

E-culture, contemporary theatre for development practice and intersection performance technique option: Radical mediamorphosis for effective development communication

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Abstract

TfD is the acronym for Theatre for Development – a development practice that utilises performance as a participatory tool in awakening the consciousness of the disadvantaged in the society for real action in finding solution to their problems. The importance of TfD, therefore, as a vital Development Communication tool cannot be overemphasised. However, the demands of contemporary TfD practice in an era of electronic culture inundated with varying degrees of challenges ranging from constraints in time and distance, inadequate availability of human resources and production facilities among other socio-economic and technological challenges now transcend solo stage performances alone. Although the stage has incontrovertibly remained the ‘mother’ performance medium as evidently appropriated in TfD; change and transformation of the society has, however, necessitated the expedient digitisation and aligning of TfD communication with the electronic media for the animator, facilitator, and practitioner to interact at a larger scale to be able to make meaningful impact through the process of mass communication. The discourse is an attempt at reinforcing the evolution of Intersection Performance TfD Theory – Intersection Performance Technique [IPT] – birthed to offer a new performance approach in TfD practice aimed at a more effective realisation of performance objectives, to make it relevant to the realities of our time. IPT, therefore, is a radicalising development communication approach which emphasises a set of techniques that utilise potentials of other genres and media apart from the stage to put the animators' message across. This technique which utilises modern technology facilities is designed to enhance TfD performances in order to effectively bring issues in performance and development communication contexts to the clarity of participating audiences; as well as facilitate the realisation of the overall goals of TfD initiatives, as a problem solving enterprise.

Keywords: Contemporary TfD practice, Development communication, e-culture, Intersection performance technique, Radical mediamorphosis, Postmodern praxis

1. Introduction

Unarguably, theatre is communication and also embodies communication by its processes (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2022). As a development communication process, TfD remains a development practice that utilises performance as a participatory tool in awakening the consciousness of the disadvantaged in the society for real action in finding solution to their problems. Its potency as a powerful conscientisation medium targeted at not only awakening the consciousness of the disadvantaged masses to actually come to terms with the realities of their situations, but empowering them also to develop faith in themselves as veritable instruments for the realisation of desired change, cannot be overemphasised (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2022; 2020; 2012a). As a development practice that utilises performance in realising its objectives, TfD has largely thrived on the stage medium. However, with the varying degrees of challenges ranging from constraints in time and distance, to inadequate availability of human resources and production facilities among other socio-economic and technological dimensions of challenges, it is only apparent that the continued sustenance of the practice in this digital era now transcends solo stage performances alone. Therefore, leading in the foregoing litany of constraints that threaten the continued sustenance of TfD practice in this era is a technological challenge. The implication is that we now live in a new world that is rather technologically driven; and unless contemporary TfD practice adapts to this new order, gradual annihilation is what perhaps stares it in the face (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2022).

2. E-culture, Contemporary Tfd Practice and the Reality of Technological Challenge

The fact that the practice of Tfd is so pressured with enormous challenges, especially with the advent of the 21st century and all its global information and technology trappings, cannot be gainsaid. This development has equally continued to threaten the viability of predominant performance approaches in the realisation of the noble objectives of Tfd practice, as well as constantly eroding its laudable impacts in target communities or audiences. Komolafe (2012: 23) has emphatically stated that consistently the problem militating against the practice of Tfd both in the West and Africa and Nigeria in particular, “dwell within the Tfd paradigms adopted”. Komolafe’s view as stated above is invariably encapsulated in what Obadiogwu (2009: 62) has tagged, “problems of ... aesthetic”. The implication of the foregoing is that there are “fundamental loopholes” (Iorapuu, 2008: 7) or shortcomings in the prevailing approaches to the practice of theatre for development that have continued to hamper effective realisation of its laudable impacts on target audiences; and these loopholes are only inherent in the process adopted. However, the reality of advance in technology contributing immensely to the myriad of challenges that have aligned together to threaten Tfd’s effective practice is only palpable as emphasis has now shifted to using technology or technical facilities to explore all aspects of human life as the society gets more and more technologised and digitalised day by day. One remarkable dimension in the manifestation of emergent technologies of the moment is reflected in the way we now find ourselves living in a virtual world facilitated by internet and computers. Okwori (2008) and Daniel (2008) have unanimously affirmed the above view after carefully assessing their personal experiences in the practice of Tfd in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria over the decades, to actually locate the new challenge in the practice in the global information and communication technology (Chukwu-Okoronkwo, 2012b).

