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Performance Liveness: Re-Creating the Every-Time

Colloquial Paper

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Performance Liveness: Re-Creating the Every-Time

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Abstract. To explore the definition and notion of liveness within the context of digital performance. Following the clues of Dixon to emphasize the humanism's meaning of this hybird creation. Two perspectives from the ontology and phenomenology of performance has been discussed to indicate the vital factor of time and position of audience which will fulfill the meaning of art in technological age. The behaviors of creation and re-creation mainly depend on the spectators, and their participation in the work of art will replace the physical presence by author's absence. The realization of this process gradually implies that there is a traction relationship between the application of technology and the emotions of the spectator.

Keywords: Liveness, remediation, performance, spectator

Introduction

The sixth chapter of Digital Performance (Dixon, 2007) is entitled Liveness. The author points out the notion of liveness from both the perspectives of ontology and phenomenology. Liveness in fact has been a long-debated issue in mediatized performance studies, which is the fundamental character that distinguishes it from other visual art forms in the sense of aesthetic pursuit. Dixon (2007) begins by explaining the feature of photographic images captured through optical lenses in electronic performances, leading to the controversial opinions between the replica and the original object, then draws the ontology of media and the concept of existence and absence in philosophy.

Digital Performance

The term digital performance is defined by Steve Dixon (2007) as something which "concerns the conjunction of computer technologies with the live performance arts." Two main parts, digital media and live performance, are included in digital performance. Digital media refers to projection, video, and computer technology to record or show off the content of the work. Live performance refers to the telepresence via screen of performers or on the stage in front of the spectator. The key role of technology played in the performance may raise the question: is the status performance art or video art?

Roland Barthes (1980) claims that photography is "a certificate of presence", a proof of something that once existed there, which "reproduces a moment in time that can never be repeated (Barthes 1980) " or "attests 'live' reality of a moment and presents it equally alive in a resurrection (Barthes 1980)". The photography hence provides more important meaning than its real-world referent. Dixon (2007) suggests that it can be further deduced in a philosophical sense in digital performance, "the media projection rather than the live performer that wields the real power, the sense of (aesthetic, semiotic) reality." Auslander (2008) also believes that "the dominant aesthetic force is the digital" rather than live performance, or that the live performance is a part of digital technology as a material.

Film is interested in "having the actor portray himself to the camera (Benjamin 2008, 18)", which sets the stage for electronic devices to become the most convenient and direct way to record personal emotions. While the blur borderline of art and modern life given a chance for everyone who can easily participate in "the performance as live in a temporal sense" (Sanden 2012, 5) via basic social media on a phone. This activity being assumedly done as the remediation and recreation of the daily events that occurred in real time and recorded by technology. In essence, it is a

re-creation of daily events along with time. Whether it is high-tech or low-tech, the participation of each individual is the most important part of this process.

The Presence and Liveness

Performance scholars often "cite Benjamin as guardian of the incomparability of 'liveness'" (Dixon 2007, 117), and enumerate his interpretation of reproduction. Benjamin's argument is that reproductions loses the aura of the original. When it is extended to nature, recorded by photography it is "an invitation to a far-reaching liquidation" (Dixon 2007, 117), because the critical auratic elements in the scene are eliminated. The images captured here are not the real vivid object itself, but a visual choice of the lens. It can be noted here that the auratic elements mentioned by Benjamin are not just a visual scene, but also include the sound part to make the real world. That is, his "presence" refers to a scene that includes two senses and above, and much closer to the notion of liveness.

On the other hand, Dixon believes in the power of media and found the evidence to promote the positives of photography. He points out that Benjamin opines that the era of mass machine duplication not only changed the reproduction of objects, but also "the mode of human sense perception" (Dixon 2007, 117). Therefore, the reproduction also has its own meaning, and photography can be seen as an original work designed for reproduction (Dixon 2007, 117). Affirming the value of the reproduction supports the statement that the replica of presence can become liveness in digital performance. In a word, the term liveness needs two features: real-time and flesh-blood body present. It may include the additional one feature, digitally recorded, as a new modern way to create or spread. For example, in the artwork of *Video Walks* of Janet Cardiff, she recorded the view of the coming and going people in an old railway station. The spectator can wear the earphone to follow or return the view in the video in a new time. The moment recorded by video is then retraced in real time, so spectators experience the video recording and at the same time the live moment. The normal scene like the usual life has been recorded by the phone in advance. When the spectator joined the route recorded in the video, experience has been inspired to respond the video, and feel again the same live sense.

