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MEDIATION THROUGH MULTIMEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of multimedia and technology (new media) in contemporary Indian theatre and performance practices through the question of immediacy. It examines how new media has ushered in enormous possibilities to break conventional theatre practices and initiate new directions in scenography, performance-making, and meaning-making processes. The study analyses the works of Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur, and Deepan Sivaraman to understand the opportunities and challenges that multimedia and technology offer to contemporary practitioners. It discusses the use of analogue and digital multimedia, including linear and interactive forms, and their capacity to create immersive, communicative, and performative environments. The research highlights how new media enables the creation of virtual space, extends the performing body, and transforms scenography from static to dynamic and performative. It also examines the changing relationships between actors, scenography, and spectators, emphasizing interactivity, intermediality, and the democratic inclusion of theatrical elements. At the same time, it engages with debates on liveness and mediatization, addressing concerns regarding the impact of multimedia on the ontology of performance. The study argues that multimedia acts as a transformative agent that redefines theatrical aesthetics, visual dramaturgy, and audience experience, while also presenting multilayered challenges for theatre practitioners. Ultimately, the research situates contemporary theatre as a hybrid, collaborative, and mediatized art form that synthesizes art and science

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to create new experiential realities in performance space.

KEYWORDS: New Media, Contemporary Indian Theatre, Scenography, Virtual Space, Interactivity, Liveness, Mediatized Theatre, Performance, Visual Dramaturgy, Intermediality.

Introduction

Multimedia and technology play a significant role in contemporary Indian theatre and performance practices. Along with light and materials, contemporary theatre is also experimenting with new multimedia and technology. While multimedia and technology help theatre practitioners to put complex ideas and break the limitations of the conventional theatre, they also create multilayered challenges for directors, scenographers, actors and spectators. This Paperattempts to explore the field of multimedia and technology (new media) through the question of immediacy. The article discusses the opportunities and challenges that multimedia (new media) and technology offer to the contemporary practitioners. New media and technology have ushered in an enormous possibility to break the conventional theatre practices and start a new direction in contemporary theatre and performance. In continuation of the previous paper, I take three representative contemporary directors, designers and scenographers (Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman) who are using multimedia (new media) and technology to analyze the theme. The use of new media and technology has come with new experience, emotion and visuality. This has serious influence on theatre aesthetics and its meaning-making process. The new explorations are also concerned with new methods of researching, performing, viewing and learning about theatre and performance through creative exploration of multimedia and technology. The idea of inexperienced materials remains equally valid in this new engagement. This study explores the role of the immersive virtual world, Kuksa and Childs call it *'Second Life' (2010: 275-291)* in an effective exploration of scenography, and in the process of creating and experiencing theatrical performances.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2006) defines multimedia as the use of more than one medium of communication or artistic expression, or as applications that incorporate a number of media, such as text, audio, video, graphics, and animation, especially interactivity, when used in theatre or the performing arts. Though one can also think about cyberspace (Internet or mass communication technology) as part of new media, I am not bringing it here for the discussion. This analysis rather focuses on analogue and digital presentations of multimedia that are not web- based. While analogue technology takes account of sound equipment, slide and film projection, digital technologies take account of computer produced video, soundscape, graphics, animation, images and kinetics tools controlled by performing body in theatrical and performance space. David Saltz argues that the digital technology (multimedia) could be further categorized according to its ability to react with performers and other elements in space. The two categories are linear multimedia and interactive multimedia. Linear multimedia does not react to performance in the theatre space. Its changes are activated by the computer operator, who operates under the direction of a scenographer. This form of multimedia remains unchanged in the space (it depends on computer operator) irrespective of the performance in the theatre space.

Interactive multimedia is approachable to stage action of the performers and other elements meaning, this type of technology changes its contents when activated by either the physical movements or by voice of the performer or light and sound elements on stage. The response can be either random or programmed in some way. In other words, it is the live performance that creates the changes to the multimedia portal displays (Saltz: 2001, P – 107-108). Contemporary scenography has the power to create a unique narrative journey in space and time with the help of multimedia. Moving image, digital space (virtual space) and mixed media environments may be used to create illusion and construct unpredictable worlds distant from any realistic representation of life. Digital media becomes a medium, which can set new rules for the performance art. Recent technologies have encouraged the fusion of direction and scenography by creating not only a new visual notion in the theatre, but also a unique experience for the spectator and performance as well.