Okwori (2008) and Daniel (2008), as referenced above, did not just stop at affirming the reality of the challenge of e-culture to effective Tfd practice. The duo further cited the rapid progression into the internet and the Global System for Mobile communication (GSM) generation as a reference point to the great threat against the oral medium and inter-personal relationship of live performance situations in general in attracting people to them and in the time such live performance situations take. The reason is simply because people are no longer likely to have such kind of time to spend in them, including a Tfd process. This is because theatre is an oral medium and an inter-personal interactive practice where a live audience will sit and you perform, thereby generating an exchange and interaction. With the prevailing e-culture and the menacing velocity of progression into the internet and computer/GSM generation, therefore, what is of utmost concern is that it will become increasingly hard to actually trap people into a situation where one will have live performances if something does not happen fast. Apart from the internet and computers, as already pointed out, other phenomenal technological landmarks of this era that are directly or indirectly associated with theatre like the cinema, the television, the video machine/camera among others have in no small measure also contributed to the gradual annihilation of live theatrical exchange; Tfd inclusive.

3. The Digital Era and Sustenance of Contemporary Tfd Practice: A Heightening Concern

Consequent upon the enormous challenges of the technologies of the era in posing great threat to Tfd practice as already highlighted, so much concern has been aroused among theatre and development communication scholars regarding this development; thus, reinforcing the exigent need to ensure secured prospect for Tfd practice in this 21st century. Inyang’s (2012; 2008) concerns centre on the quest for the best creative approach at ensuring the survival and sustenance of the relevance of African theatre in the face of these challenges. Likewise, Ode’s deepest worry about this development is perhaps encapsulated in her very crucial question: “What are the chances of Tfd negotiating development for Africa when the very tools of its functionality are being seriously challenged by globalization” (Ode, 2008: 14). Her worry, no doubt, stems from her overwhelming consciousness that negotiating development for the African world through theatre and Tfd in particular has actually been greatly threatened in the face of the development and advance in information and communication technology. In view of the above concerns, which Umukoro (2007) no less acknowledges, she nonetheless enjoins Tfd practitioners to further explore and exploit new strategies to cope with these challenges as a possible way out. The foregoing, therefore, is only a clear indication of the urgent necessity for action in repositioning Tfd practice in order to contend with the numerous challenges besetting it. Asigbo (2005: 104) also recognises this urgent necessity for a “comprehensive review of the practice” of Tfd. Hence, if Tfd practice must actually remain relevant in fostering meaningful development in the face of all encumbering challenges, there is need for a re-thinking process and commitment to experimentation on the part of practitioners. This is also borne out of the fact that theatre is a very dynamic art; and it is this unique dynamism that predisposes it to diverse routines of self-reinvention which makes it adaptable to any situation of development. Therefore, more viable approaches that will entail conscious partnership with a technology need to be urgently discovered and vigorously projected. The above proposition is constantly becoming a recurring decimal in the postulations of Tfd practitioners like Jenks Okwori who recommended the incorporation of technological devices into Tfd process as a tool in its campaign. However, what is lacking is relevant performance theories to enable the Tfd practitioner domesticate the prevalent e-culture and bringing it to the service of theatre for development. This critical theoretical issue provides the point of departure for the researcher in this discourse. Hence, the conscientious attempt at the evolution of “The Intersection Performance Tfd Theory” as a response to this disconnect between e-culture, electronic media and Tfd.

