

The Relationships of Theatrical Performances Between Greek, Roman, Indian, Chinese Japanese and African Theatre

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>Politics, governance have failed the world but theatrical play will not fail the world. The world has experienced a plethora of awful events, wars and series of wars but with the coming of technological advancement nothing is hidden under the sun. Human beings are treated worse than animals because of extreme materialism all over the world, sometimes even worse in the so called civilized world. Thus in a sense there is need to rethink how man has created meaning out of a meaningless world through theatrical activities and advance this course as a means of making meaning in the modern world. The research method for this paper is the qualitative method involving primary and secondary methods of data collection. The theoretical framework, employed for this study is Schechner's 'Performance Theory.' Findings. In this sense show the relationships between the dramatic practices of Africa, Greece, China, India and Japan have almost the same historical precedent of agricultural harvest festival underpinning.. Asian theatrical presentations like their African counterparts could be called dance drama as' they emphasize symbolism. All these theatrical traditions ... include those of Africa, India, China and Japan ... who have all created and sustained one form or another of drama or what has been described as total theatre to make meaning in society. The findings in a sense is that in these type of theatre there is an integrative synthesis of elements stylized movements, acting, mime, dance, all controlled by instrumental sounds with enlightens educates and entertains the people in a direct way in a sense that is more distinct than that in traditional western theatre. The contributions to knowledge are that theatrical play will create a more meaningful society.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Comparative Theatre, Greek Theatre, Indian Theatre, Chinese Theatre, Japanese Theatre, African Theatre, Performance Theory, Intercultural Theatre.</i></p>
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Introduction

“The decay of universal system of values and a traditional way of life at the beginning of our modern era deprived theater of its homogenous and representative public and of its accepted conventions for mirroring a shared human experience.” (Helen Krich Chiney, p. 14). Dance was the basis of early African, Indian, Chinese and Japanese theatre. Kabuki performance, and the musical dance dramas that developed revolved around stories that were romantic and often erotic” grotesque, chivalry (Wilson & Goldfarb p. 109) Peking opera is the most popular form of Chinese theatre and like the theatres of Greece, japan and India combines music instruments as the coordinating instruments in theatre and dance in their own spectacular way. Theatrical performance in classical Greece was

performed in three days and each day, between one evolutions of the sun this sequential arrangement of events, also occurs in these other theatrical conventions. In Greek theatre a Goat is sacrificed to announce the beginning of the festival in Ekine theatre too an animal is sacrificed to initiate the festival but the sacrificial animal depends on the type of masquerade to be performed i.e. Goat, Ram, or Foul is used as sacrificial animals to initiate performances. African traditional theatrical performance, Greek, Indian, Japanese and Chinese theatrical conventions are all communal affairs as there are no restrictions to which category of people constitutes the audience, men, women, children, chiefs, and people from neighboring communities, the ancestral spirits all constitute the

performers and members of the audience and attendance is free for all. In furtherance of these relationships we see a clear perception of the development of Greek theatre with Pisistratus using the theatre to replace public execution as a means of communal excitement. For we have seen that theatre all over the world share the same functions, values and elicit similar responses to their performative enactments before her audience. Edwin Wilson & Alvin Goldfarb (2004). *Living theatre A History*

Each of the Asian theatres are unique, but these theatres also have aspects in common that set them apart from western theatre... they rely much more on dance than western theatre does... they emphasize symbolism. All the great Asian traditions- including those in India, china and japan – have created and sustained one form or another of what has been described as total theatre. In this type of theatre there is a synthesis or integration of elements – acting, mime, dancing, music, and text- more complete than in traditional western theatre. (p. 87)