On the use of new media and technology, scenographers have different views. Some of them think that scenography is limiting and reductive to the idea of theatre. Peter Hall asserts that 'advances in technology have allowed for greater scope, potential and excitement but has also created potential problems in the cohesiveness of making theatre' (White: 2006, p- 105). In a seminar on scenography at the NSD, Robin Das[1] argued against the use of multimedia scenography. He was not ready to accept that whether multimedia scenography can be considered as scenography at all. Because in his view, scenography is not helpful for the actors. He still takes actor is the main protagonist

[1]Robin Das is an eminent personality of Indian theatre, he is known as the actor, director, theatre light designer. He works in many Hindi films, now he is teaching in National School of Drama since last 10 years.

in theatre. Sadanand Menon[2] was also skeptical when he said that someone like Robert Wilson[3] can make a play with two actors and forty-eight technicians and use high technology to create impact. He termed these experiments anti-theatre which shows a new position of visuality and new relationship with audience. In contrast to these views, Robert Lepage argued that 'use of technology has been regarded as tonic for a complacent theatre. New media allows practitioner to create a new form of communication and creative expression' (White: 2006, P- 109-110). Robert Lepage tried to communicate with today's spectator (mediatized) who are very close to multi-mediatized world, where human bodies operate through new media (multimedia). In a similar manner Josef Svoboda argued that 'this union of art and science is essential and vital for our time. It provides art with a rational basis and helps us to carry our investigations further' (Oddey & White: 2006, P-110). In a similar tone, Erwin Piscator in his own monograph The Political Theatre (1929) demonstrates how film was utilized in numerous ways in his productions: including isolated moving image interludes, documentary evidence, dynamic scenery, scene titles, and to provide commentary and meaning as a companion to stage events. At the same time many directors, scenographers and philosophers have problems with using multimedia and technology in the theatre and performance space. At the same time, many theatre practitioners are very passionate about the use of multimedia and technology in theatre and performance spaces. The debates ask us to think scenography in relations to actor and scenography and scenography and spectators at the level of emotion, affect, aesthetics and meaning making process. It also examines the relations between the use of technology and the creations of scenographic statements in the performance space. At the same time, the discussion mainly concentrates on the convergence of multimedia and technology (new media). It shows a new path for working, if these media (multimedia and technology) are assimilated effectively in the theatre and performance practices. Many contemporary theatre directors, scenographers, philosophers are almost obsessed with use of multimedia and technology in the theatre and performance space. They open up a new way of artistic expression, creative possibilities and provide a huge canvas to experiment with these media of art and science; which blur the boundaries of other genres and arts; for instance Pillai's *(The Black Orchid, Helen (2007-8), Midnight Children (2014), Loren Epson, (2015) and so on),* Kapur's *(Virasat (2014), Antigone Project (2002-3), Naulakha and so on), Sivaraman's (Peer Gynt (2010), Spinal Cord (2009), Dr. Caligari, (2015-16), Project Nostalgia (2014) and so on)* production highly depend on collaboration with different genres of artists like painter, film-maker, musician, architect and animation and graphics artist. In this regard, Svoboda said that 'production space should be a kind of piano, on which it is possible to improvise, to try out any idea whatever, or to experiment with relationships among various components' (White: 2006, pp. 110–111). The medium gives a technique to theatre practitioners to mesmerize contemporary spectators with a meaningful theatrical manifestation that brings the world of art and science in the entertainment arena together as they have developed in the similar atmosphere. The new and its related discourse have been producing significant cultural changes in our contemporary society and theatre practices as well. While it has offered opportunity it also raises several challenges for contemporary theatre designers and researchers. Here it is significant to observe that how multimedia and technology can redefine the meaning and boundaries of cultural experience and develop new kinds of mediatized theatre and performance.

Contemporary Indian theatre has become a complicated mixture of paintings, collage, videos, music, sculpture and numerous new media (multimedia and technology). The intervention of new media has radically challenged the conventional language of theatre and performance art. Multimedia along with theatre has become a space to examine fast changing multi-mediatized environments of the social. Packer and Jordan (2001) argue that there are new possible texts of new media history, just as there are numerous possible paths through a network. They suggest two significant key-properties to understand the assessment of new media. New media as an amalgamation of creative form and technology and *interactivity* that allows users to manipulate the affect of their experience in media directly.

It is not surprising that our modern culture becomes multi-mediatized and innovative with the notions of

[2]Sadanand Menon is a renowned Indian artist; he is a cultural journalism teacher, photographer and stage light designer. He is also a known speaker on art, culture, photography and so on. He is a teacher at Asian College of Journalism and IIT Madras.

[3]Robert Wilson is a contemporary American experimental theatre practitioner, director, scenographer, and playwright. He has also participated in several international collaborative theatre projects. Over the course of his wide-ranging career, he has also worked as a choreographer, performer, painter, sculptor, video artist and sound light designer.

virtual reality and virtual culture. We can see digitalization of almost every aspect of our contemporary society (sound, visual, sensual, touch). Manovich (1995:1) mentioned that our contemporary culture (digital culture) can be considered as an "existence of another virtual space, another three-dimensional world enclosed by a frame and situated inside our normal space". Our contemporary world is surrounded by fictive/virtual (computer generated) surroundings, which has huge canvas and explores several layers of human engagements. This field of interactions includes medical science, aeronautics, market, education, sports, and exhibition and so on. Virtual reality is the replica of the real environments and imagined environments that can be experienced in theatre and performance space as the synthesis of real and virtual space. Sometimes virtual space and real body become the medium of the creating of a virtual world. For instance, Kapur in Antigone Project videos projects on the actors' body *(Antigone Project: 2002)*. And so for a time actors become mediums of creating virtual reality.