4. The Intersection Performance TfD Theory

The Intersection Performance TfD Theory has been comprehensively documented in the researcher's seminal work, *Intersection Performance Technique and Postmodern Theatre for Development: Pathway to Effective Development Communication* (2022). It is instructive, therefore, to note that Intersection Technique based TfD is a product of socio-cultural and technological change in line with changes in performance style and taste of the audience. The researcher's aspiration towards radicalising TfD finds theoretical backing in Robert Crease and John Lutterbie's Technique Theory; as it provides the platform upon which the evolution of "The Intersection Performance TfD Theory" is based. The researchers cited above posited that "Every technique is put to use for some end, and this end is decided in the light of some philosophic outlook or other" (Crease & Lutterbie, 2009: 162). The philosophical outlook that conditioned "The Intersection Performance TfD Theory" is the Cultural Posthumanism Philosophy which maintains that:

the performer and the body of the performer is a liability in the study of mediated performance; but also, perhaps paradoxically, that the analysis of mediated performance, once the anthropic bias is discounted, allows us to revalorize certain seemingly obsolete «humanist» categories by embracing the notion of posthumanism.... in mediated performance, including video, digital avatars, and CGI ... (Ralf Remshardt, 2008: 1)

Cultural posthumanism, therefore, is a cultural direction which strives to move beyond archaic concepts of "human nature" to develop ones which constantly adapt to contemporary technoscientific knowledge. Though with variations, it is synonymous with aspects of the transhuman philosophy which is a vision of how we might concretely use technology and other means to change what we are – not to replace ourselves with something else, but to realise our potential to become something more than we currently are (Posthumanism: <http://www.posthumanism.com/>). However, posthuman philosophy supports the technique theory more because of the extreme nature of transhuman philosophy which believes that technology can make humans super-human beings. The relativeness of posthumanism to technique theory stems from the point that technique theory focuses more on:

...self-assertion and domination, which manifests itself in numerous forms in a variety of disciplines, through which we enable ourselves to achieve arbitrary ends (artistic or otherwise). It is the creation of means to ends, with the choice of these ends the product of a different kind of activity (acts of will or thought) that is or ought to be primary and more fundamental than the means. Technique presupposes freedom, in Barrett's words. The danger, according to this view, is that technique leads us to become more absorbed by it than by the ends it should serve... (Crease & Lutterbie, 2009: 163)

Barrett's observations above stem from the bifurcation of the technique theory into "bodily techniques" and "scientific techniques" aspects. The proponents of the "bodily techniques" aspect, see the scientific aspect as distraction and capable of diminishing the actor's natural techniques; while the proponents of the latter see it as an enhancement of the actor's natural techniques. However, Intersection Performance TfD Theory is a middle course intersecting for the two aspects through retaining the stage medium for the performer's body techniques and inclusion of the electronic media for the enhancement of the product. Although also rooted in Freirian theory of TfD, Intersection Performance TfD Theory for intersection technique based theatre for development is only but a radicalisation of Freirian TfD theory; with Friere's failure to take into consideration, the relationship among conscientisation, means, medium used for conscientisation and area of coverage providing the point of departure for the researcher. Hence, the need to capture more problems, reach more audience and cover larger geographical areas in a single performance justifying the evolution of intersection performance technique theory for TfD. Moreover, the need to bind together different conscientisation attributes of each medium to make each intercede at a point in the process of Freire's problem posing education system further reinforces intersection performance technique based TfD; as Freirian theory for TfD reveals obvious limitations in its present mono-media structure, to buttress Thomaz Souto Correa's apt assertion that "We are "mono-media" when they are "multimedia". As Correa further posits, "... to reach them we will need to stop thinking in ways that are mono-media" (11). Freirian theory is therefore the "old" used in bettering the "new" – Intersection Technique theory. The performative and presentational techniques of intersection performance TfD theory revolve around:

- Participative performance
- Dialogic acting
- Joint problem identification
- Joint problem solving
- Communication (vertical and horizontal)
- Utilisation of indigenous/local and foreign languages
- Intersection of stage and electronic media of radio, television, telephone video and computer
- Intersection of each medium at relevant point of plot development
- The use of folkloric narration and projector as interjection and intersection elements.

