

TRANSCULTURAL STAGE DESIGN AS A MOMENTARY SPATIAL EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

Stage design is a temporary space built specifically for performance or play. The atmosphere that a stage designer creates is built to determine how the individual or group of people should perceive or feel during a performance or play. Meanwhile, transcultural aesthetics is a theoretical assessment of distinctive applied aesthetic concepts and experiences of cultures apart from one's own. The transcultural stage design discussed in this paper is a performance stage for contemporary Hip Hop music by Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS). The particular stage discussed is the band's introduction and IDOL song performance stage during Melon Music Awards 2018. This massive stage contains the composition of a traditional dance performance of South Korea, the composition of Jindo (drum dance), Bunchaechun (fan dance improvisation) and Korean folk dance as the background for the opening of the IDOL song, hip-hop and electronic dance music from western culture. Through this performance, the audience had a momentary spatial experience that was familiar yet new. The idea of transcultural stage design as a momentary spatial experience will be explored through an analytical design approach to define the cultural and modern elements, bring a new blending atmosphere, and establish the Korean wave in Global art.

Keywords: *transcultural stage design, momentary spatial experience, performance stage, IDOL song by BTS, MMA 2018*

Introduction

Play and performance are always exciting things, especially music performances either in a group, choir, or solo performance. There are two essential areas when artists perform: the stage, a space designed for performance, and audience areas, a space for the audience to watch and enjoy the performance. A successful performance entertains the audience throughout the performance and leaves an impression behind. For this reason, stage design, known as scenography, holds an essential role in each performance, giving us information about the narration of the performance (Marku & Priambodo, 2018).

Stage, set, or scenic design is the art, craft, and practice of designing and implementing theatrical 3-D environments for plays, opera, musical theatre, dance performances, live concert events, film, video, and television productions, and themed events and environments. Stage design or scenography plays a crucial role in the production of performances as the first visual thing audiences see in the venue (Marku & Priambodo, 2018). This first impression will naturally shape their perspective and suggest the meaning of the experiences (Mckinney, 2000). When the performance starts, each element in the performance, such as set design and costume, reflect the themes, mood, style, emotion, as well as the context of the production of the performances (Eagan, n.d.). Pamela Howard (2002) stated that scenography is a creation of the original work as an elegant synthesis of space, text, research, and fine arts by the actors and director for the viewer. Audiences will feel the ambiance of the performance space, sense its spatiality, and save it in their memory.

Baudrillard (1996) has linked material and form space as an element that significantly affects an atmosphere. They are related to each other as a cultural system of signs constructed spatial experience. This spatial experience is not a four-dimensional spatial space but spatiality in a broader context, a relation condition between one human being and another. This interior is understood outside the historical frame as an applied, disjunctive, and randomly accumulative space inhabitation.

Moreover, the transcultural aesthetic is a generic term used by comparative philosophers and aestheticians to denote a theoretical assessment of distinctive applied aesthetic concepts and experiences of cultures apart from one's own (Tanchio, 2014). It has ideological implications since it opens up the prospect of understanding a work of art and the forms of skill in the fullness of its being but also our experience of it (Deutsch, 1975). Based on this definition, the transcultural aesthetic can be an approach to designing a stage, part of the scenography.

The performance in this paper is the music performance by a boy band group from South Korea, BTS. Unlike other boy bands from this country, this group came from the underdog

label but has come to become a famous worldwide boy band group. Their genres of Music are various western Music, Pop, Hip Hop, kR&B, EDM, and K-Pop. The transcultural stage is made to stress that BTS is not a western boy band but a Korean boy band with a western music specialist. Through this performance, Korean traditional culture became known internationally.

Music performance has commonalities as normative aspects shared by performers and differences based on individualistic aspects (Palmer, 1997). The narrative aspects are essential things that shape all music performances. Since individualistic aspects are the characteristics and the uniqueness of music performances that differ from each other. Nowadays, music performance as public art has challenged traditional sociality that might normatively gather us around identity-based categories of belonging, such as being of nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, and gendered role. It was a potential relatedness when we gathered to see public art, as Mike Douglas (2011) describes. People feel connected when enjoying a music performance together. This sense of relatedness is both narration from the play and also another form of the transcultural in a performance.