Antigone Project (2002) by Anuradha Kapur

In this thesis I consider the term virtual reality as the parallel culture creating number of opportunities for creativity, experiments, communication and learning. Additionally, I treat the concept of virtual reality frequently in a literal way as a means that allows three-dimensional reconstruction and such a creation is only collaboratively possible.

Multimedia and Technology in Contemporary Indian Theatre

One of the main principles of theatre is representation; theatre represents the society creatively in theatrical and performance space. Spectators' understanding of the artistic interpolations of theatrical representation depends on the representation of social reality within which every spectator is 'positioned to enact, and to experience effectively, spectators of the reality' (Guiraud: 1988, P- 30). In this sense, the widespread use of new media (multimedia and technology) is responsible for significant changes in performance-making processes in theatre and performance. The use of new media (multimedia and technology) in contemporary Indian theatre gives an ample opportunity to spectators to communicate and interact with a world of digital theatre. This has also become accessible and comfortable with fast-moving and extremely mediatized contemporary culture. This mediatized contemporary theatre culture can be viewed as experiments and innovations in the light of the twentieth century 'modern' theatre where many theatre designers, directors, scenographers, theatre practitioner have designed spectacles in Parsi theatre, Bangla Theatre, Marathi theatre and so on. They used heavy technology for various types of theatre. Here I would like to place an example from Abhilash Pillai's *Lorem Ipsum (2015)* written by *Rajesh Tailang, (*Lorem Ipsum is a play in which Abhilash Pillai has tried to illustrate the dichotomy of experiences; the pain of sadness and the tears of

happiness. The content of this play has different theories running behind flying, disappearance and the anecdote of mankind's aspirations for flying.

The aerospace industry is no more an elite travelling extravaganza. Registering the global economy common man is able to fly more rampantly from one destination to another in this present age and the memories of journey are becoming drier, and warm, for the sake of saving time. Possibly many people might have experienced similar emotions during their train journeys. Before the launching of aeroplanes we know how rich the experience of the mankind was when they travelled in a train or a ship for a lengthy period where their personalities got changed, acquired lot of knowledge and got acculturated.

Today we know how aeroplanes symbolized the wealth of a nation, at the same time; we know these aeroplanes need huge amounts of fuel for flying. And I think we are quite aware of the hegemony of those who have more oil and the war powers. Today these aeroplanes are becoming a weapon for attacking and shattering the harmony of a nation. The intensity of turmoil created by a hijack or a pilot's death on board or machine failure not only counts for the fellow travelers in the flight but for their family members, relatives and parliamentarians of the nation in totality. "In a nutshell, the theories of disappearance of a flight could be sensible. It all sounds for mankind 'there is no one who loves pain itself, who seeks after it and wants to have it, simply because it is pain'. It is like today's politicians annotating in their speech certain quotes from the 'puranic' text without understanding the actual meaning and content behind those lines"[4]. But quoting it validates today's scenario.

When we theatre workers take a gallery of ideas for human disappearance from a flight and scramble it to making a light specimen, we try to replace meaningful context with emotional stories of passengers in the flight allowing viewers to focus only on graphic aspects such as acting, designing and visualization without being distracted by the content of them. The whole has developed from a series of improvisation by students from the idea of Rajesh Tailang and creative team. Is this gibberish play; for our conscience and thoughts in the era of privatization in the field of aeronautics? (Director's note from production brochure, 08-11 May 2015*)*. In the production, he used moving images, videos and graphics to create a unique experience of flying in an airplane. For that matter, he created the inside and outside atmosphere of an airplane. Details like how a passenger in an airplane feels inside an airplane was made possible with the help of new media (multimedia and technology). In a similar manner Deepan Sivaraman used video projection to express his artistic approach in *Dr. Caligari (2016)*[5]. He used video projection on the wall to enlarge or underline significant expression, inner emotion that otherwise could not be shown in a theatrical space and through the actions of the characters.



(*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari (2015-16)* by Deepan Sivaraman)

[4] Lorem Ipsum (2015), Directors' note (production brochure, 8 to 11 May show).
[5] For the description of the play, see the paper first.

He created a surrealistic atmosphere with use of new media (multimedia and technology), use of innovative space, smell (*kerosene*) and taste. He tried to activate all senses of performer and spectators as well. This type of expressive multi-mediatized approach of the scenography has been increasingly becoming common among contemporary Indian theatre practitioners.