Performance, certainly, is a natural attribute of the theatre while participative performance is a special attributive of TfD that enables the audience to be part of the performance in an interactive manner heightened by the electronic media as

complementing and intersecting at the stage medium. Dialogue is an essential ingredient of the theatre. However, dialogic acting is pedagogic and interrogative. It is aimed at problem solving in Intersection Technique Tfd, and makes for bilateral exchange of feelings between performers and participative audience. Tfd identifies problems; Intersection Technique Tfd identifies multiple problems in multiple locations and makes the problem-solving process intersect at the stage medium through folkloric narration technique. Hence, it has potentials for solving more problems because it has wider coverage. Intersection Tfd widens the scope of communication and area of conscientisation by employing more media of communication. Though originally, Tfd is communicative, its communicative ability is enhanced with intersection of other media apart from the old stage medium. Electronic media have come to enhance communication in various sectors including education and religion, the theatre should also benefit from it through intersection performance technique. Communication can take place in different languages, more medium provides an avenue for more languages. Though Tfd emphasises the use of indigenous languages, intersection encourages combination of both indigenous and foreign languages for wider coverage. The use of other languages is encouraged by intersection performance technique because it is believed that the performer is no longer talking to the physical audience only. Intersection of stage and electronic media of radio, television, telephone and video is a special attribute of intersection-based Tfd that is required for taking the audience to locations outside the stage arena. The reality of the film is incorporated with the use of computer and projector, while phone and television and the affordability of the radio not only make intersection performance based Tfd more life-like but also deepens its impact. Plot development is propelled in such a manner that the electronic media intersect at emphatic and critical points in the incidence of the story in order to overcome the problem of distance and physical presence. This is achieved through the use of the folkloric narrator and projector as intersecting variables. The theorist, therefore, according to Nwosu (2014: 169), “has obligation of ensuring the satisfaction of the need of the spectator through evolution of theories for the revival of a declining live theatre especially the spectator with a specific need”. However, Nwosu is of the view that a theorist does not impose a theory on the practitioner the way a tyrant imposes laws on the people; rather it is the service of theory to practice that makes it acceptable to the practitioner; hence, the researcher’s pertinent submission that it is the usefulness of this theory that will popularise it among practitioners.

5. Intersection performance technique: Radical mediamorphosis for effective development communication

The researcher’s concern about theatre in the development context is the very nature of communication that theatre offers, especially in considering the communication process as a dynamic and on-going process, involving a series of actions and reactions targeted towards achieving a set goal. Therefore, because communication is a process, and a dynamic process at that, it constantly moves, shifts, and changes; it is not static. Communication is also a two-way process, occurring between the sender and the receiver; and at the heart of all communication experience lies the conscious aspiration to *reach* this receiver – the audience. Also connected to the term reach, is *effect* – the outcome of communication. The aim of every communication activity is to be able to create some effect on the receiver. This effect could be either positive or otherwise; and communication can only be considered successful when the intended effect is achieved; that is, when the target receiver is effectively reached. The nature of the envisioned communication in this context, therefore, is as reinforced by the positivity of effect or impact as experienced by the recipient or target audience of such communication experience. Hence, since the communication in context is about utilising performance as a participatory tool in helping the target group explore whatever existing limit situations and conditions that have hitherto subjugated them, as to be able to have a more critical view of the realities of their situation, and take necessary action; this envisioning is thus premised on the backdrop of the fact that the process of such communication experience is inevitably central to either the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the outcome. Another significant point of attention here is the nature of the audience involved in this communication experience; taking into cognisance also the intricacies of the global world of the twenty first century. The audience in focus, therefore, is an audience whose tastes and demands are as increasingly changing as the changing patterns of the era in which they find themselves, as of course conditioned by emergent technologies of the time – an audience of the postmodern era. This no doubt explains why Ahmed Yerima encapsulates the characteristics of this audience in this manner:

The twenty first century audience are themselves more restless in nature, more provoking in thought, more critical in assimilating answers that are personal, and at the same time, communal to common or individual problems which communities encounter (Yerima, 2013: 125-126).

