

FOOTBALL AND THEATRE CULTURES: A RE-MAKING OF A THEATRE AUDIENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The position that football occupies in global discourse calls for a re-reading of its impact in other fields of endeavor. In the theatrical parlance, the performativity aspect of football has re-invented fresh narratives that underscore this research paper. Of particular interest is how the football culture especially its innovative aspect in 'audience' participation and an extended globalization of post-audience interest sustain its 'audience'. This work is hinged on the symbolic interactionist theory which is a process of interaction of actions as postulated by George Herbert Mead. The theory states that objects don't have meaning until they interact with social actors. The paper makes a case of asserting that, theatre just like football enjoys an uncommon commonness both in the performance aspect and in audience perceptions and participations. By drawing from the culture of football, the paper takes a look at how theatre as a performance medium enhances audience sustainability and performance interest. The paper also takes a look at the aesthetic qualities that football and theatre enjoy in line with spectacle, costume, directorial approach, scenery and management. The paper concludes that Theatre and Football bear a lot of similarities in terms of the activities that surround them. From costume to character development, from performance area to managerial skills, all these play side by side and further establishes the two professions as easy bedfellows. The paper recommends theatre practitioners to borrow a lift from football culture and advance theatre performance and audience interest through ways that attracts potential audiences.

Keywords: Theatre Football, Performance, Audience

Introduction

Theatre and football are fields that bear a performance tradition as well as aesthetic representations. In theory however, the two fields could trace a different historical tradition or professional difference, but what obtains at the centre of performance is what forms the underlying motives of this paper. The paper therefore explores the convergent areas of theatre and football and how the two cultures function in providing performance for its teaming audience. The paper in exploring the aspects of performer-performance-audience as it obtains in the cultures of theatre and football, this write up also takes a look at the aesthetic roles that spectacle, directorial concepts, costume as well as scenery play in providing a holistic entertainment for its audience/fans.

This paper first begins by taking a brief historical background of football and theatre with the view to generating information that will enable a fuller understanding and exploration of the paper. The paper will then proceed to look at the similarities that football and theatre share as a performance act intended for the sole sanctioning of the audience. The

aesthetic outlook of football will be discussed and how it has re-invented and repositioned the state of entertainment globally and to the Nigerian fans in particular.

Performance (noun) and performative (adjective) activities are part of our everyday life. Ethnographically, performance is central to human existence as our everyday life is entwined with performance. From the hunter to the farmer, mason, driver, mechanic, tailor, village town crier and teacher perform one task or the other for sustenance. Performance suggests that everyone puts a performance (does something or performs a task) in our society. This could be from our different occupations, communication, mode of dressing and even the food we cook and eat.

Barranger Milly (2009) submits that all cultures have theatrical performances and special places for viewing events. The earliest performance areas in Africa were used for rituals. These spaces were usually located in an open circle, a hut and an enclosure and were shared between the priest and onlookers. Traditional performances like storytelling sessions, music and dances with costumes, masks, mime, and drumming were held at open spaces, usually at the village square, market arena and they serve to educate the local population as well as for the preservation of culture, history and religion of the people.

Performance is a term that generally describes action; the doing of things by people. It relates to any task, obligation, or duty a person, or a thing is obliged either by nature or by law to do. It is also used to describe the extent to which something is done (good or bad). This explains why it is common to hear people say “it is a wonderful performance”, to indicate satisfaction with a given undertaking, or “a weak performance”, to express dissatisfaction. However, performance as used in this study refers to that done artistically, especially as it relates to theatre and football.

In the arts too, performance refers to action, hence it is described as “a doing art” (Guthrie, 1953:16). But it is not just a doing art, it refers to any action taken purposefully by a person or a group of persons for some other person(s) to watch. In this wise singing, dancing, laughing, crying, walking, eating, coughing, moving, or even being still and silent in a deliberate manner to attract attention of the other person(s) is all regarded as performance. Performance therefore draws its resources from daily life activities.