The Perspectives of Ontology

In postmodern culture context, mass media provides a free space for replicas to spread or consume, and the replicas recorded by the media or self-repetition have gained their corresponding aesthetic value. While the repica can not replace the original one for their different presence and sense.

Peggy Phelan (2003, 146) opposes the view to reproduction of the performance, and believes that the transient unrecordable disappearance is the essential feature of performance art. Once recorded, it will fall into the "circulation of representations of representations" (Phelan 2003, 146). Moreover, the recorded performance art will become other forms of art rather than performance. She used the performative and constative utterances to distinguish the describing words and real-acting. Supported by Derrida's opinion that the performative writing promise is only to utter this promise (Phelan 2003, 150) . So, if the performance is recorded by words or video, it no longer can be the performance. On the other hand, her perspective to analyze and judge the ontology of performance is from an elite view of high art. High art has a feature that can not be replicated to spread via mass media to get more accessible attention from normal people. The situation is like the different price between painting and prints, even though the theme is the same one, the original painting will be more expensive than its prints. So, it is always the elite original one like the ephemeral performance mentioned by Phelan.

Dixon agrees with Auslander's view on the disappearance of film moving images formed by visual retention and uses it to explain the ontology of media. By citing Auslander's notions that "television's earliest appearances, as an ontology of liveness more akin to the ontology of theatre than to that of film"(Auslander 2008, 12) and "disappearance may be even more fundamental to television than it is to live performance"(Dixon 2007, 125), Dixon gets a positive statement to argue the ontology of performance. The disappearance of the ontological characteristics of the performance art also corresponds to the ontology of the media. In other words, the disappearance can be regarded as the ontological characteristics of media and live performance.

The Perspective of Phenomenology

The perspective of phenomenology is closer to the concept of site proposed by Rosalind Krauss, which insinuates that an event includes the work and the spectator together happening in a certain space. Or the objecthood mentioned by Michael Fried, the attention and interest of the beholders belongs to the space to constitute the sense of the work. For the theater, it also tries to extend meaning beyond the frame, breaking the "forth wall" (Dixon 2007, 130) to invite the audience to participate in it. And, in some extent, the meaning of digital performance contains the body of the spectator which to fulfill a sense of interacting with the works. Interactive design, therefore, is a direct means for the author to control the behavior and mind of the spectators. There are two main ways to participate, one is the spiritual interest and attention to the performance content, and the other is the physical interaction with the actors or digital media.

For the audience, liveness is the "being there"(Dixon 2007, 129) with their attention or participate "as an extremely vital and equally dynamic element.(Sanden 2012, 15) " Dixon talked about the relative relationship between existence and absence. It seems no answer and result if the participation needs to try to identify the audience's attention in work. The audience for Dixon to discuss in book ought to be seen as an ideal group, who love art and may have established a strong background of art and can fully appreciate it in the context of art history. If their emotion is not specialized as this ideal one, the attention of the audience is also not the final proof of presence, because they may not have any participation in spirit or acting. Such interaction is a kind of false and form, not the one can inspire people's spirit. To aim at the audience's experience within the artwork need to try to create more meaningful content to fulfill the art rather than to seek technology for technology sake.

Conclusion

Liveness is a core problem in performance art, and can be one feature of the digital performance. The remediation of the performance will bring more positive meaning for the audience and spread the work in public and also give more creative space for the artist. Both the perspective of ontology and phenomenology are around the notion of real time, and the time for the performers to show and the audiences to appreciate. The display value of the work is replaced by the need to interact with the audience. The author's ideas is no longer a single judging standard. The audience's physical experience and the use of technological media carrier serve as an important part of this whole process of appreciation, so as to fully manifest and convey the author's wishes.

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