According to Brockett & Ball, 2008, p.264) “Noh theatre masks are traditionally made of wood, painted, and handed down from many generations.”, which is the same in the theatrical traditions under study. Whereas there are only five basic types of masks (aged, male, female, deities, and monsters), there are many variations within these types.” The major influence on Noh’s view of the world was Zen Buddhism, which teaches that ultimate peace comes through union with all being, that individual desire must be overcome, and that nothing in earthly life is permanent. (Brockett & Ball, p.265) Noh plays typically have as protagonist’s ghosts, demons, or obsessed human beings whose souls cannot find rest because in life they were devoted to worldly honor, love, or other gods who keep drawing them back to the physical world and its imperfection. (Wilson & Goldfarb, 2008). Noh scripts are short and do not emphasize story telling like western drama. The dialogue serves primarily to outline the circumstances that led up to, and culminate in, a dance. Same sequence observable in Ekine dramatic performance

Noh is a musical dance drama that evokes emotional state of mood, and most of the lines written for the play are sung or intoned, even the spoken passages are recited in a stylized manner speech is only used when a player comes on stage to summarize the first part. Noh performers can be divided into three group’s; actors, chorus, and musicians which is evident also in Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Indian and African traditional dramatic practices. The actors are trained from childhood and are expected to devote twenty or more years to perfecting their craft. There are two divisions of actors; those who play the secondary

character Waki and the Wakis, followers, who in Ekine are the Ekine members who serve as the chorus like in Greek chorus whose functions are to introduce the drama and lead the main character towards the climactic moment. There are also those who play the shite the main character and his followers, which in Ekine are classified as the masquerade assistant. There are also two types of minor characters who appear in Noh drama the Kyogen whose primary skill is to play the short comic plays that are performed on the same bill with Noh plays. While, “Kokata’s are child actors, who play children roles and other minor roles, ‘in Noh dramatic convention.’ (Wilson & Goldfarb 2008).

The Noh drama chorus is composed of between 6-10 members depending on the nature of the play. They sit on one side of the stage throughout the duration of the play and sing and recite most of the Shites lines while he is dancing or narrating events. Each Noh play requires between two or three drummers and one flute player. The drummers apart from playing their instruments punctuate the performance with a variety of vocal sounds. And there are also two stage attendants whose jobs are to assist the musicians and the other to assist the actors in changing or adjusting costumes or masks and to bring out or remove stage properties as needed and all assistance and performers are male.

Costumes are rich in designs based on the official dress of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most costumes are made of elaborately embroidered silk with each character having his traditional costume, headdress, hand properties and positions on stage. The chorus, musicians, and attendants wear stiff shoulder boards and divided skirts, the traditional dress of the samurai. (Wilson & Goldfarb, p.266).

Theatre

Theatrical performances are products of historical ideology; which embrace descriptions and codes on how things need be done, when to do them, how to do them and not commands as performing habits and theatrical practices of man which has evolved through aeon of time have experienced changes overtime. Furthermore drama which represents man in movement must primarily reflect those socio-cultural and environmental changes motivated by man’s cultural contact with other cultures, must be in a more slight and characteristic way as sub linear gestures, as our performance and theoretical approaches change so also do our performance contents and contexts change with time. This notion Brockett and Hildy (2007, p.16) explicitly observes and states in relation to the imaginative and

emotional experience witnessed by the audience of a dramatic performance thus

To experience (emotionally, imaginatively and intellectually) what it means to be human in the broadest sense ought to be one of the primary goals of both education and life; few approaches have greater potential than theatre for reaching this goal, because humanity is its subject and human beings its primary medium.

Theatrical or dramatic performance being a reflection of the cultural emotion of man must be experienced from its socio-cultural perspective as it is the basic means of education in most traditional and African societies. People who are conversant with theatre understand that theatrical tradition is culture oriented. Changes from one culture to the other not therefore people not conversant with Chinese, Indian, Japanese or African indigenous theatrical performance modes often sometimes restrict the definitions of theatrical or dramatic performance to the written text or spoken word neglecting all the other modes or aspects of theatrical communication, education, and enlightenment such as the spiritual relationship between the gods, actors and audience, such as incantations, invocations, ululations, possession and the instrumental or musical accompaniment that coordinate, control and modify the actors movements and the actor, audience or actor actor interaction in these theatrical forms. Thus there is need for reinvestigation and redefinition of the dramatic relations of these major dramatic cultures. In an African perspective, Nzewi (1986) posits that "traditional theatre ... was the property of its society. Its functions ... prescribed and regulated by the society while its artistic details and organization were entrusted to a chosen group of talented and knowledgeable members of the society." (as cited in Okpaku & Opubor et-al. p. 83). Not understanding the cultural contents and context of these performance cultures presents a blurred vision to the observer hence the study of the relationships between Greek, Indian, Chinese, Japanese and African culture presents many problems to the contemporary creative dramatic artists. This is precipitated by the reason that most academics and presenters of culture do not immerse themselves in the culture they are representing because they do not understand the culture they are recording or presenting.