Another narration guides the audience from the beginning, starting when we book tickets online, wait for the opening gate, find seat positions, and watch the performance at the stage design. Palmer (1997) also stated that one of the discussions about music performance in psychology is to understand relationships between performance and the viewers' perception. The stage design affects how this relationship works through the design elements, such as lighting, texture form, materiality, and sound. Because of this, a scenography would be a multi-narrated sequence because of the relationship between the environment and the story of the performers.

This paper tries to discover transcultural stage narration by using the BTS song "IDOL" performance at Melon Music Awards 2018 in Seoul as a case study. This paper begins with scenography and its relevance to interiority and space as the initial idea. The discussion will be about how the performance is narrated continuously on stage with the elements of design applied in "IDOL" particular stage scenography, and it becomes a momentary experience for the audiences.

Research Method

This research discusses how spatiality is constructed through systematic arrangements in a scenography or stage design. Spatiality in scenography is closely related to the idea of time and space. Further it will explore some theoretical concepts in the System of objects by Baudrillard as a reference, along with transcultural aesthetics by Paul Albert Tanchio, scene design by Radivoje Dinulovic, and Narrative in Scene design by Joe M. Rohe. The

scenography theory from Fiona Wilkie about Space in site-specific performance is also reliable for understanding spatiality.

The method used in the research is a qualitative approach with a study case in the introduction of the BTS song "IDOL" performance at Melon Music Awards 2018 in Seoul. The Melon Music Awards 2018 was held in Gocheok Sky Dome, which has a capacity for 16,744 spectators for baseball games. There are several steps to analyse this transcultural narration in the stage design as a momentary experience of introducing the BTS song "IDOL" performance.

Step 1: Initial "IDOL" song analysis as a narrative of the stage design, both the music and the lyrics.

Step 2: The second step is analysing the location as space for the Melon Music Awards 2018 stage design and "IDOL" song performance by BTS.

Step 3: A visual analysis of the "IDOL" song performance is presented through the stage design components to deliver a specific narration and leave the momentary experience for the audience.

"IDOL" Song Analysis by BTS as a Narrative

Who is BTS? As mentioned before, BTS is a worldwide Korean boy band with a western music genre, hip-hop, pop, R&B, and EDM, as well as K-Pop. BTS stands for Bangtan Sonyeondan, bulletproof boys, known as the Bangtan Boys. It was formed in 2010 and debuted in 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment, a small agency. The groups consist of seven personnel, RM/ Kim Nam Joon (the leader), Jin/ Kim Seok Jin, Suga/ Min Yoon Gi, J-Hope/ Jung Ho Seok, Jimin/ Park Ji Min, V/ Kim Tae Hyung, and Jungkook/ Jeon Jung Kook from a different region in South Korea who have the same passion in music.



Picture 1. The seven members of BTS on the red carpet at MMA 2018

Source: <https://www.habkorea.net/bts-takes-7-trophies-at-melon-music-awards-2018/>

BTS music is mostly co-written, co-produces by them, and has a wide range of genres. The lyrics have often discussed a variety of subjects, from mental health, youth, loss, self-love, individualism, and others. Their work also frequently references literature, philosophy and psychological concepts and includes an alternate universe storyline. For this reason, BTS' music style mostly has a definite theme with various narrations. They also presented the LOVE MYSELF Campaign with UNICEF to deliver the true meaning of love to the global audience, help end violence and neglect, and promote self-esteem.

The "IDOL" song by BTS was released on August 24, 2018, as the lead single from their third compilation album, Love Yourself: Answer (2018) and debuted at number 11 on the Billboard Hot 100. The song is a "traditionally inspired track" featuring South African's style electronic dance music with traditional Korean rhythms, the pounding of a Korean folk percussion instrument for a conventional Korean farmer's ensemble performance. According to the BTS's label, the song was inspired by Gqom, a style of house music that originated in Durban, South Africa, and then combined powerful traditional thumping drums with bass and house synths in a balance between tradition and trend. The track also includes classical Korean instruments, the Gakgung, a horn-bow with shehnai-like sounds. This "IDOL" track is culturally rich with a diverse global sound.

Furthermore, "IDOL" song lyrics narrated the generation's anxiety as a singer and performance in early adolescence. In 2020, the lyrics of "Idol" were displayed in a special exhibition titled "Korean Pop Lyrics: Melodies of Life" at the National Hangeul Museum in Seoul. This analysis begins by identifying a narrative related to the context, time, and space associated with the "IDOL" song lyrics.



