

THE INTERSECTION OF FILM AND STAGE PLAYS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

Lateef Olaitan RASHEED

Department of Performing Arts and Film Studies

Faculty of Arts,

Kwara State University, Malete. Ilorin.

lateef.rasheed@kwasu.edu.ng

rashlateside2025@gmail.com

Joe ODEDINA (PhD)

Department of Performing Arts and Film Studies

Faculty of Arts,

Kwara State University, Malete. Ilorin.

joe.odedina@kwasu.edu.ng

jodedina@gmail.com

Abstract

In an era where digital innovation is reshaping global performance practices, Nigerian theatre is confronted with the challenge of integrating traditional storytelling methods with modern technology to meet the expectations of contemporary audiences. Despite the growing accessibility of multimedia tools, their application in indigenous productions remains limited. Therefore, this study investigates the creative use of digital projectors in Ahmed Yerima's Mojagbe and Rogbodiyan by Ojo Rasak, focusing specifically on how projection technology is employed to facilitate flashbacks and represent past events within live performances. Anchored on Henry Jenkins' Media Convergence Theory, which explores the intersection of old and new media to create enriched cultural expressions, the research examines the projector's narrative function in enhancing temporal structure and dramatic depth. Using performance analysis and observation, this study reveals that digital projectors, when purposefully integrated in stage performances, not only expand the expressive range of live theatre but also enhance a hybrid form that bridges indigenous traditions and contemporary media culture. Hence, the study recommends that Nigerian theatre practitioners, directors, and academic institutions should embrace the intentional use of digital projectors as a creative tool for depicting memory, history, and imagination, thereby enhancing narrative clarity, deepening audience engagement, and modernising the delivery of cultural themes.

Keywords: Intersection, Film, Stage, Plays, Technology

Introduction

Live performance is a dynamic artistic tradition that encompasses theatre, dance, music, spoken word, and other performative expressions presented before a live audience. Unlike recorded or mediated performances, live performances thrive on the immediacy and energy exchanged between performers and audience in real time. This intimate and ephemeral nature distinguishes

live performances as events that are not only seen or heard but also deeply felt. In Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, live performance is historically rooted in indigenous forms of masquerade, drumming, praise singing, oral narratives, and dance, which often serve both sacred and entertainment purposes. From the ritualistic dramas of ancient civilizations to the bustling stages of contemporary festivals, live performance remains a potent medium for storytelling, cultural expression, communal gathering, and social commentary.

With the advent of modern technology, the boundaries of live performance have significantly expanded. The traditional stage has evolved into a multidimensional space where lighting design, sound engineering, stage mechanics, and digital effects interact to enhance storytelling. Technological tools are no longer peripheral add-ons; they are now integral to the overall dramaturgy of performance. Li (2024, p.1) opines that “as a large branch of artistic creation, stage art design is a comprehensive art, involving scene design, lighting, sound effects, costumes, make-up, props, special effects and many other aspects of its more inclusive”. By adopting digital technology and fusing it with stage creativity, live performance has expanded beyond the scope of what is physically present on the stage.

In contemporary theatre and performance practice, directors and choreographers deliberately integrate microphones, projectors, automated lights, soundscapes, and even augmented-reality into live shows. These innovations are designed not only to enhance aesthetic appeal but to deepen the audience’s emotional and intellectual engagement with the performance. For many artists and theatre companies, technology offers new creative possibilities to reimagine spatial dynamics, manipulate time, and bridge gaps between physical and virtual worlds.

Multimedia technology, in particular, has become an increasingly influential force in shaping the aesthetics and form of live performances. By definition, multimedia technology refers to the use of multiple digital and analogue media, such as video, animation, projections, sound design, and interactive platforms, within a single artistic presentation. Liu (2021, p.1) asserts that “...multimedia elements has brought a new possibility for developing visual communication art design, providing anew platform for the traditional visual communication art design”. It provides a hybrid framework where performance art can intersect with visual art, film, and computer-generated imagery. This blending of media disrupts linear narratives and creates layered experiences that challenge the audience’s perception.

In Nigeria’s evolving performance landscape, multimedia has enabled directors to experiment with new modes of communication, memory reconstruction, and symbolism. It has also allowed them to engage broader audiences through innovative techniques that combine traditional stagecraft with digital storytelling.

The merging of two different kinds of media has been adopted for a while now and Ross (2023) suggests why the use of projection in a live presentation has been beneficial for decades when he states that:

The ease of its use and the ability for a user to control its temporality meant that slide projectors were adopted by artists into slideshows, in other words, live

presentations involving a slide projector, which accompanied the prevalence of performance in contemporary art from 1960s onwards (p.69).