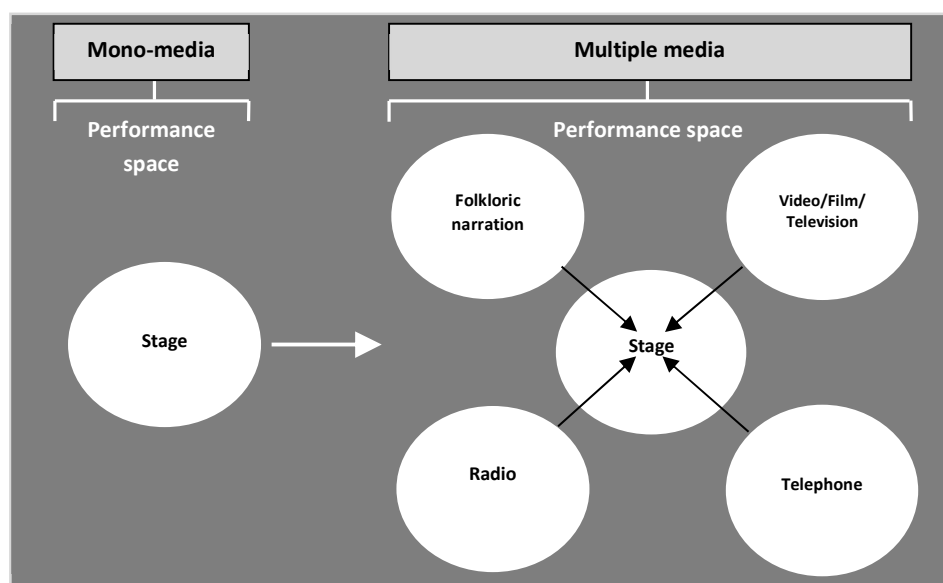
Hence, the contemporary Tfd and development communication practitioner should not fall short of the above sensitivity; especially since he/she is particularly “working in an environment that is getting ... increasingly complex, challenging, and demanding”, as Velasco (2000: 53) opines. With the foregoing in mind, there is exigent need to effectively meet the expectations of the nature of the audience in context. Hence, the researcher is spurred on the strength of the foregoing, to fill the existing gap by providing Tfd and development communication practitioners with a new performance approach – Intersection Performance Technique (IPT) – aimed at a more effective realisation of performance objectives in Tfd practice to make it relevant to the realities of our time. This is the reason why IPT has become a radicalising development communication approach – ‘radical mediamorphosis’ – that emphasises a set of techniques that utilise potentials of other genres and media to put the animators’ message across. Mediamorphosis, as Nwammuo (2011) reveals, was coined in

1990 by Roger Fiddler to refer to the transformation of communication media. According to Biagi (2003), the term was coined from two words: media and morphosis (a scientific term used to describe the way an organism or any of its parts undergoes change) to create a new word to describe the simultaneous changes taking place in the media world today. The intersection performance technique, which utilises modern technology ICT facilities, is apparently designed to enhance TfD performances in order to effectively bring issues in performance and development contexts to the clarity of participating communities and audiences; as well as facilitate the ultimate realisation of the overall goals of TfD initiatives, as a problem solving enterprise. The above leaning is invariably informed by the clear understanding of the fact that the partnership of “the new media and information technologies” with TfD does not only have the capacity to “permit new forms of expression”, in the practice, but also that of “creating new forms of knowledge”; such that will naturally lead to “new social formations” (Lyotard, cited in Konkwo, 2009: 217) or what may be better described as new dimensions of understanding among concerned audiences.