Contemporary theatre and performance is the artistic-combination of different mediums (multimedia, painting, music, film, sculpture, dance and so on) of arts and science, which in turns creates immersive, interactive and communicative environment[6]. Whatever are the concerns of contemporary practitioners, scenography (mediatized theatre/Image theatre/virtual scenography) is becoming strongly relevant in contemporary electronic culture and particularly in the field of 'New media' culture. One can debate that theatre art has several similarities with the virtual reality. But when we look back to the historical perspective, theatre practitioners have been using many such impressive and immersion tricks. Examples such as physical surrounding with fake perspective, panoramic view or wall painting to give a sense of landscape immerse and illusionary world/ or fictive cosmos (Grau: 2013) can be seen as continuation. The efforts which were fundamental to theatre have radically transformed with coming of cinematography, computer technology and later on virtual reality. Gere (2002) further argues that multimedia proved to have a strong connection with artistic expression for example in the work of Abhilash Pillai's *Lorem Ipsum (2015), The Black Orchid, Midnight Children (2014), Peer Gynt (2015),* Anuradha Kapur's *Antigone Project (2002), Virasat (2013), and 409 Ramkinkars (2015)*, Deepan Sivaraman's *Peer Gynt (2012), Dr. Caligari (2015-16), Project Nostalgia (2014)* and so on. All the three directors create their work using artistic combination of various mediums (words, image, sound, light, graphics, videos, animations, painting, sculpture and so on). This is further complemented by the fact that theatre provides an ideal space for these experiments. Richard Wagner's speculation of drama fits here. He considered drama and theatre as an ideal medium to unite all branches of arts (2001: 69) with the intervention of new media and technology, theatre becomes a hybrid art or can be termed as synthesis of various arts. Wagner had a deep faith in experimental theatre art which creates a new visual language and aesthetics in theatre and performance space. Packer and Jordan refer to Wagner's approach as 'one of the first attempts in modern art to establish a practical theoretical system for the comprehensive instigation of the art through the "tantalizing", synthesizing, effect of music drama – the unification of music, song, dance, poetry, visual arts, and stage crafts' (2001: XVIII).

Deepan Sivaraman creates performance according to the above approach. He attempts to create 'total theatre[7]'or 'theatre of totality' through the use of various expressive medium of arts. He challenges the conventional relationship between spectators and 'stage' (proscenium) and performance with the innovative uses of different mediums of arts and new media (multimedia and technology). Most of Sivaraman's theatre productions happens in alternative space. We can take the examples of *Ubi Rai (2012), Dr. Caligari (2015), The Legend of Khasak (2015-16), Peer Gynt (2012) and Project Nostalgia (2014).* The spectators primarily are seated in performance space. The spectators can feel the space and atmosphere of the space.

[6]Scenography is the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation (Pamela Howard, 2002:130). Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth expand upon this to suggest that "scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting image to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is sensory as well as an intellectual experience, emotional as well as rational. (Joslin McKinney, 2009:4)

[7]The German term Total Theater was first used in the mid-1920s for a form of theatrical presentation planned by Walter Gropius for the director Erwin Piscator (1893–1966). Piscator's approach was highly influential. He altered texts to suit his own ends and was the first to introduce film and animated cartoons on stage to speed up the action. He was in favor of spectacle to get his messages (often propagandist) across. The text was subordinated to effects which could be achieved by arresting lighting, music, dance, acrobatics, startling sets and costumes. All the mechanical resources of the theatre were put to use. Total theatre developed into epic theatre (q.v.). In France the concept of total theatre was put into practice by Jean-Louis Barrault in the 1950s. One of his notable productions was Claudel's Christophe Colombe (1953). More recently the Italian director Luca Ronconi has enlarged the possibilities of total theatre by involving spectators and audience in the action. For example, his travelling version of Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (1970). In England the leading exponent was Joan Littlewood at the Theatre Workshop. One of her most successful productions was Oh! What a Lovely War (1963).



The Legend of Khasak (2015-16) by Deepan Sivaraman (Spectators are very close to performance space)

Sivaraman allows rather prefers audience seating as close to the performance space as possible. His idea is to make the spectators feel the warmness of light, material and smell of the sweating actors.



Virasat (2013-14) by Anuradha Kapur (Spectators are very close to performance space)

Similarly, Kapur also likes to have spectators close to the performance space. In some of her performances, spectators were served food, fried vegetables in her performance. She wants her spectators to use tactile senses to taste and smell a performance. All of the directors want their audience to get immersed in performance. New media (multimedia and technology) rather help them to create that immersive environment with use of innovative idea and alternative performance space. In this regard, Pamela Howard has to say that scenography as inseparable from the actors and audience. In her book, *What is Scenography?* she observes that,

Scenography is always incomplete until the performer steps into the playing space and engages with the audience. Moreover, scenography is the joint statement of the director and the visual artist of their view of the play, opera or dance that is being presented to the audience as a united piece of work. (2002: XXIV).