This ease of application is what has created a symbiotic relationship that enhances one medium through the use of another and both are better for the fusion than they would otherwise have been separately. The end result is a more lively performance that can reveal some hidden pasts to the audience.

Such synchronization of two media which results in the creation of a new reality is what Snead and Hayatshahi (2018) observe when they state that:

In 2012 the Wooster Group did a performance of Hamlet but based it on the directing style of Richard Burton. Specifically, the group played the 1964 performance that Burton directed on Broadway on a screen behind the stage and the actors on the stage reacted, commented on, imitated, and shaped their bodies to the recorded actors on the screen on the 1964 Broadway version(p.3).

This performance was staged on Broadway in New York City and was so popular that it led to articles and books being written about how the technology enhanced the performance. This is amazing because both media have been around for over a hundred years by the time they were both mixed as a single programme in 2012 on Broadway.

Two compelling similar examples of the synthesis of live performance and multimedia technology in contemporary Nigerian theatre are Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and Ojo Rasak's *Rogbodiyan*, both serving as paradigmatic cases of innovation on the Nigerian stage. *Mojagbe*, directed by Yusuf Salami in 2024, and *Rogbodiyan*, directed by Titilope Olowu in 2025, are notable for their powerful theatricality and creative use of visual projections to depict flashbacks, thereby enhancing the audience's experience of historical and past events. In both works, technology is not simply decorative, it is embedded into the dramaturgical structure and narrative process.

The juxtaposition of live performance and multimedia technology in *Mojagbe* and *Rogbodiyan* exemplifies a new direction in African performance aesthetics, one that respects traditional modes of expression while embracing modern innovation. This convergence allows for a richer, more immersive experience, where audiences are not merely passive observers but active participants in a multidimensional theatrical event. Furthermore, it challenges practitioners to rethink how space, time, narrative, and sensory engagement are constructed and experienced. Therefore, this essay will explore the application of multimedia technology in these two performances, and reflects a broader trend in global performance arts, where digital tools are harnessed to push the boundaries of storytelling, preserve cultural heritage, and articulate contemporary realities in more layered and resonant ways.

Nigerian Indigenous Theatre and Contemporary Performance Practices

Nigerian indigenous theatre has deep roots in the cultural, spiritual, and communal lives of the people. Lawan(2019, p.265) observes that: "Theatre and Drama in Nigeria, as in other places in Africa, both have their beginning in traditional festivals and religious rituals". Long before the advent of colonialism and Western influence, traditional performances were integral to various aspects of Nigerian life, ceremonies, festivals, rituals, storytelling, and community bonding. Eze and Mercy (2024, p.190) confirm this when they state that "Festivals of rites of passage are those that demonstrate the joy of a new status in the society including priesthood, puberty, chieftaincy rites, etc. The iwaakwa festival of some Nigerian Igbo people is a good example of a puberty festival".

These performances were largely non-scripted, highly participatory, and often infused with music, dance, drumming, masquerade, chants, and symbolic costumes. Each ethnic group had its own theatrical forms: the Yoruba with Alarinjo and Egungun masquerades, the Hausa with their puppetry and Dodo performances, and the Igbo with their Mmanwu masquerade tradition. "Drama and Ritual are reciprocal in function and similar in structure, since one can easily lead to the other, depending on the context" (Ogunbiyi, 1981, p.6). These indigenous forms were not just entertainment but served religious, moral, and socio-political functions. The theatre was a living, communal art, drawing its strength from oral traditions, folklore, and the collective memory of the people.

The colonial era brought Western forms of theatre and education to Nigeria, reshaping indigenous performance traditions. With the emergence of Western drama inherited, perhaps imposed through colonization, African drama became modernized to scripting of drama, use of language, satirical plays, use of a curtain, theatre of the absurd, during colonialism, African drama such as the religious ritual was seen as a barbaric act by the colonial officers (Eze and Mercy, 2024, p.185). Missionary schools introduced formal drama rooted in European literary and theatrical styles. This era also witnessed the emergence of the "concert party" theatre, an amalgamation of indigenous performance elements with Western comedic skits and scripted dialogue. Writers and dramatists like Wole Soyinka, Hubert Ogunde, and Ola Rotimi began to blend these traditions in their work, creating a hybrid form that retained indigenous aesthetics while employing Western dramaturgical techniques. Lawal(2015, p.103) highlights that:

Dramatists like James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ahmed Yerima and Felix Okolo among others bond theatre with development into a closely-knit relationship. They use theatre to reconstruct their history by bringing their legendary, folk and mythical heroes alive on stage, venerating and romanticising them; enacting historical events to tell the world that Africans have history; straightening it by filling in the lacunas and chasms carved deliberately by the racists European historians and explorers, and finally celebrating African cultures that are wantonly destroyed by the corrosive European imperialism.

