the Dae lim plaza for a month.

II. RESEARCH ON "LOST MISSING AND FORGOTTEN"

Generic, Specific and Sympathetic: "Lost Missing and Forgotten" has been created based on role reversal that involves sympathy for attributes of a specific site. The epistemological base of contemporary arts such as Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation effect and Victor Shoklovsky's concept of defamiliarization is an important factor to draw interaction between audience as it gives audience, not performers, a chance to create a performance by making a contact with other audience. Second, community building means that performers and audience build a community together at the venue instead of drawing a line between them. Third, contact is a necessary

part of a performance to draw audience engagement and coexistence of audience and performers as it frees audience from vision-based art appreciation [5].

A. Principles of Role Reversal

Fig. 1.   Stroll of audience on the way to the venue.

Role reversal has changed audience to be actively involved in a performance rather than passively receive information and messages that performers intend to express. Throughout human history there have existed various forms of venues such as places for rituals, the first venue in a civilized society, or we can say a city state, in ancient Greece, proscenium stages, black box theaters, and so on. As mentioned above, rigid separation between performers and audience has been a basic premise in terms of venues except for rituals.

Considering the epistemological base of Bertolt Brecht's theory of alienation effect, Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" and Wolfgang Iser's aesthetics of reception, perfection is no more a prerequisite for a sound performance. Instead, it is its imperfection that frees audience from a passive and receptive stance.

In terms of performance as mutual interaction, role reversal is a typical example of audience engagement.

"Lost Missing and Forgotten" practices audience engagement and role reversal from the very beginning of the work [6]. A guardian gives audience an instruction on how to use a headset to engage in and enjoy a performance.

Fig. 2.   Realization of role reversal to active audience through the use of a headset.

A site-specific performance asks audience for role reversal which involves use of a headset that enables a user to play or stop a certain music or sound autonomously on each floor. This namely is a new role assigned to audience that has not existed in past performances on a proscenium stage or at a typical theater. Technology, which is a significant environmental factor in this society, is used throughout the performance is a key factor that determines engagement level of audience and functions as a significant mechanism of role reversal.

Role reversal realizes aesthetics of performativity as it demands audience to proactively use technological devices to interpret a performance rather than passively 'watch' it.

B. Principles of Community Building

Audience engagement stands out in a site-specific performance as audience should do a lot more than they actually did in performer-centered pieces. Since performers do not express any messages throughout the performance which is very common in dichotomous performances, audience can build varied forms of communities by interacting with each other. In short, it is audience, not a performer, who creates and shares signs of art with others.

There we can find some elements of community. A community is an integral part of a performance as it enables audience to pro-actively perform their roles as a subject. As shown in figure 3, sky lanterns function as a lighting for the performance. Audience can be a performer by lighting up a certain object and an improviser as well who creates a performance in collaboration with others.

Additionally, audience show the aspects of a community by strolling around a space throughout a performance. On the route that is designed for the performance, audience are free to choose whether they walk together with other people or just stroll alone.

Fig. 3.   Stroll of audience in the building with a sky lantern.

The aesthetics of strolling, a principal aesthetic of Walter Benjamin in terms of interpreting a city, is a main philosophical concept of a site-specific performance. Additionally, immersive theater "Sleep No More" created by theater company Punch drunk shows various types of communities by letting audience stroll. People build different communities depending on which floor they are on and whom they are with [7].

As stated in "En route in Chicago: What if you did a show and one person came?" published by Chicago Tribune, which is a preview of "En Route" created by Australian theater company one step at a time like this, it lets audience stroll around the 'city' so that they can unconsciously engage in the performance and communicate with random strangers. In other words, both performers and audience can express themselves to anonymous people through strolling. In short, strolling is a

crucial part of a site-specific performance which shows the elements of a community. It is the reason why most of site-specific performances use strolling as a key element.