From the above discussion it can be observed that contemporary Indian theatre scenography is changing the relation between actor and scenography (physical and virtual relation as well). It is also changing the relation between scenography and spectators and actor and spectators. Against this background, the study of contemporary Indian theatre asks us to examine and understand the presence of every unit of theatre in performance such as material, light, sound, graphics, animation, space (physical and virtual), performers and text in a democratic manner. Pillai, Kapur and Sivaraman have felt that with the presence of so many materials in consideration, theatre making process becomes challenging. Nature of theatre has been changing over the years because our contemporary society is also going through remarkable changes by the intervention of the new media (multimedia and technology). As a researcher, we have to find a way that is based on 'inclusion', we can see that scenography is the central component for the composition, which is inclusive and democratic in the process of theatre-making. Howard makes this point very clearly by saying that,

The scenographer visually liberates the text and the story behind it, by creating a world in which the eye sees what the ears do not hear. Resonances of the text are visualized through fragments and memories that reverberate in the spectator's subconscious, suggesting rather than illustrating the words (Howard, 2002: 33)

Contemporary Indian scenography is creating a new experience (which I call it *'inexperienced'* reality in 'theatre and performance space'). Democratic in its nature and behavior, the categories of theatre and performance has been changing the entire perspective of the theatre making process. Sivaraman and Kapur said in an interview that ''scenography" as an approach of theatre making is very convincing because it has potential to experiment, explore and experience theatre making and 'production' (Kapur and Sivaraman, interview). Production here stands for complete performance, but many scholars believe that performance and scenography are always an incomplete unit of performance. In theatre making process, some time they begin with music and in that case music becomes the center point of the particular performance. Sometimes material, props, image, videos, graphics or animation can become a central idea to begin a performance. The theatre making process is based on a reciprocal relationship between actor and theatrical elements, such as materials. Both activate each-other. Though many theatre practitioners believe that actor or performer can only activate the 'materials[8]' but I as a theatre practitioner felt that materials can equally activate actors and performers. Kapur is in agreement with this view (Kapur, interview). In this way, we can claim that theatre and performance making process with emphasis on scenography has become more democratic and inclusive in nature. The approach also has power to create something that remains 'inexperienced' in theatrical experience for director, scenographer, actors as well as spectators. I would reiterate that this could have become possible because of use of new media (multimedia and technology) and intermediality approaches.

Multimedia as a Transforming Agent

A new trend that has emerged in contemporary Indian theatre and performance characteristic is led by multimedia. New media (multimedia and technology) is increasingly replacing the physical reality of theatre and performance space into virtual reality. This trend of multimediatized theatre and performance has come with new challenges for directors, designers, scenographers, actors and spectators. In this regard, Arnold Aronson forecasted which I have mentioned in the introduction (Aronson: 2010, P- 84-88).

We know that theatre and performance are a moving art by their fundamental nature. Every 'unit' (character, time, space (location), music, emotion, action and text) keeps transforming in performance, often with transformation of space and time. The problem of the physical set is the issue of immovability. Many directors somehow managed this problem of immovability by designing performance floor in their productions. For example, Amal Allana designed the floor to suit the demand of *Natibinodni*. Similarly, Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry also designed floor in her production of *Blood Wedding* and Ratan Thiyam did same for his production, The *King of Dark Chamber*. The floor designs still remain static in nature in companion to multimedia technology. In conventional modern theatre, once the set design is done it becomes impossible to remove them. So suppose, if designers want to change the physical set, it at least take 5 to 10 seconds of blackout to do that; Hui Man Lua has address this issues in his Ph.D.[9] thesis. He argues that 'as the projected imagery on the floor changed along with the actions and mood, the

[8]Materials stand for the elements (raw material) or visual materials that come in the creating of representational reality.

[9] Lua, Hui Man. *Digital Video Scenography: Scenic Design for Dead Man's Cell Phone.* Columbia: THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, 2011.

characters were teleported through time and space. Abhilash Pillai and Deepan Sivaraman have used this technique in The *Black Orchid (2010)* and Dr. *Caligari (2015) respectively*.



The Black Orchid (2007) by Abhilash Pillai (Performative Floor through multimedia and technology)



Dr. Caligari (2015-16) by Deepan Sivaraman, (Performative floor)

"This instantaneous and fluid transformation of the space between scenes and locations became as theatrical as the fantastical encounters and events within the play, as well as making the performance space just as performative as the performance itself" (Lua: 2011, P- 10). I will argue that new media and technology has given a new dimension of performativity in scenography.

Use of new media has whole dimension of theatre and performance. Physical set (physical reality) used to limit the imagination of the playwrights, directors, designers and scenographers. Playwrights cannot write ocean scene, railway platform scene or mountain scene, even if it is required. This is because