Contemporary Nigerian performance practices continue to reflect a dynamic interplay between the indigenous and the modern. Many theatre practitioners now incorporate traditional elements into their productions, songs, drumming, dance, costuming, and oral narrative structures, while

presenting them in more structured, scripted formats. Ogunbiyi (1981, p.245) eulogizes the originality of Osofisan's drama when he says that:

Osofisan has sought to reshape traditional Yoruba mythology and ritual in the light of the contemporary realities, to squeeze out of old myths fresher meanings, in the belief that Man, in the last analysis, makes his own myth. Not content to merely expose the ills of the society, he has dared to provide us with glimpses of his vision of a new society.

Therefore, with the rise of global interest in African narratives and aesthetics, Nigerian theatre has the potential to offer unique contributions to world theatre through its rich performative heritage. By valuing its roots while embracing contemporary techniques, Nigerian theatre can continue to evolve as a dynamic and relevant force in the local and international performance landscape. This abundant Nigerian theatrical heritage is partly due to its live action which interacts more with the audience. However, Reside (2023, p.1), comments about the ephemera state of stage plays and his preference for printed media when he opines that: "It also seemed to me, in my youth that the texts preserved on paper, tape and disc in the library were more authentic than those I might have heard on stage. Mistakes are made in live performance, particularly in amateur productions."

Part of Reside's reason is that no two productions can be exactly the same, even if the same drama is performed by the same company on the same day. The cause for differences could be due to timing of the characters, fatigues setting in after repeated role playing, different reactions by different audiences, and time of the day among other issues. The introduction of multimedia into such live shows are what is required to keep the stage plays from getting mundane. Film and other screening insertions into a live stage play gives the play an added layer of physical and psychological dimensions which the audience can relate with.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Henry Jenkins' Media Convergence Theory as a framework to explore the intersection of live performance and multimedia technology in *Mojagbe* and *Rogbodiyan*, positioning both as paradigms of theatrical innovation. Jenkins' theory highlights how old and new media collide to produce enriched cultural experiences, and in these productions, the use of multimedia, particularly the projector, functions as more than a technical enhancement. Jenkins (2006, p.2) describes convergence culture as a space "where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways". It becomes a vital narrative tool that restructures the temporality of the plays. In *Mojagbe*, for example, the projector facilitates smooth transitions between the past and the present, myth and reality, enabling a fluid narrative structure that mirrors indigenous oral storytelling while embracing modern visual techniques. This blending of timelines contributes to a more layered and immersive dramatic experience, allowing the audience to access multiple narrative planes simultaneously, in line with Jenkins' idea of transmedia storytelling.

In Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and Ojo Rasak's *Rogbodiyan*, multimedia technology, like the projector, was used not only as a technical enhancement but as a vital narrative device that expands

the expressive range of live theatre. In both productions, the projector was purposefully employed to achieve flashbacks, restructuring the plays' temporality and enriching their storytelling depth. In *Rogbodiyan*, it further externalizes abstract concepts such as fear, destiny, and ancestral presence, creating powerful visual metaphors that interact meaningfully with the actors' performances. Grounded in Henry Jenkins' Media Convergence Theory, which explores how old and new media intersect to produce, enriched cultural experiences, this convergence of live performance and digital imagery does not replace tradition but enhances it. The result is a hybrid of theatrical form that bridges indigenous performance practices with contemporary media culture, inviting participatory and culturally resonant engagement from audiences already immersed in convergence culture.

Multimedia Projector as Narrative Catalyst for Flashbacks and Symbolism in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and Ojo Rasak's *Rogbodiyan*

In *Mojagbe*, Ahmed Yerima integrates Yoruba cosmology and political conflict into a tense narrative where the inevitability of death serves as the ultimate dramatic force. The multimedia projector becomes a narrative catalyst by allowing the audience to witness pivotal past events and spiritual confrontations that shape the present action. In figure one, the outdoor scene of ritual preparation and warrior confrontation was projected during the live performance to recall moments from *Mojagbe's* past, such as his meeting with the warriors of Isepe. These flashbacks function not merely as exposition but as active force pressing on *Mojagbe's* choices, reminding both the king and the audience of the unheeded warning and past event. By visually transporting viewers into these earlier moments, the projector reinforces the cyclical nature of fate within Yoruba belief, where the past continually intrudes on the present until its lessons are learned.