Picture 2. A verse of IDOL song lyrics by BTS

Source: <https://genius.com/Genius-english-translations-bts-idol-english-translation-lyrics>

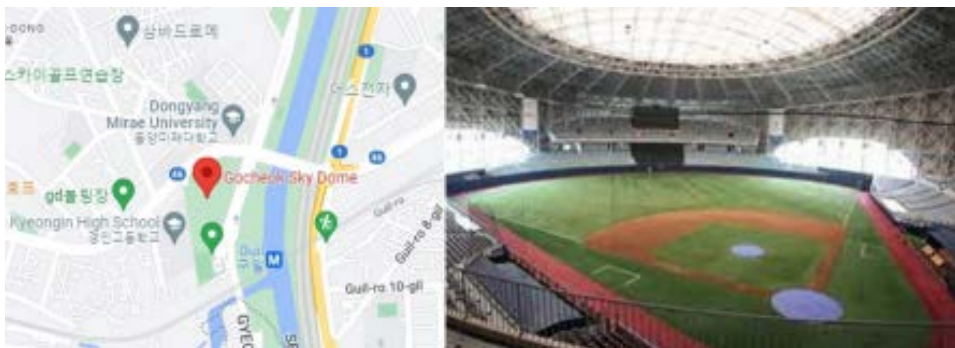
The phrase above is only one verse from the complete lyric, and all songs, bridge, and chorus are in Korean and English. The performance and the stage are connected at a specific time through the combination atmosphere of transcultural contemporary art. As Eliot Deutsh

(1975) said that with artwork time, we unified the organising of a temporal field and we are given a world. Time is uniquely performed in art. Stage design for the performance of this boy band group is prepared to provide the audience and the fandom an atmosphere that can connect their message while they are performing.

Gocheok Sky Dome as a Location for Melon Music Awards 2018

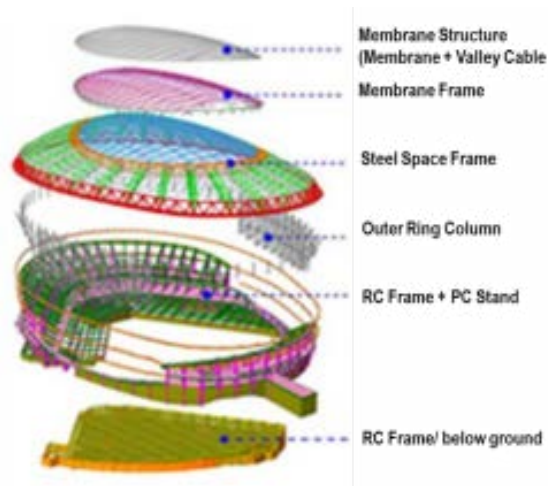
The Melon Music Award (MMA) is one of the prestigious music awards shows in South Korea. Kakao Entertainment holds it annually through its online music store Melon, and since 2009 it has been officially held offline. It was initially a fan-voted award, yet it uses digital data from the Melon music platform, online voting and judges' evaluation as the base for the awards to artists who have had exceptional performances during the year. This show consists of the awards ceremony and music performance by the award nominees. The audience for this event is the K-pop fandom from around the world since this is the award ceremony.

The Melon Music Awards 2018 was held in the Gocheok Sky Dome, a domed baseball stadium located in Gocheok-dong, Seoul, South Korea. It is the home ballpark of the KBA club Kiwoom Heroes and is primarily used for baseball. However, several music performances are also held in this stadium as it can accommodate many people, specifically for K-Pop boy band or girl band concerts, and music awards shows. In this massive space for performance, the scenography signals a practice of theatre design, where visual, spatial, and kinetic elements are fully integrated within the version (McKinney, 2000).



Picture 3. The location and the view of Gocheok Sky Dome

Source: <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Gocheok+Sky+Dome> and https://english.visitseoul.net/entertainment/Gocheok-Skydome/_15906



Picture 4. The structural system of Gocheok Sky Dome
 Source: <http://www.csse.kr/eng/proj/shm/gocheok.html>

This stadium is popular for K-Pop artists to hold concerts because it is massive and can modify different stage designs based on the show's theme. The stage design can be categorised as a scene design in architecture, like Roland Barthes's idea: Architecture as a system of thinking about space establishes a relation towards all of these problem aspects (economic and ecological, aesthetical, social, cultural, psychological, philosophical, others.) simultaneously and becomes an ideological category per se. Since human life represents a fundamental and essential object of architecture, architecture's structure and final form need to be concerned as a machine (Marcus & Corbusier, 2000), not as a scene, sculpture, or designed artefact.