Thus initial recordings of cultural performance and art forms of Africans were carried out mainly by European Anthropologists and Ethnographers who already have a mindset that nothing significant can emanate from these primitive tribes. Not taking time to understudy the cultural significance and communicational modes of African performance process from the custodians of culture. Lack of understanding has led to a misconception of

performance practices of African traditional theatrical performances, as they are now judged from a Eurocentric ideological and theoretical perception.

Drama

Brockett and Hildy (2010:4) furthermore states that "as should be evident, much that is found in ritual is also present in theatre/'drama'... there must be actors ... and those who exercise control over the performance." The differing forms of narratives and means of communicating ideas in society are imperative and conditioned by cultural contexts and concepts. The European performance divisions of between auditorium, stage and the divisions between dance, music, visual arts are not applicable to the African concept of drama where dramatic arts is an integrated all-embracing process where music, dance, song, mask, elaborate costume, chants, ululations and drummed communication form the essence of theatrical performances.

Drama

On the concept of drama, Schechner (1977, 71-72), signifies that while theatre and performance are about doing, drama and script refer to the idea or record of the doing or what is done, and as such are more concerned with the written script. Schechner further differentiates between drama, theatre and performance by saying that: the drama/script is the domain of the author, the composer, scenarist, shaman ... the theatre is the domain of the performers; the performance is the domain of the audience. And he concludes, using his oppositional dyad model of drama –script versus theatre-performance, that within cultures, to the extent that the drama-script dyad is emphasized, to that extent will the theatre -per[formance] dyad be de-emphasized, and vice versa. However he says most cultures of the world, he argues; emphasize the theatre –performance dyad, while it is only in modern drama, especially in the west, since the late nineteenth century 'where the written text has been privileged as the most important aspect of theatre performance.

We have also seen from enquiry that scholars like Horton (1968), Adedeji (1980), Amankulor (1980), Clark (1980), Enekwe (1980), Nzewi (1980), Bell-Gam (2002), Ododo (2004), Adeoye (2010), Emasealu (2012), and Krama (2012) hold the view that, the experience of theatre in Africa like in other climes is a carry-over from the traditional festival performance practices. Thus we see that drama as a distinct social phenomenon that has always existed in all societies as a form of festival drama, dance, masquerade drama, dance drama, musical opera, which most times are embedded in festivals which all indicate that the indices of these dramatic practices are a reflection from their world view as the major means of socio-cultural

education. Thus the delineation, clarification of the various artists that make drama happen especially what embodies the storyline, script, who directs these performances in the course of presentation coupled with the directorial of music and instrumental sounds can only be deciphered in terms of theatricality which is important as regards its relationships to other performing cultures.

Performance relationships

An in-depth analysis of Schechner's Performance Theory relates to the functions of the chief drummer in Ekine drama, as performing directorial dramatic functions in his cultural context. We will also cite the works of other scholars dealing with theatre, drama, African traditional theatre/drama, cultural relativism, visual ethnography as a means of cultural documentation and expression, and what scholars have said relating to drama and theatrical performance in these dramatic conventions musical instruments dictate, control, motivate, directing in the performance process like in Ekine drama. The issue of African traditional performances being drama had undergone various contending positions from various scholars in Africa and elsewhere. This contentious discourse on the functionality of African dramatic performance culture now requires definitions and interpretations of who coordinates the dramatic process, just like in Indian Mahabharata, Chinese kabuki, Japanese Noh, Greek early theatre before the introduction of more than three dramatic characters which will best be expressed by distinguishing cultural peculiarities of African traditional theatre and drama in relation to its theatrical traditions and its western counterpart. Indicating these peculiar cultural differences requires identifying the preferences and scholarly identities of such scholars. Also popular with the public in Indian dance drama, Chinese kabuki, Japanese Noh theatre is the use of stylized movement and gestures not words that took up aspects of myths in the performance of such drama as the spoken word was de-emphasized.