it would be quite difficult to create such physical sets or physical reality of the real life. They all have to think in terms of a single location. Problems are also arising because of changing socio-political situation and significance of information services. In this new development, several boundaries are blurring, local culture and performance are getting globalized and global ideas are becoming part of the local culture. People are travelling a lot and visuals are dominating the scene. We always have images and information percolating in our mind. In a fraction of second thousands of images can appear in front of our eyes. In this changing environment, I will argue that fixed sets are becoming too limiting to capture these images and movements. In this context, Reaney has interesting observation about contemporary plays, These plays reflect current culture in that they are rich in information and use a multitude of visual images and multiple storylines. Information is typically presented in high-speed bursts and in pieces that have to be put together by the audience. They do not follow the more familiar and comfortable linear style of storytelling of the past. This new style of presentation is similar to the dissemination of information through electronic media and is suited to the talents of a population who can simultaneously watch two television shows and a football game while avoiding commercial breaks[10]. Even in contemporary Indian theatre context, directors and scenographers are struggling with new found materials of new media and technology. Kapur for instance has used (a documentary film by Seema Biswas and Harish Khanna) video projection in *Antigone Project (2002)*. The projection was a documentary film on Gujarat riots. The projection of documentary created a special relationship with spectators. Now for the directors and scenographers it was easy to draw some parallel between Antigone and Gujarat riots. In a similar manner Sivaraman projected operation theatre videos on the cyclorama in the 'Spinal Cord' where human bodies are treated as an object. The scene brought spectators in a discomfort zone.

Virtual scenography (digital scenography) is not only a video projection or some image or graphics projection in performance space. It is neither about simply 'replacing nor transforming a physical space into a virtual space, it needs to be rather viewed as creative engagement with various forms and materials. Improvisation remains a crucial issue of this making and therefore the issues raised during the improvisation' (Yildiz: 2000, P- 295) needs to be addressed. Contemporary approaches of scenography are the exploration of the new emotion, aesthetics and experience through computer generated virtual environments. Sometimes the design also collaborates with physical scenography. The main focus of the contemporary theatre is the democratic 'interaction' with each and every element of theatre agents (set, light, sound, actor and spectators and so on) in an interactive and intermediary fashion. In this context, Pelin Yildiz said that 'interactivity is the most important medium in communication technology. A visual communication method depends on visual perceptional requirements and contemporary approach in order to maintain interactivity' (Yildiz: 2000, P- 295). As we know interactivity (new media is also known as interactive media) makes communication more inclusive and dynamic (text to image, sound, emotion to graphics, color and so on), it opens up a new space of democratic distribution. To create a statement on theatrical and performance space, contemporary theatre can be viewed as an interactive multimedia composition. In this context, the intermedial effect of action and text, sound, and light, stage and costume design produced a highly complex art form' (Yildiz: 2000, P- 295). Therefore, it becomes highly important that contemporary theatre and performance needs to be analysed in multidimensional and multilayered spatial contexts. The explorative investigation of contemporary theatre and performance practices open a path to an *avant-garde*[11] scenography approach. Here, I would like to give an example from Pillai's production of *Midnight's Children (2014).* Pillai developed a unique style of scenography in *Midnight's Children*, where he created a combination of virtual space and physical props. Actors were playing with real physical props (bicycle, kitchen, and so on) in virtual space.

[10] Reaney, Mark. "Digital Scenography: Bringing the Theatre into the Information age ." *Academia.* January 1, 2000. www.academia.edu/1807776/Digital _Scenography: _Bringing_ the_ Theatre _into_ the _Information _age (accessed May 28, 2016).

[11]The avant-garde (French word) theatre means experimental or innovative theatre practices. Literally, avant-garde means, 'advance guard' which is a military term.



Midnight Children (2014) by Abhilash Pillai

He also projected 'montage' of images with folk music and songs. The images were showing the dream of the youngsters of newly 'independent India'. Likewise, Sivaraman used video projection in 'Project Nostalgia' he projected several footage on the wall, on hand props and on stage props as well. For example, there was a scene in which a character was reading a letter, the video projection was shown on the letter.



Project Nostalgia (2014) by Deepan Sivaraman

He created a nostalgic memory of characters in more communicative and interactive ways by using new media. Both the directors challenge the conventional style of theatre experiencing through this artistic use of new media (multimedia and technology) and physical props in the theatre space. A significant

aspect of this scenography is to make scenography (static to dynamic) 'performative' from cyclorama to the floor by the use of new media (multimedia and technology). It works with innovative ideas of lighting and sound properties to explore a new experience, affect and aesthetics for theatre and performance arts. This could also become possible because of new engagement of director, scenographer with computer generated units (image, sound, animation, graphics and videos and so on) and technology to control live performance.

Space, Actor and New media in contemporary theatre practices

Contemporary theatre can be understood as post-dramatic theatre for various reasons. Three aspects become significant in contemporary theatre and performance practices and they challenge the conventional theatre practices. Earlier, the projection of videos and images were used as part of cyclorama, later the projection was used in reference of live performance. Many times director and scenographer also used the projection of videos and images to show inner conflicts and emotions of particular characters in performance. Now it is providing a creative and 'performative space'[12] (virtual space) for theatre and performance arts. Many directors and scenographers like Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur and Deepan Sivaraman (here I am not claiming that only these directors use these techniques) have been projecting videos and images on the performing body, costumes, and floor to make aesthetic and political statements in theatre. Kapur has been using video projection on the performing boy (actor's body) in 'Antigone Project' (2002). She was trying to show inner conflicts and mental situation of women in the time of riot through those projections. She wanted to show that how during every riot women especially go through multilayered oppressions. Pillai has used a similar method in *Midnight's Children (2014)* where he projected montage of images from the independence period. These experiments transform the 'performing body' into 'dual-performative'. In the first case, performing body is performing in nature itself and in the second case, performing body (as an object) become performative through the projected images and videos on body and costumes. For instance, Sivaraman has used video projection frequently in more articulate ways in *Dr. Caligari (2015), Spinal Cord (2009) and Project Nostalgia (2014).*