Picture 5. The layout and the view of the MMA 2018 stage design at Gocheok Sky Dome
 Source: <https://koreanbuddy.com/shop/2018-melon-music-awards/> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyI0Q&t=874s

Like the picture, the Gocheok Sky Dome was designed to be a stage for The Melon Music Awards 2018. There is a stage for the artist to perform and a different space for the audience. The area in this stadium is used for this music performance. The stage design is important as several artists would perform on this stage, and must be visible from all directions to the audience. As a whole, the setting must show the pride of Melon Music Awards, but also should provide the needs of the various artists with the flexibility to re-arrange.

A work of art in scene design can also arise from any creative process, including scenic thinking and using scenic resources to create a staged event (Dinulović, 2010). Therefore, if we apply the logic of theatre to other artistic disciplines, scene design can also be viewed as art itself. It is clear that in the past decade, the scenographic practice and the scene design have continually wandered off from the theatrical black box toward hybrid areas placed within the points of intersection of the theatre, architecture, exhibition, visual arts, and media (Lotker, 2010).

In light of this, it is entirely natural that the question of staging the space (Lotker, 2010) becomes the reason for gathering architecture and events, physical structure and time fluctuation, morphology and "slice of life" (*trance de vie*) (Lotker, 2010). It seems more than natural to think about exploring and exhibiting architecture today. Scene design understood as a tool, methodology, or point of view, could be a strong and potent platform for re-thinking, re-evaluating and re-presenting contemporary architecture.

The "IDOL" Song Performance at MMA 2018 by BTS

As mentioned above, the stage design and construction process is the arrangement of the scene slice by slice. In this study, we want to analyse it scene by scene. What we call the transcultural stage is the architectural construction based on the set of the performance. As we know, elements are common to all theatre: performers, audience, directors, theatre space, and design aspects (scenery, costume, lighting, and sound). The essence of theatre is the interaction between the performer and the audience. Theatre needs to be experienced live. There is a "call and response" atmosphere.

The design aspects of theatre space are the main element to discuss in "IDOL" song performance, how the stage is placed one by one as a transcultural stage. It is essential to have a set, or some equivalent area, where the artist (in this case, BTS) can perform. It is also necessary to have a place for audience members to sit or stand and enjoy the performance. The picture below shows how the Gocheok Sky Dome is designed to provide the needs of this musical performance.



Picture 6. The division area of the MMA 2018 stage design at Gocheok Sky Dome

Source: <https://koreanbuddy.com/shop/2018-melon-music-awards/>

In the “IDOL” song performance, the transcultural stage is divided into some scenes. Each scene is located in a different part of the stage with various design aspects of the theatre space. BTS used all of the stage space maximally to present the song’s narration, which is culturally rich combined with modernity. The scene discussed in this paper is mostly the introduction part of the “IDOL” song performance, the first verse, and the ending. The introduction part of the song had four sections with traditional music and instruments that was truly a transcultural stage design before the song started. It was a drum dance, Buchaechum (a fan dance, a Korean mask dance, and Pungmul (a Korean folk performance).



Picture 7. The division area of the stage area at MMA 2018

Source: <https://koreanbuddy.com/shop/2018-melon-music-awards/>

The first section of the introduction performance was a drum dance. A member of BTS was dancing a free-style dance along with a Jindo drummer. There were three platforms with

Jindo drums stacked, consisting of 5 people on each stack. The BTS members dance on the second platform in the middle of the Jindo drum dance. He and the dancer also wore a modern version of traditional Korean clothes, modern Hanbok.



Picture 8. The member of BTS dance along with Jindo drummer dancer

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s



Picture 9. The members of BTS wore Hanbok, the traditional Korean clothes (left).