In every artistic performance, therefore, trinities of entities function in having a successful performance. These are: (a) the person(s) who performs the action; (b) the action itself that is been performed; and (c) the person(s) for whom the action is performed. These entities go by the names performer, performance, and the audience. A performance must therefore operate on the wholeness of these entities to be qualified as such. What is performed, according to Robert Cohen, could be for the purpose of attention, entertainment, enlightenment, or involvement of the audience. In the words of Cohen:

Performance itself connotes a doing which is creatively embellished to achieve communication of a planned nature, in a planned or an unplanned structure. It then follows that, the prime focus of a performance is situated in the desire to communicate messages. This could be through classical genres such as; satire, tragedy or comedy, or even extempore—as mostly explored in some African performances. One outstanding feature of a performance is the end result wherein something is taken home as a message by the audience. (Cohen, 1994: 35-36)

Theatre and drama are regarded as performance because the three entities are usually involved, and the elements that form the content of theatre and drama are usually drawn from everyday life. Oscar G. Brockett identifies the elements of performance to include “time, place,

participants (players/audience), scenario (agenda/goal/text rules), clothing (uniform/costume/mask/make-up), sound (speech/music), movement (gesture/pantomime/dance), and function or purpose". These elements are found both in theatre and drama which takes us to the next section of the performance history of football.

Theoretical Framework

This work is hinged on the symbolic interactionist theory which is a process of interaction of actions as postulated by George Herbert Mead. The theory states that objects don't have meaning until they interact with social actors. Although these objects have meaning in themselves, they rely on individuals to guide the objects to the satisfaction of both the objects and the individuals. According to Blumer in Carter and Fuller, "meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others" (np)

Consequently, football and theatre are objects which people interact with, to bring meaning out of them. In football, this interaction comes in the form of players playing, (movement) interacting with a round leather object (football) in a playground or field while in the theatre, actors (performers) interact on stage through action (movement) and dialogue. Football and theatre only convey meaning to their respective patrons after this interaction thus leading to physical attachment around such objects.

The Performance History of Football

The history of football is closely related to the history of play in the world of a child. We are all born with an instant closeness to kicks and to jerks. Football is just a harder kick of the creative maturity of professionals. The true origin of soccer is difficult to determine. A Greek playwright, Antiphanes (388-311BC) reports that soccer originated in Greece where it was called "Harpastum." The Romans obtained the game from the Greeks and, in turn, passed it on to England. The early games were rugged and irregular. Two towns, three to five miles apart, sometimes engaged in a game with no rules being enforced. Occasionally a river had to be crossed. Rugby was devised accidentally at Rugby College, England, in 1823 when one of the players on Rugby's team tucked the ball under his arm and ran across the goal line. This act was recognized as unsportsmanlike conduct. The game gained tremendously in popularity through the next forty years, and when the word football was used, some people asked, "Which kind?"

In 1848, the advocates of football met in Cambridge to draw up a list of rules which became known as the Cambridge Rules. This meeting was unsatisfactory since some schools favored carrying the ball as permitted in rugby. The result was a meeting in 1863 of the group that favored the kicking type of the game. This group voted to confine play entirely to kicking and later became known as the London Football Association. To distinguish between the two types of football, they called one "rugby" and the other "association." Later this was shortened to "assoc" and finally to its present designation, soccer. Soccer had been played in American colleges since 1830.

In 1868, the first intercollegiate soccer game was played in New Brunswick, New Jersey between Princeton and Rutgers. Rutgers won, but Princeton asked for a return game and won. Soccer became a national sport in 1913 with the organization of the United States Football (Soccer) Association. In 1919, soccer was introduced at Bryn Mawr, a women's college. It was not until 1927, however, that the National Section on Girl's and Women's Sports published the first soccer rules for women. Outside the United States soccer is the most widely played and watched game in the world.

The Performance History of Theatre

The performance history of the theatre is as old as man. According to Oscar Brockett, “performative elements including (dramatic and theatrical) are present in every society, no matter how complex or unsophisticated a society may be” (1995: 1). Theatre performance originated from Greece. Dramatic performance was one of the most important aspects of the Greek religious festival in honour of Dionysus, held to solicit favour for abundant harvest, gift of children among other expectations. The first contest took place in 534BC. Though a member of the chorus, Thespis was the first solo actor to step out from the chorus to deliver his lines. He is thus regarded as the father of actors. He was later joined by other performers like Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. These performances took place in the day (as there was no electricity) at the open air theatre with a capacity of between 14,000 to 17000 spectators in attendance.

