

TEC 154 2014S, Class 36: Technology and the Theatre (Thomas, Theatre/Dance)

Overview

- Preliminaries.
 - Admin.
 - Questions.

Preliminaries

Editing

- DB, CO, and LY: In-car technology
 - Editors: CC, DS, and JV
- CC and PG: Digital vs. analog recording
 - Editors: ZS, SA, and CO
- EG, MK, and ZS: Film/video
 - Editors: DB, DP, and FC
- TD, EL, and DS: Voting machines
 - Editors: MK and AF
- SA, DP, and JV: Airport security
 - Editors: EG, TD
- FC and AF: Anti-immigration technology
 - Editors: PG, EL, and LY

Admin

- Today's note takers: AF and CC.
- Readings for Monday to be distributed via email.

Upcoming EC

- CS Table Friday - Heartbleed. Contact [rebelsky] for details.
- Iowater Saturday. Contact [Iowater] for details.

Questions

Key Points from SA

Three main points about theatre and technology: 1) Nearly nothing new. 2) A lot of things can be done with ease, speed, and control. 3) Impacts performance style.

Biblical stories used to be told in the form of plays presented to the public of a European town typically in a town square sometime during the dark Ages.

Skipping ahead 500 years --- Theatre moved indoors resulting in the depiction of journeys, portrayed by the hero or heroine moving a lot on the stage. Telling a narrative story of a journey by moving props or people on stage. Gears, pulleys, and stage machinery are hidden and used for moving props.

The challenge of theatre moving indoors was the lack of light. Candles located at front of stage, close to actors. The others were in chandeliers, which hung over the stage and over the audience. The audience was more active in the play and there was more interaction between them and the actors. The evolution of lighting technology led to a certain degree of separation between the actors and the audience.

The ability to project painted/real scenery onto an object using a projector saved a lot of money and labor over the long run. It offered a way to easily control the stage and how it appears.

Theatre Technology

- Has changed significantly over the years.
- Theatre is no longer about just going to see a play in a "theatre".
 - We see theatre in railroad stations, found locations, and more
- Three main points
 - Nothing we do now is particularly new (at least in European tradition)
 - Technology makes it faster for us to do design work and performance
 - Also easier
 - And with more control
 - Technology impacts performance
 - E.g., if realism is a style, how do we create an interior that replicates everyday life?
- Start with Greek and Rome, then middle ages, then today, then questions.
- Reminder: We are not doing anything that has not been done for 100's or thousands of years.
- [Image of Greek theatre: We see the stage, the huge audience, and the scene house in back.]
 - Using cranes to bring the God down from above.
 - "Deus ex machina" - God from the machine
- [Image of Roman Theatre]. Theatre at Orange.
 - HUGE SCALE
- When we see a crane bringing a God down on stage, we need to suspend our disbelief; we realize it's not realistic.
- After the Roman empire falls, there's not a lot of theatre.
- Skip ahead to Medieval theatre.

- We don't know a lot
- Education in monasteries
- People going to mass didn't know Latin
- So monks started putting theatre in mass to explain things
- Stories are still in Latin
- Special effects become important, e.g., flaming hell mouth
- Starts to move outside
 - Pageant wagons
 - Primarily Western Europe - England, Spain, Portugal, (Denmark, etc.)
 - Now told with regular people (from various guilds), in the vernacular
 - 30 or 40 short stories told to the public of the town.
 - Special effects:
 - Noah's ark, Animals going up two-by-two. Floods happen. Barrel makers make it rain for six or more minutes.
 - Fire and hellmouths, Descent into hell
 - Ascent into heaven
 - And yes, there are accidents
 - Lots of simple special effects, often with ropes and pulleys
 - Moses parts red sea - two curtains
- [Image: Reconstruction of one of these wagons]
 - Main stage 6'-8' tall (e.g., looks like a room) [Tiring House]
 - Machine loft above 4'
 - Lots of metal paint to get cool reflections
 - Trap doors to the underneath (5' tall or so)
- Skip ahead 500 years - Theatre moves indoors
 - Okay, moved indoors a little before.
 - Late 17th century, early 18th century (did I get that right?)
 - Diderot does lots of sketches of theatre machinery
 - E.g., carts that move when someone turns a wheel underneath the stage.
 - Lots of journeys
 - Ability to move scenery off to the side to tell a story.
 - Danger of moving indoors: Lighting
 - Outdoors theatre relies on sunlight.
 - So now we have to use candles
 - Serious effect on what people can see inside the room [We'll see a movie.]
 - How do people see scenery?
 - How do people see faces? Makeup becomes really important.
 - Make white faces with high contrast so that they can be seen
- [Film clip: Terry Gilliam's "Baron Munchausen"]
 - Opens in theatre. Details are impeccable, even though the movie is comedic/over the top.
 - Hidden stage machinery that is making the sun rise.
 - As we increase our ability to make things happen secretly, we increase sense of wonder, excitement, and more.

- Lighting:
 - Footlights at the front of the stage.
 - Chandeliers over stage and over audience.
 - Less differentiation between theatre and performers
 - Audience engages in the show differently - Catcalls, etc.
- [Okay, we have some trouble seeing this, but that's also somewhat realistic.]
- Whale eats ship
- Munchausen shot across the room
 - You can see the rope
- Spectacle!

Tracking Scenery

- How do we create tracking scenery - Move left and right without seeing the worker
- Cart underneath stage
- Slot in stage
- Rope to pull the thing.
- With pullies, so that you only need one staff member
- And yes, we're still doing this today

How do we make scenery?

- Painting is expensive.
- And the arts are underfunded in the US
- So let's project real images
- Makes it easier to change the scene
- Has changed the style of plays
 - Most modern plays have more than 50% projected scenery
- We can do a time warp and more; skip over realism.
- We can interact with the design spaces
- Quick, easy, lots of control
- Kaleioscope images

Beyond

- Communication between members of a team is easier
- Communication with technology is easier, too. E.g., controlling the lights with iPad
- Lots of simple networking tricks that have been around for at least fifteen years
 - As technology gets better, easier easier easier, faster faster faster.
- Media server
- Combining technologies: We have the projector and we can also move the projector around
- Will the follow spot ever die?
 - Probably not
 - But it's still changing: We can use a device to keep track of where the person is to track them
- [Sam didn't hear the question]

- Lots of networking
- Ability to run from a central machine
- Desire to move to wireless technology
- But less bandwidth is available
- Strong pushes back against realism, more visual spectacle
- How do you differentiate this from film?
- Resources to do it well are expensive?
- What's being lost as we move forward?
 - The sense of design - One light can be much more interesting than thirty.
 - Too much fascination of technology - Focus on the technology, rather than the design.
- How does technology change performance?
 - Greece: How does someone in a mask 100 yards away from someone convey something? Lots of body motion.
 - When you move indoors, you get some more silly things No attempts to do realism.
 - In 19th century and early 20th century, fascination with realism because the lighting technology allowed it.
 - 1960's pushing back against realism.
 - Things move back and forth - Technology influences performers, performers influence technology (and designers and playwrights and)
 - Theatre writers seem to be doing more writing for TV or the screen, more jump cuts and such
- Everything is portable
 - And relatively cheap
- Is there an effect on the number of theatre techs because we need less?
 - Designers are consultant labor.
 - Theatres don't have money for scenic designer, lighting designer, sound designer, etc. Seeing way to hire one person to do it all.
 - Need new skills.

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