The foregoing is, therefore, to the effect that TfD messages communicated through partnership with ICTs can now bring new meanings on the contemporary audience and of course enhance their understanding of the message of the production; since effective communication will only naturally lead to proper understanding. What this implies is that we are fast approaching the end of the mono-medium TfD performance tradition. Therefore, although Intersection Performance Technique obviously involves the use of multiple media, its aspirational technique, however, differs from that of multimedia. Here, the researcher’s aspiration goes beyond multimedia, since multimedia involves the use of multiple media which do not coagulate to enhance the message of the performance. Intersection goes beyond multimedia to make each medium intercede at a relevant point in the incidence of the story to enhance communication process, bilateral exchange of feelings, area of coverage, presentation aesthetics, number of audience conscientised and conscientisation potentials of the story in performance. Therefore, intersection performance theory embodies postmodern performance techniques induced by the emergent, but dominant electronic media culture that changed the approach, style and nature of contemporary performance. Its potentials in enabling TfD practitioners utilise, like other theatre practitioners, electronic media culture that changed the taste of the theatre audience cannot be overemphasised. The illustration in Figure 1 below shows the radical shift from the traditional mono-media performance approach in TfD to intersection of multiple media approach.

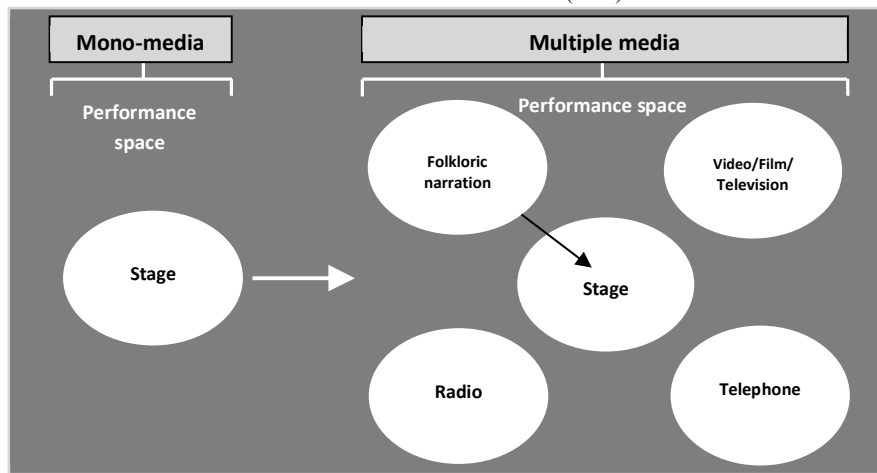
Figure 1: Paradigm shift from the traditional mono-media TfD performance approach to intersection of multiple media performance approach

Source: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2022)



Apparently from the above illustration, while mono-media (mono-medium) represents a single channel approach, multiple media represents a combination of different channels approach, including the electronic and non-electronic channels/elements. The implication is that in the intersection of multiple media approach, each medium intercedes at a relevant point within the performance to complement the actions on stage and bring to more clarity and understanding of the audience the overall actions of the performance. The following illustrations in Figures 2 – 5 are replicated from the one above to further present a pictographic view of how each medium intercedes at critical points in enhancing the overall conscientisation potentials of the story in performance.

Figure 2: Folkloric Narration Intersection Technique
Source: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2022)



Here, the folkloric narration intersection technique interacts with the stage medium to intercede at relevant points, while the other communication media are receded to the background waiting for their own points of intersection. The rest of the communication media also take the same pattern of intersection as the need arises.