At the defeat of the Greek empire around 146 B.C, the Romans adopted the Greek style of performance. They eliminated the chorus but increased the number of actors on stage as playwrights were free to use any number of characters considered appropriate to tell their story. The theatre witnessed considerable development during the Roman period than the Greek era. Brockett, submits that, “in Rome, the theatre was far more highly developed, varied, and extensive” (1995:53).

The middle ages saw the supremacy of the church and the introduction of liturgical drama. Performances were tailored to match with the stipulations of the church as majority of the performances were biblical stories tailored to teach morals. Performances were held either in the church, around the church or streets with simple settings. Practitioner followed church calendar as a guide towards planning their productions. Brockett submits that “the church calendar also provided an incentive towards dramatizations because it commemorated particular biblical events” (1995:85)

The Renaissance stretching from late 1300 through the early 1600 saw the transformation of the theatre throughout Europe. In Italy, new rules for writing plays were set while the performance area- the stage was remodeled, creating a picture frame opening around the stage (the proscenium). According to Brockett, the proscenium came into use gradually. “In some temporary theatres, an appropriate proscenium arch was created for each new production but in permanent theatres, the desirability of a permanent framing was clear, especially after the flat wing was adopted. Consequently, during the seventeenth century, the architectural proscenium arch became standard” (Brockett, 1995:138).

The English Renaissance also known as the Elizabethan theatre saw the professionalization of acting, as professional actors who took over from the amateurs. This led to building of permanent theatre buildings and the formation of theatre companies to manage productions. English plays abandoned the neo classical ideals and adopted the structure of brief scenes which allowed for quick scene changes as well the use of poetry. The most influential Elizabethan dramatist is William Shakespeare.

In Asia, three countries of note were Japan, India and China. Japan developed two major theatrical traditions: Noh and Kabuki theatre forms are worthy of mention. Noh actors wear masks while Kabuki, used heavy makeup to create their character. Generally, the orchestra plays an important role in Japanese theatre. In India, Sanskrit drama is the major theatrical mode. The focus in Sanskrit theatre is on the actor who uses gestures to communicate meaning to the audience. However, in China, Beijing Opera is the most popular. Brockett, (1995:597), records that the actor is the primary emphasis in performance as he “uses four basic elements at his disposal: movement and gestures; speech and song; costume and makeup; and psychological insight” in his trade.

Football and Theatre: A performance of Easy Bedfellows.

No matter their histories and the theories governing them, football and theatre are easy bedfellows that upholds performance as the driving force. Action is central in defining the stories of theatre and the movement of football. But we shall attempt in this section to justify those elements of theatre that also find voice in the game of football. The performer, performance and audience.

Performer

In theatre as stated by Cohen (1994), Brockett (1991), a performer is one who carries the action. One who 'acts', 'perform', 'do' all refer to the role expected of a performer to do. Whether singing, dancing, acting or talking, a performer performs any role for the sole purpose of entertaining and as well as educating the audience. The performer in the theatrical parlance is that actor or actress who through improvisation or structured performance performs a specific assigned role. Today, most of the performances in the theatre are structured in nature to be able to offer the audience with performances that address their daily life issues.

Structure is the most fundamental, the most relevant and one that unites all the activities in the process of performance. In structure we have the plot, in structure we have the action, and in structure we have the beginning of a performance and the end. Once a performance is not well structured, it will go a long way in affecting the role of the performer. The performer carries the energy, the type of energy that theatre needs to continue to survive. The same type of energy is what is representative in the game of soccer and the ambience of the football culture.

In football therefore, the performers are the players, those who define the act and dexterity of football. The players are the eyes upon which the spectators offer their minds to. They dominate the field which is the stage and give joy to millions of fans who cut across every entity of planet earth. UEFA championships and world cups emphasizes the discipline, skills and strength/energy of football. By drawing millions of fans across the world, football remains at the centre of entertainment in the world. In countries like Nigeria, the love and enthusiasm for football has brought a lot of change in people's lives. Just like theatre which aims to heal the human mind, football has demonstrated a more subtle and sometimes ridiculous moments in the mind of the fans.

However, Aristotle provided in principle of what culminates to a good performance called "organic unity". The organic unity is the unity of time, place and action. Theatre just like football is one that happens at stipulated times, football takes place at stadiums and performed on the pitch. The action in football is the action of play and all the activities that bring out the joy and the fun. The game of football has the beginning of the match, the middle, and the end fitting perfectly in Aristotle's theory on plot construction.