Pointing out the fan in a certain direction as a sign to change the section (right)

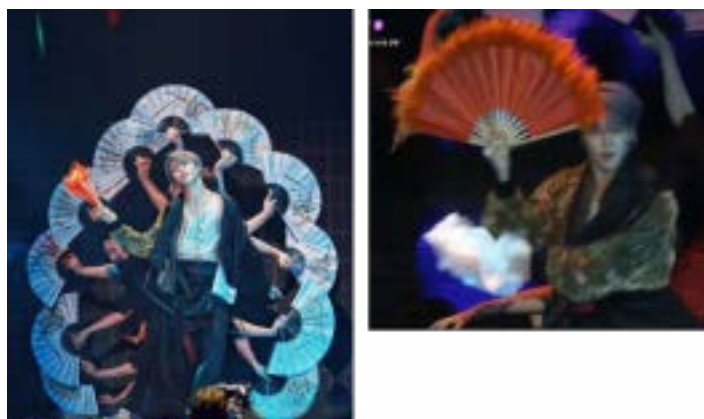
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s

Before moving to the second section, the artist made a significant movement as a signal to start the second section. The action was dancing with a fan and pointing in a certain direction. The second section began with a fan held by other BTS members. Then he started dancing a re-interpreted Buchaechum, a fan dance, along with dancers. The dance choreography beautifully pointed out the use of a fan as a traditional Korean dance. The

artist and dancer wore a modern Hanbok in this section. Finally, he held a white scarf and threw it away in a certain direction.



Picture 10. Other members dance a re-interpreted Buchaechum, a fan dance
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s



Picture 11. The performers wore Hanbok, the traditional Korean clothes (left). Throw out the white scarf to a certain direction as a sign to change the section (right)
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s

As the second member threw the white scarf away, the third member of BTS started dancing with a long fabric covering both of his hands. He danced along with some dancers with a traditional Korean mask and also used a long fabric in their hands. The BTS member and the masked dancer in this section also wore a modern Hanbok. Finishing his performance, the artist took a mask, wore it and threw it away.



Picture 12. A BTS member and dancers with a traditional Korean mask and a long fabric in their hands perform
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s



Picture 13. The performers wore Hanbok, the traditional Korean clothes (left). Throw out the traditional Korean mask to a certain direction as a sign to change the section (right)
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s

After that, the scene changed to a group of male artists with various properties, such as a hat with a long fabric, different types of musical instruments, and a specific costume of a lion. All of the performers also wore a Hanbok. They performed a piece of folk music, lion dance and acrobatic movement in contemporary choreography composition. Certainly, all of the male artists wore Hanbok in this performance.



Picture 14. The Pungmul performance

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s

Finally, this section transitioned from the introduction to the start of the song. In the same area of this Pungmul performance, all of the BTS members started singing IDOL songs with digital backgrounds. As an ending of the IDOL song performance by BTS, the entire dancer was dancing the traditional dance again along with them as the background.



Picture 15. The transition from Pungmul performance to sing IDOL song

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s and

Picture 16 The ending of the IDOL song performance with all of the performers in the introduction part.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_9b0dyl0Q&t=874s

Those analyses consist of a transcultural aesthetic in contemporary art by using a traditional Korean costume, traditional Korean dance and music as an intro to IDOL song performance, in which songs with western HIP-HOP genre. The atmosphere in the IDOL performance combined Korean traditional music with the drums' sound as the main beat and the song's beat, creating harmony in its sound. The costume singer in hanbok and the modern choreography also can be seen as transcultural art. The traditional dance, the stage background in contemporary graphic art, performs together until the song ends. The audience can feel the transcultural stage as a narration with a new meaning, a momentary spatial experience.

Conclusion

"We do not want to change our identity to get to number one. If we sing full English, then that's not BTS." RM, the leader of BTS. With this quote from the BTS leader, we want to point out that the narrative of the group's singing and dance performance is transcultural art. All the elements of stage design, such as costume, scenery, lighting, and sounds in the IDOL MMA 2018 performance, created a transcultural momentary spatial experience. The audience could feel the mixture of modernity and Korean culture in that performance. The atmosphere build had successfully increased the Korean wave, adding a total of ninety million fans. They also stay proud as Korean and still consistently make music with all genres because they are musicians and love music.

Furthermore, transcultural narrative can be an approach to developing the stage design. Exploring the culture state of the art with combined modern elements and technology can bring a new blending atmosphere to give a unique experience for the audience, even for just a moment. This approach can establish the Korean wave in global art and other country cultures.

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