Figure 3: Telephone Intersection Technique
Source: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2022)

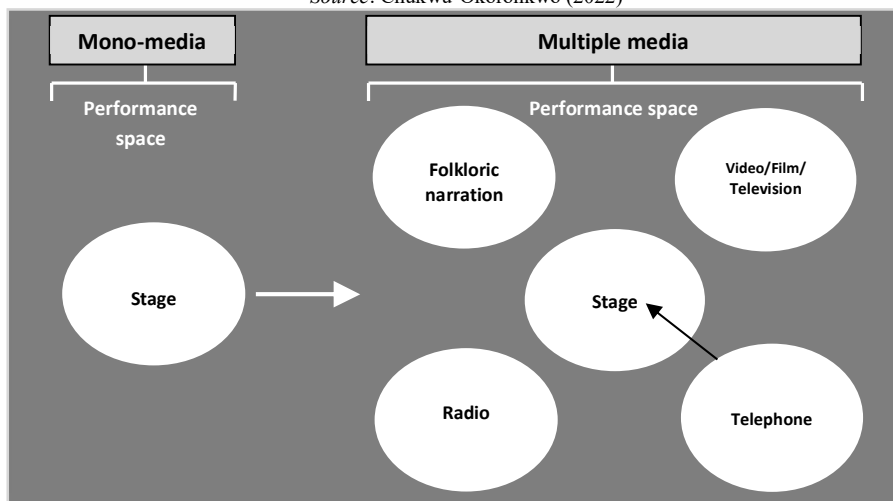


Figure 4: Radio Intersection Technique
Source: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2022)

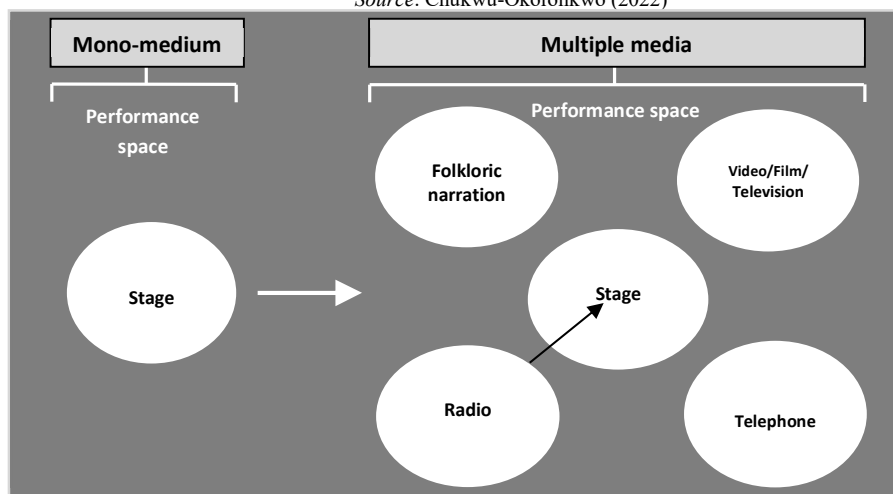
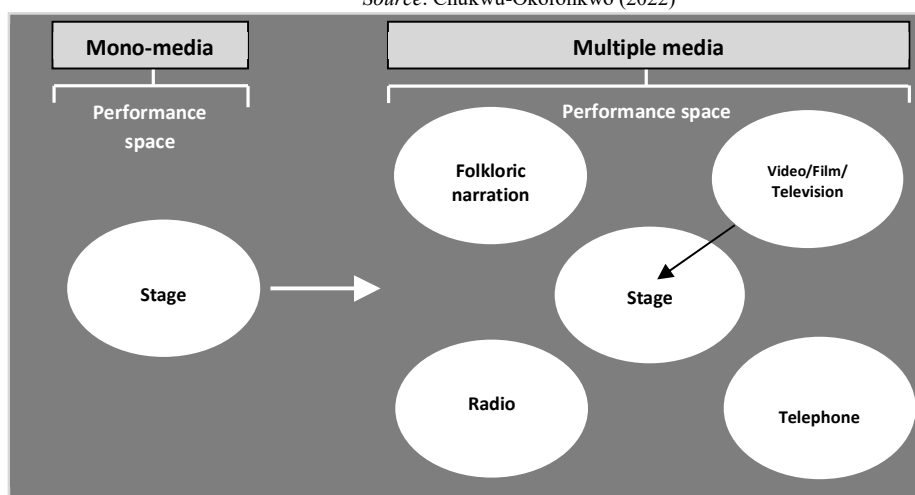