Performance

As highlighted above, performance is one of the elements that hold theatre together. Performance concerns the credibility; it concerns the intrigues that function in theatre and in football. Credibility is an audience imposed demands, and it has to do with the play's internal consistency: the actions must flow logically. Credibility demands, for example, that the characters in a play appear to act out of their own individual interests, instincts and intentions rather than serving as mere piece for the development of theatrical plot. This implies the inherent psychology in the game of football. Players are trained by coaches who in the theatre represent the director to fully understand the game through the knowledge of rules and the mastery of play. The players are trained not for their self-satisfaction but for the

satisfaction of the millions of fans who are desperately waiting in the stadiums and on their TV screens actors are trained for the audience. Performance therefore is key in understanding and unraveling the characters in a theatrical performance and the skills of a player in the game of football. Characters must maintain consistency within themselves: such that their thoughts, feelings, hopes fears and plans must appear to flow from human needs rather than purely theatrical ones. Credibility should be a contract between the performance and audience, whereby the audience agrees to view the characters as “people” as long as the author agrees not to shatter that belief in order to accomplish other purposes.

Intrigue is that quality that makes us curious (sometimes fervently so) to see “what happens next”. Sheer plot intrigue- which is sometimes called “suspense” in that it leaves us suspended (that is “hanging”) - is one of the most powerful of dramatic approaches. Intrigue is one unique factor that draws us into the world of a play; credibility keeps us there. In the best plays the two are sustained in a fine tension of opposites: intrigue demanding surprise, credibility demanding consistency. Combined, they generate a kind of “believable wonder”, which is the fundamental state of drama and the undying fantasy of football. Credibility alone will not suffice to make a play interesting, and no level of intrigue can make a non-credible play palatable. The integration of the two must be created during performance in order to establish that shared ground that transcends our expectations but not our credulity.

Audience

Here is the main aspect that keeps theatre alive and allows the game of football to continue breathing. The audience is the reason why there is a performer, the audience is the reason why there is a performance, and the audience is the reason why both theatre and football exist. It is from the audience that whatever is presented or performed is drawn from. The stories and the intrigues is the energy that the audience offers to give life to any performance. Whether theatre or football, whether audience or spectator the focus is to entertain the audience who are willing to offer their time, energy and resources. In football, the fans are not only spectators but they see football as business, something most of them especially the Nigerian fans survive on. With their knowledge of football and their ability to project what the outcome would be, just as characters actions can be predicted in a piece of work, football fans use such knowledge to try it out in ways of betting. This has enabled many of the youths especially Nigerian younger football lovers to engage in Betting as means of livelihood. In theatre too, theatre lovers have on different occasions discovered their talents through watching performances. There is inspiration and a charge to survive in theatre and football.

Football and Theatre: Aesthetics Qualities

Aesthetics is a term derived from the Greek word aesthesis which means perception. It was first used in the eighteenth century by the German philosopher, Alexander Baumgarten to refer to those principles governing the nature and appreciation of beauty especially in the visual art. It was linked with the branch of philosophy that preoccupies itself with investigating into sensory knowledge, and was mooted by the classical Greek philosopher, Plato (Dukore, 1974).

The bottom line of aesthetics, which is the relation that holds between what is experienced artistically and how that which is experienced is understood by the senses aesthetically, invariably generated a dialectics producing two schools. While one school argues that aesthetic judgment should be objective, the other trails the route of subjectivity in aesthetic judgment. Plato, the proponent of the objective school held that all things of sensory beauty are imitations of the perfect form of their objectivity. For example, the category of

flower – imitates the most perfect form of flower that exists only in idea, and the closer the object comes to the perfect form, the more aesthetically pleasing it is (<http://www.paulford.com/what-is-aesthetics>). Plato found support with Baumgarten, who sees aesthetic beauty as perfection arising from such information as gathered through the senses (<http://www.csmt.uchicago.edu/./aesthetics.html>). (Wickam, 1972).