Plate 1: The confrontation scene that was projected as flashback in the production of Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*

Source: Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* directed by Yusuf Salami

Also, in the production of Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*, the projector took on a symbolic presence, layering the live performance with moving images that were not staged physically but were vital to the performance spiritual atmosphere. In figure two, a projection hovered above the actors, placing their movements within past event.



Plate 2: The use of multimedia projectors as flashback in the production of Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe*

Source: Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbeas* directed by Yusuf Salami

More also, *Rogbodiyan* as directed by Titilope Olowu, masterfully employs multimedia projection as a narrative catalyst, particularly in the flashback sequence that the provided image encapsulates.

Plate 3 below portrays a young woman in anguish, restrained and evidently in a heightened emotional and physical state, evoking deep symbolism and psychological resonance. Through the deployment of the multimedia projector, the scene shifts the audience away from the present timeline of the drama into a reflective, memory-driven narrative space. This deliberate transition is not merely an aesthetic interjection but a calculated narrative technique that exposes buried truths and forgotten histories. The emotional intensity of the character, likely representing a victim of rape and past tyranny or injustice, bridges the divide between past and present, alerting the audience to the cyclical nature of corruption and power abuse in the fictional village of Koroju.



Figure 3: A scene where the kings rapes a lady
Source: Ojo Rasak's *Rogbodiyan* as directed by Titilope Olowu

The multimedia projector in *Rogbodiyan* thus emerges as more than a technical apparatus; it becomes a conduit for collective memory and a mirror to cultural psyche. It allows the audience to enter a metaphysical plane where the past speaks to the present and where every image projected carries the burden of suppressed truth. The character's expression, as seen in the image, invites viewers to emotionally engage with history, thereby bridging the boundary between performance and lived experience.

Finally, the use of multimedia projectors in Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and Ojo Rasak's *Rogbodiyan* extends beyond mere visual enhancement; it functions as a critical narrative device that bridges temporal divides, deepens thematic exploration, and reinforces symbolic meaning. By visually manifesting flashbacks and spiritual dimensions, the projections compel both characters and audience to confront repressed histories and unresolved conflicts. In *Mojagbe*, the projector intensifies the fatalistic tone rooted in Yoruba cosmology, while in *Rogbodiyan*, it becomes a vessel for collective trauma and social critique.

Findings

The study reveals that multimedia projectors, when purposefully integrated into live theatrical performances like *Mojagbe* and *Rogbodiyan*, serve as powerful narrative tools rather than mere visual enhancements. In both plays, the projectors enable effective use of flashbacks, allowing seamless transitions between past and present, and deepening audience engagement with the characters' memories, cultural heritage, and psychological experiences. The use of projection technology successfully externalizes abstract concepts such as fear, destiny, and spiritual confrontation, thus enriching dramatic expression and preserving traditional storytelling within a modern technological framework.

Summary

This study examines the intersection of live performance and multimedia technology in Nigerian theatre, specifically through the analysis of *Mojagbe* by Ahmed Yerima and *Rogbodiyan* by Ojo Rasak. Drawing from Henry Jenkins' Media Convergence Theory, the study explores how the use of projectors enhances narrative depth by enabling flashbacks and symbolic representations. The findings demonstrate that digital projections significantly enhance the temporal structure, thematic resonance, and audience immersion in live performances, fostering a hybrid aesthetic that merges indigenous theatrical traditions with contemporary multimedia innovation.

Conclusion

The integration of multimedia technology, particularly projectors, in Nigerian theatre presents a transformative approach to storytelling that bridges tradition and innovation. In *Mojagbe* and *Rogbodiyan*, the purposeful use of projections not only enhances visual appeal but also restructures the narrative, allowing for deeper exploration of memory, history, and cultural symbolism. These productions exemplify how traditional African performance practices can be preserved and enriched through the creative use of modern technology, offering new dimensions of meaning and engagement for contemporary audiences.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Nigerian theatre practitioners, directors, and academic institutions embrace the deliberate integration of technology multimedia tools into live performances. Training programs and workshops should be developed to enhance practitioners' technical and creative competencies in multimedia application. Furthermore, funding and institutional support should be provided to facilitate the acquisition and use of such technologies, ensuring that indigenous narratives are not only preserved but also innovatively presented to resonate with modern, media-savvy audience.

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Performances:

- Bakare, O. R. *Rogbodiyan*. Performed on the Saturday, June 28th, 2025 at the Kwara State University, Malete. Ultra Modern Theatre. Hall A. 2pm.
- Yerima, A. *Mojagbe*. Performed at the Kwara State University Malete. Convocation Arena, on the July 5th, 2024. 2pm.