Figure 5: Video Intersection Technique
Source: Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2022)



It is only obvious from the above illustrations that the stage which is the mother medium remains constant and relevant at all times while each of the other interceding media is introduced only at relevant points to enhance the conscientisation potentials of the story in performance. The implication here is that both old and new media forms now coexist in meeting the demands and realities of the time rather than the old one just dying off or completely going into extinction. This radical mediamorphosis in Tfd practice, therefore, is rather a clear transformation of communication media, resulting from what Tankuakio (2002) may have considered as the complex interplay of social and technological innovations; and perhaps, perceived needs of the time (cited in Nwammuo, 2011: 117). The point of emphasis in all of these, therefore, is that Theatre for Development practice can no longer depend solely on the live stage with its obvious limitations, to thrive. Accepted though that the stage is the mother medium; change and transformation has, however, shown that Theatre for Development communication must be digitised, and aligned with the electronic media for the animator, facilitator, and practitioner to interact at a larger scale and make meaningful impact through the process of mass communication.

6. Contribution of the study

The study unarguably provides an out-of-the-box perspective/approach [Intersection Performance Technique] for the execution of contemporary Tfd/development communication initiatives, aimed at a more effective realisation of performance objectives, in consonance with the realities of our time. It would also serve as a catalyst and platform for further discussion and or experimentation on further approaches and potentials towards the advancement and sustenance of the practice.

7. Implications of the study

The study invariably reinforces the reality of the fact that Tfd practice can no longer depend solely on the live stage with its obvious limitations, to thrive. Is is, therefore, an unequivocal signification of the imminent and, indeed, fast approaching end of the mono-media Tfd performance.

8. Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, the researcher recommends the conscious commitment of all Tfd and development communication practitioners in adopting this manifest viable approach provided by IPT; and to conscientiously seek for further ways of expanding it for the sustenance of contemporary Tfd and development communication practice and its continued relevance in fostering meaningful development in target communities in this postmodern era. Furthermore, beyond the adoption of Intersection Performance Technique in Tfd and development communication practice, it is also envisioned that the *conscious* and *indeed conscious* application of IPT in theatrical performances generally would not only necessarily advance effective communication and performance objectives in particular, but also the robust, dynamic and satisfying practice of the art of theatre in general.

9. Conclusion

The study x-rayed the threatened viability and sustenance of contemporary Tfd practice in an era of e-culture as inundated with varying degrees of challenges ranging from constraints in time and distance, inadequate availability of human resources and production facilities among other socio-economic and technological challenges, especially in its mono-media (single stage) performance tradition. It reinforced the evolution of Intersection Performance Tfd Theory – Intersection Performance Technique [IPT] – as a new performance approach in Tfd practice aimed at a more effective realisation of performance objectives, to make it relevant to the realities of our time; and spotlighted IPT as a radicalised development communication approach (radical mediamorphosis) which emphasised a set of techniques that utilise

potentials of other genres and media apart from the stage to put the animators' message across. The study further revealed that intersection technique's novel utilisation of modern technology facilities was essentially designed to enhance Tfd performances in order to effectively bring issues in performance and development communication contexts to the clarity of participating audiences; as well as facilitate the realisation of the overall goals of Tfd initiatives, as a problem solving enterprise. On a summary note, therefore, and in consonance with Nwosu's apt submission that the theorist has the obligation of ensuring the satisfaction of the need of the target audience through evolution of theories for the revival of a declining live theatre (169); this researcher has apparently demonstrated, through the evolution of Intersection Performance Tfd Theory, his passionate commitment to the solemn obligation of ensuring the sustained viability of contemporary Tfd practice as well as its continued relevance in fostering impactful development in target communities in this digital era.

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