Proponents of the latter school however, argue that it is a matter of personal taste, determined by each individual's ideas or feelings. One of them, Immanuel Kant insists that beauty is a subjective relation, not a property. He argues further that, a man will not argue if another tells him that something is pleasing in and of itself. For Kant, therefore, aesthetic value, like everything else, does not hold beauty or truth in objects. This means that the rose itself is not beautiful—it is beautiful when one decides and views it as such and society in general agrees, making beauty a property, rather than an opinion (<http://www.paulford.com/what-is-aesthetics>). From the Kantian perspective, the beauty of the thing is the recognition of truth that is both universal and objective. Kant is corroborated by David Hume who upholds the subjective view but points to the fact that, an informed judgment can only be reached when there is a relation between the taste and the type of thing being judged (<http://www.csmt.uchicago.edu/./aesthetics.html>).

The subjective view too, did not, however, go without criticism as others argue that the subjective model describes only the viewer's response, not the work itself. Consequent of this, attention was again shifted to the value of art from individual pieces to the entire establishment. This involves whether a work is “good” or not, which examples are better or worse than others, and whether or not it is even possible to make such judgments. Still, others believe that art is basically communication from the artist, and the importance lies in what he or she meant by it. This too, is opposed by those who rather focus on what the work itself means, based on awareness of the conventions within which it was created. According to Yina, aesthetics is generally concerned with literature from a philosophical point of view, in relation to the general concepts of art, beauty, value and estimation. Styan believes that:

The aesthetic value or quality interpreted as *kalos* presupposes the beauty of harmony, unity, the integration of parts into an organic whole in any creative work of art. . . . The aesthetic object thus has multiple parts which are a totality and finesses in its accomplishment of “perfection, (Styan, 1960:24).

Basin's conception of aesthetics of art coincides with its conception in the theatre where aesthetic beauty is judged by how a theatrical performance is able to appealingly communicate to the audience using theatrical standard or conventions. The same aesthetics is the communicative elements in the game of football. Aesthetics in football is not devoid of those theatrical elements inherent in their performance. Here, performance and aesthetics are usually combined and viewed as a concept—performance aesthetics—which relates to beauty of the theatrical performance. It involves how performative elements such as movement and spatial relations of characters, the light, settings, costumes, make-up, and props and so on are carefully harmonized to give a theatrical production its beauty and value. Football makes use of the flood lights, the jerseys are the costumes, and the entire setup of the stadium is the setting. Affirming this, Grotowski state that:

. . . Production aesthetic elements . . . include but not limited to the following; design for set, costume and make up, stage properties, light and all the other visual and non-visual elements including sound and sound effects and dance. Therefore, production aesthetics could be seen as those artistic and technical elements that collaboratively engender good production (Grotowski, 1965:60).

The aesthetic qualities of football therefore cannot be overemphasized as it is professionally inherent and creatively circumspect in the game of football and the art of theatrical performance.

Added to this, the management as well as directorial approach/coaching enables for the spectacle that comes with performance. While theatre enjoys the aspect of theatre management to be able to regulate some of the activities in the performance tradition, football also enjoys team management and professional management. Club and club owners create guidelines that intending players are required to adhere. The governing body of football, the NFL is also part of the management. While theatre adopts different directorial approach for performances such as Stanislavski and Brechtian etc, football is more consistent in directorial style due to the performance area (usually an arena theatre), the Brechtian directorial approach seem peculiar to football. The reason is that the Brechtian approach allows for intervals of interjections, external participation and discipline.

Conclusion

The essence of every performance is for the benefit of the audience who represent the core and the energy for performers. Whether in theatre or in football, performance is key and the audiences evaluate the performance performed. Their evaluation is what makes them enjoy or bemoan it. And as discussed in this paper, theatre and football bear a lot of similarities in terms of the activities that surround them. From costume to character development, from performance area to managerial skills, all these play side by side and further establishes the two professions as easy bedfellows. Theatre has a lot to learn from the culture of football especially in this modern age where football has literarily taken over the entertainment stage.

One of such lessons will be to borrow the marketing strategies employed in advertising football and apply them to the theatre with some modifications. Added to the above is the deployment of modern communication and technology gadgets to the theatre to catch up with modern trends in this computer age as well as to make it more attractive. Efforts to make the theatre enjoy more media publicity will help in the resuscitation of theatre and sustenance of theatre audience. This is because, as observed above, meanings are continuously created and recreated through interpreting processes during interaction with others.

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