C. Principles of Contact

Contact is a primary philosophy of modern arts which breaks away from the logics of vision-based contact. It is also a prerequisite to awaken all the senses for communication that are different from those stimulated by contact improvisation in postmodern dances, nonverbal elements in contemporary plays, or vision-based methods of communication. Principles of mutual and physical contact are closely related to the principles of role reversal and community building as well to audience throughout the site-specific performance.

The space, located next to the rooftop and used in the last part of "Lost Missing and Forgotten," clearly shows the elements of mutual and physical contact. In this space, the audience practices performativity by lying on the floor. Lying on the prepared mat, audience make contact with each other and look up the ceiling. This might be a fresh moment for audience as they get closer both psychologically and physically and experience novel sight lines which are different from what they are accustomed to.

Fig. 4. Experience of a new sight line lying on the floor.

In a certain sense, it can be said that contact is a culmination of role reversal and community building. As shown in figure 4, audience gradually accomplishes performativity by reversing roles by proactively choosing sight lines and building a community with other audience by lying on the floor together.

Concepts of role reversal, community building and contact are the key elements of a performance in terms of the aesthetics of performativity. These are realized in a relationship with technology which shall be explained in the following part.

III. ROLES OF TECHNOLOGY

In recent performing arts, emerging technologies such as virtual reality(VR) and artificial intelligence(AI) are used in various performances in unexpected ways. The most significant technological element that is used for "Lost Missing and Forgotten" is undoubtedly a headset.

Audience are allowed to actively engage in the performance by turning a headset either on or off depending on a floor they are on and a context of the performance they are watching. It is important to understand that use of a headset can function as a

tool that can either raise or reduce an engagement level of audience throughout the performance.

It means that audience can autonomously select their levels of engagement, as stated in the theory of alienation effect put forward by Bertolt Brecht, which is clearly distinguished from aesthetics of virtual reality that solely depends on technologies to create an illusion. After all, influences that technologies have brought to the performance is closely related to the performance itself. It also functions as a tool that enables audience to pro-actively choose what to experience throughout the performance.

TABLE I.   THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND THREE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE WORK

Techno logy	Role Reversal	Entrance on the first floor	Use of technology for art appreciation and role reversal for performativity of audience
	Community	The second, third and fourth floors	Realization of aesthetics of strolling by moving from floor to floor with use of technology
	Contact	The rooftop and other spaces	Physical contact through lying on the floor with use of technological devices

As stated on the table above, "Lost Missing and Forgotten", a site-specific performance performed at the Dae lim plaza in Jung-gu, uses technologies throughout the performance based on three principles that are mentioned above. Technological devices that are provided to audience include a headset, mobile phone and other media. Experience that audience make throughout the performance is unique and it may be identical or different from experience that other audience make. It is recognized as a meaningful case and methodology in regards to performativity in performing arts that results from technological environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study we have looked into aesthetics of performativity which is an important factor of contemporary arts stemming from the change of audience reception theory. Three elements of aesthetics of performativity, which are role reversal, community building and contact, are particularly borrowed as tools to figure out how the aesthetics form a connection with technologies throughout a performance. As shown in "Sleep No More," audience reverse their roles by strolling in a building. It clearly realizes aesthetics of strolling and lets audience build a community on each floor. Moreover, realization of performativity through contact of audience is a widespread phenomenon throughout the performance. Emerging from a conventional dichotomous performance, it uses various methods of communication. Still there is a distinctiveness as a 'Korean' site-specific performance as it carries social messages at the place that is alienated from capitalism.

It is meaningful in the aspect of mutual coexistence of contemporary arts as well as high-end technologies are used to realize the performativity of performing arts in comparison with the past.

Technologies can do a lot more than creating an illusion. As we can find in the case of "Lost Missing and Forgotten," they can also draw the performativity of audience. It namely means that technologies function as an environmental factor to realize performativity. However, it is important to understand that technological environment is merely a means to confirm a presence of performers and audience at the venue. Audience engagement is a key factor that confirms the presence and a critical issue that performing arts professionals should render as a proposition.

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