Dr. Caligari (2015-16) by Deepan Sivaraman

In a scene, *Dr. Caligari (2015)* extends his body part in a gesticulated action, while an actor was typing the action on the type-writer. In *Spinal Cord* (2009) Deepan Sivaraman used video projection to highlight

[12] In contemporary theatre practices, space itself perform during the show through the use of new media (multimedia and technology).

the parts of the body, an operation theatre scene. He used videos projection for the extensions of characters' body. Sometimes to create body doubles which remain ambiguous. With new media and technology, contemporary theatre directors are trying to intensify the spectator's senses through the montage. Many theatre and performance scholars call these contemporary practices as 'image theatre'. It is true that contemporary theatre practices have been constituted by intensive use of image (electronic generated image and multi-mediatized image in theatre and performance space). Michel Foucault would call it image's power to organize a society. To understand 'power' of image theatre, Foucault said in an analysis of the image's 'internal relations of domination and resistance, as well as their external relations with spectators and with the world.' (Mitchell: 1995, P- 445). The power of image can be identified in most of the production of Pillai, Kapur and Deepan. Their usage of new media (multimedia and technology) is an intervention, through which a digital/virtual body is created in contrast to the physical body.

Digital body has the capability to modify, accommodate, annihilate and more so to multiply meaning and effect. It can also undermine the dominant power of text based drama. New media (multimedia and technology) allows instantaneous and visual transfiguration of space, performing body (action, emotion and mood) and therefore becomes more dynamic and performative. Contemporary theatre practitioners are using these materials also to configure transitions and the stage of in-betweens. In this process, performance becomes fluid and meanings get illustrated. It also creates a space of dialogue between actor, scenography (environments) and spectator as well.

The use of new media (multimedia and technology) in the contemporary theatre practices created an imaginative virtual space. It extended/ enlarged actor's body and emotion. It shows the inner conflicts of the characters through image, videos, graphics and animation and so on. It has the capacity to refer a particular scene to a particular context. Most importantly, it blurs the boundary that exists in the disciplinary formation of arts, science, social science and other disciplines. New media can be considered as the best artistic expression, full of theatrical effects that gets appropriated for the nature and style of the production. With this advantageous position new media (multimedia) as method of scenographic design is better placed than 'conventional' theatre design and performance making (meaning making process). Even in terms of creative experimentations and artistic development, new media can offer better scope than conventional theatre. New media expression is more powerful in style and experience for the contemporary spectators. Through the use of new media (multimedia and technology) directors and scenographers can create a virtual cosmos. This is also in the line of the technological orientation of our contemporary society.

Use of Multimedia as a threat to the liveness of performance

Here I would like to reflect on the relationship between body (actor and spectator) and scenography (physical and virtual) through the idea of liveness. The reflection is based on the issues raised by Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander and others. Philip Auslander disagrees with Peggy Phelan's definition of liveness by creating another notion of presence and mediation. Auslander in his conceptualization doubts 'very strongly that any cultural discourse can actually stand outside the ideologies of capital and reproduction or should be expected to do so' (1999:197). I would like to address the issue of liveness in contemporary Indian theatre and performance. Phelan has argued that

Performance's only life in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representation: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of production, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. (Phelan, 1993:41)

Performance and media are assuredly different and separate creatures, but I also argue that media can take on performative qualities, and not only because performance goes into the process of its creation. For Phelan, the mechanism of theatre's transmission is everything. If a live audience views a performance, it remains a performance, but if it is ingested through a projector and screen (or a television), it ceases to be a performance. The content of a production is outside of this discussion, though being mediatized would, in Phelan's view, diminish whatever political impact it may have. This diminishing is due to the performance's entry into a mass-market frame. Part of it also has to do with the reciprocal subjectivity involved in the performance, as Diana Taylor notes, "We are all caught off balance in the spectatorial gaze, suddenly aware that the 'object' of our gaze is also a subject who looks back, who challenges and objectifies us" (Taylor: 1998, P- 183). In the proscenium theatre a production happens every evening in front of the spectators, but there is space

to accommodate variants. New media (multimedia) is a powerful medium to repeat and reproduce 'live' performance with many other forms of arts, it forces performance to explore a new rationale, new approach, experience, expression and performance surroundings. The live performance has developed a new form that possibly would never have arisen of it were not intertwined, with several human activities and hadn't absorbed other genres of arts and science. In the context of liveness and performance debate, Peggy Phelan claimed that the 'live performance is transgressive, making each performance unique and irreproducible, separating it ontologically from the mediatized (Phelan 1993). Philip Auslander has criticised her for being nostalgic. Auslander makes evident that contemporary theatre and performance is mediatized so much so that theatre and performance repeatedly draw their ideas from new media (multimedia and technology). I see two extreme stances of Phelan and Auslander working as binary. Fischer-Lichte and Dixon rightly argued that both extremes stances can make theatre and performance experience. Dixon elaborates the idea of liveness through 'the works of art' and he finds out that these practices uphold both extremes of artistic capability.