We have seen that most writings about the art of theatre practice up to the present age has concentrated more on dramatic script/drama, criticism, dramatic structure and themes, story and character; language as they were hardly about "performance" neglecting the process of how theatre is made and received by the audience, or the place of the performance and the function of the performer and spectator relationships in the performance/theatre process. Thus we see Schechner in his *'Performance Theory'* put forward a more inclusive framework for looking at the performance forms from across the world. His work had enlivened discourse on the universality of the dramatic/theatrical experience differentiating between the terms, 'drama' 'script', 'theatre' and 'performance' which is

very clear, and will be a useful framework in examining the chief drummers primary function controlling dramatic dialogue through which he controls language/script thus directing in traditional African (Ekine) performance. As Schechner (1977, p. 66) puts it

The phenomenon called either/all "drama," "theatre," "performance" occur among all the world's peoples and date back as far as historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists can go. Evidence indicates that dancing, singing, wearing masks and/or costumes, impersonating other humans, animals, or super naturals, acting out stories, presenting ... isolating and preparing special places and/ or times of presentation, and individual or group preparations or rehearsals are coexistent with the human condition.

Schechner (1977, p. 70), He goes further to explain that the great tradition of the script emphasised by Western theatre no longer functioned as a code of transmitting action through time ; instead doings of each dramatic "production" became a way of re-presenting and interpreting the words- of -the- drama. Maintaining the words intact grew in importance; how they were said, and what gestures accompanied them, was a matter of individual choice, and lesser importance. He concludes by saying that while those in the west were accustomed to concentrating our attention on a specialized kind of script called drama. ... the avant-garde in the west, and traditional theatres elsewhere, refocused attention on the doing aspects of script, and beyond script altogether to "theatre" and "performance."

In giving a guideline for performance studies' Schechner suggests it with a model of four concentric overlapping circles, of with the outermost, largest and least strictly defined standing for performance which maybe either scripted or unscripted performance while the smallest innermost being the most specifically defined representing scripted performance. Theatre is the middle circle and shares in part the loose definition and inclusiveness of performance, and the strict definition and exclusiveness of drama. Schechner's fourth category which is the script/drama in Ekine performance is embedded in the tones of the chief drummer as the drum language coordinates, controls and dictates movement, composition and performance sequences. The chief drummers drum tones perform the function of script, storyline and dramatic content. Schechner's key contributions lead to three very important facts in relation to the relative nature in every performance culture. The first that theatre and drama are types of performance which may be found in every human society but in different form relative to the performing culture. Secondly that drama is a kind of theatre practice

that is scripted or unscripted and thirdly that all the theatres of the world have performances and drama.

This stems from the fact that there is also a deliberate attempt by scholars from areas in Africa that do not have well defined and coordinated performance/dramatic culture with much dramatic content inherent in African societies tend to generalize, declassify and delimit the study of African performance culture dramatically by generalizing, seeing, or referring to African traditional theatre as not having developed structurally in terms of dramatic dialogue and content.

Conclusion

Performances are innate human experience which is not taught but occurs through human interactions. Like children's let's pretend to be. Performance is an inclusive term in relation to theatre which is realized by humans through everyday socio-moral interactions of life i.e. love, hate, witchcraft, jealousy, war, salutations, ululations, greetings, displays of emotion, family burial scenes, coronation scenes, installations, professional roles, sports, theatre, dance, ceremonies, rites of passage , all constitute

human performances that make up the themes in Africa, Greek, Chinese, Japanese and Indian dramatic traditions. Thus, their performance modes are culturally conditioned which in a sense all dramatic traditions are inter related in one of these areas.

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