On the one hand it stands as evidence for the unique aura and presence of live performance, which can only be damaged and robbed by technology, and not significantly alter reception of performance, since our minds (and performance itself) are already mediatised. (Dixon, 2007:17)

Phelan defines some aspects of the live theatre and performance in terms of their uniqueness of the digital performance or unique experience by the user of new media (multimedia and technology) in contemporary theatre practices. That can be seen in the productions of Abhilash Pillai, Anuradha Kapur, and Deepan Sivaraman. There is space for inconsistency, impulsiveness and contextual appropriateness. New media creates uniqueness by capturing real-time and space in performance. The trajectory of new media lies in its nonverbal language, gestural and postural language. Through the use of new media (multimedia and technology), the visual language no longer remains the preserve of human-to-human interaction. Using new media (multimedia and technology), the gestural and postural language of the computer-generated atmosphere is not generated in but is a digital reconstruction of a live atmosphere movement. The significance of the production of Pillai, Kapur and Sivaraman lies in incorporating the extremes that both Phelan and Auslander have suggested. Though the primary responsiveness of physical realities are always there, but the newness of the new media rests in its intermediality and interaction. The new media not only helps to create uniqueness of real time and space but also it is capable of capturing the spontaneity and intricacy of the visual language.

There are various possibilities to capture motion in live performances as it is full of transgressive potential. Several scholars such as Garau and others have underlined the significance of suitable responses to creating expressive, communicative and meaningful conversation between real and mediatized theatrical and performance elements.

The challenge with human-human communication is to drive avatar behaviours that enrich, rather than hinder, communication between remote participants. With human-agent communication, the challenge lies in simulating intelligent social responses by coupling the agent's dialogue with appropriate conversational behaviours. (Garau, 2000:105)

This is a clear difference between live and video projection. Though the differences cannot be viewed as contradiction, both can have their individual presence. Awareness and study about the live and mediatized culture in contemporary theatre and performance practices, simplifies an enhanced understanding of experiences reported by spectators in relation to liveness. Thereby permitting a suitably stimulating circumstance for understanding the new spectacle of theatre and performance. These discussions around the ontological and physical uses of liveness for the theatre and performance practices opens up numerous ways for cross-disciplinary discourse of the arts, sciences and other genres as well.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to explore the use of real-time and ludic space in contemporary theatre and performance practices. It examines the relation between live and mediatized elements in the process of performance making.

The use of new media (multimedia and technology) is one of the most effective, performative, expressive and artistic developments in contemporary theatre and performance practice. The directors, designers and scenographers do not use these media for the sake of representing contemporary society, they rather use them to address new challenges that society is facing. New media and technology are able to bring out the issues of innumerable dreams and inner conflicts our society is facing. Sometimes a particular event encounters characters in the contemporary society. New media can be considered

as an artistic medium in totality which contributes to the development of the design language, new aesthetics and 'inexperienced' expression. As we know contemporary theatre practices deal with visual and sensorial composition and one can think of a close relation between scenography and dramaturgy. In an interview Deepan Sivaraman has said that he sees contemporary theatre as the practice of visualization. A new trend has emerged in contemporary theatre practices where directors, scenographers are creating a visual dramaturgy on an 'idea'. To explore this idea, they explore new media (multimedia and technology), performing body (movement), different kinds of materials and alternative space or site specific performance. More or less this has become a trend in contemporary theatre.

Anuradha Kapur now believes in the idea of visual dramaturgy. In THE HINDU LET FOR LIFE[13] fest 2014, she referred back to Stanislavski who said that 'people come to theatre for subtext; they can read the text at home'. In this context of new media, the subtext becomes live through the 'visual' use of new media, material, action, light and sound and so on. Kapur argues that in such theatre practices, action drives the word rather than word driving the action. These experiments with theatre practices have changed the whole concept of the design and now it is replaced by the term 'scenography'.

The contemporary mediatized scenography of theatre and performance practices are flexible in nature in comparison to linear and conventional theatre practices. The form is more flexible, expressive and performative. New media in a way has also encouraged and opened up a door for collaborative kinds of work. It is fundamentally because media as a genre itself is collaborative in nature. Like light and materials, new media (multimedia and technology) has radically transformed the space and experience of watching theatre and performance. New media (multimedia and technology) offers a unique quality to instantly transform and sculpt space according to the demands of an 'idea' in a real time and space.

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[13] Lit for Life is an annual literary festival organized by the English daily The Hindu, India. The festival was inaugurated in 2011 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of The Hindu's literary review.

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