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DESIGNING COSTUME FOR ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE

By

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Abstract

The use of costume in different strata of the society has gone beyond mere beautification of oneself and achieving a degree of decoration. A great number of elements are imperative in costume design application. This paper explores the costume designer and imperatives of costume design. Technical theatre has to do with all the visible or physical elements involved in a stage production. These elements are: scenery, lighting, sound, costume and make-up - all working together in ensemble to create the desired place, time, period and mood of the production. Costume Design as an area in Technical Theatre implies the fabrication of clothing in styles to decorate the performer, denote the status, establish the time and period and create the mood of the for a successful artistic performance in terms of the basic principles, types of costume design, the process involved and objectives. . This paper recommends consciousness and carefulness in the artistic design and utilization of costume and that designers should employ all the professional approaches, bearing in mind that the elements and principles of costume, are fully utilized to achieve the desired purpose in any artistic performance

Introduction

The essence of putting on clothes may not be limited to covering nakedness, being comfortable and gaining emotional appeal. In other situations, people are likely to be judged, rated or addressed based on their physical appearances. In our contemporary society, man is at the centre of various designs of clothing that are symbolic and representative. This therefore means that designing of clothing has been helpful to man in communicating meanings in terms of profession, position, hierarchy, etc and thus facilitate designing for the theatrical performances to depict the robes of characters. Wilson notes that, "... the robe of a judge in which wearer is crowned with authority and wisdom, seriousness and dignity and when we see someone in the judicial robe ... " (355).

As a communicative art form in the theatre business, costume is one of the mediums through which the wearer/actor appears remarkably convincing. Dapo Adelugba sees costume as memory of the soul (19). Thus, when presented in a performance, costume constitutes the outward and visible appearance of the actors. Costume, enhances the appearance and intensifies the personality of the wearer.

IMPLICATIONS OF COSTUME DESIGN FOR THE THEATRE

Design in the theatre implies the purposeful planning and visualization of theatrical elements for desired effects. In the assertion of Albright *et al*, "design is the visual scheme of the production, including scenery, costume, perspective and stage lighting. Design, therefore consists of all the inanimate things which contribute to the visual effect of the performance" (225). Theatrical design is the art of creating the visual

images of a theatrical production through sets, costumes, lighting, make-up and scenery. The development of theatrical design is closely related to that of the stage, dramaturgy and the representational arts like costume designing.

Design, in general, means creating or fashioning out a plan or drawing a sketch to suit intended purpose and for actualization of a specific objective. Design in itself implies the purposeful visualization and planning on how something is to be made or done. Albright *et al* in *Principles of Theatre Art* asserts that "design is the visual scheme of the production including scenery, costume, property and, stage lighting. Design therefore consists of all the inanimate things which contribute to visual effect of the performance" (233).

Judging from the above assertion, theatrical design embodies different areas embedded in various design practices. Ohiri in Agberia defines theatrical design as "the creation of some visual elements, by intention, in order to enhance proper depiction and appreciation of the lesson of production" (Jacob 3). The definition by Ohiri above highlights that theatrical design has to do with the intentional and meticulous planning and creation of some of the visual as well as the aural elements towards the actualization of the directorial concept.

Theatrical design is inevitable in contemporary theatre practice. From the historical point of view the concept of design was not alien to theatre profession in the 5th century. The principle of Greek theatrical design was assimilated by the Roman theatre, which often made use of a curtain and from the Roman theatre down to the Renaissance, elements of theatrical designs were utilized in all theatre practices. Elements of theatrical design such as costumes and masks originated from the oldest folk. The Ancient Greek Theatre of the 5th century was supplementing the Scene building with three-dimensional stage props, which, during the Hellenistic period; were used together with painted sets.

The two key words in the concept of theatrical design are "intentionality" and "meticulousness". Meaning that theatrical design must be consciously and painstakingly (carefully) executed rather than haphazardly executed. In the word of Gillette, theatrical design "is a series of steps through which we pursue the goal of creating what we hope will be a work of art - a scenic design, costume design... of an efficiently coordinated production". (17). However, all the areas of technical theatre revolve around the concept of design.

FUNCTIONS OF COSTUME

Costume serves as a medium for performance, a tool for visual expression, which, apart from its feature as an item of clothing worn by the performer/actor to make a statement, serves a great purpose in character identification. According to Julie Umukoro "what would a man be without his clothes; without his clothes, a man would be nothing at all. The clothes do not only make the man, without them he is a cipher, a vacancy, a nobody, a nothing" (68). This simply means that people are known and can be identified with the types of costume they wear. It is pertinent, therefore to note that costumes on stage production aid in personality and status identification and by extension, the culture of a people. Plumette asserts that "Costumes are minor arts and they tell much about a people or culture and time in which they lived" (292).

THE COSTUME DESIGNER AT A GLANCE

A costume designer is the person responsible for designing costumes for a film or stage production. He or she is considered part of a production team alongside the director, scenic and lighting designer as well as the sound designer. The costume designer might as well collaborate with hair or wig master or a make-up designer. The Costume designer will typically seek to enhance a character's persona and create an evolving plot of colour, changing social status or period through the visual design of garments and other means of dressing, distorting and enhancing the body within the framework of the director's vision. At the same time the costume designer must ensure that various costume designs allow the actors to move in a manner consistent with the historical period and enables the actor to execute the director's blockings of the production without much damage to the garment.

Additional considerations include the durability and suitability of garments, particularly in a theatrical performance. The designer must work in consultation with not only the director, but the set and lighting designers to ensure that the overall designs of the production work together in harmony. The costume designer needs to possess strong artistic capabilities, thorough knowledge of pattern development, draping, drafting as well as awareness of poise when in period dress, and also be sensitive to the creative direction that the performer wants to take his or her character.

PERSPECTIVES IN COSTUME DESIGN

Costume design is the fabrication of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or a performer. Costume is specific in the style of dress particular to nation, a class, or period. The most basic designs are produced to denote status, provide protection or modesty, or simply decorate a character. Costumes may be for a theatre or musical performance but may not be limited to such.

Designs are first and foremost sketched out, and approved by the costume designer, then dragged on a form or a pattern drafted along with the fabricated portion, the costume may require accessories such as:

1. Foot wear
- 2, Hats and head dresses for the actors to wear, but it may also include
3. Designing
- 4, Make-up
- 5, Wigs
- 6, Underwear

A COSTUME DESIGNER AND REQUISITE OBJECTIVES

The functions of a costume designer are to:

- i, help establish tone and style of the production.
- ii. indicate the historical period of a play and the locale in which it is set.
- iii. indicate the nature of individual characters or groups in a play: their stations in life, their occupations, their personalities.
- iv. show relationships among characters: separate major character from minor one, contrast one group with another.
- v. meet the needs of individual performer, make it possible for an actor or actress to move freely in costume: allow a performer to dance or engage in a sword fight, for instance when necessary, allow performers to change quickly from one costume to another
- vi be consistent with the production as a whole, especially with the other visual elements.

There is the need to state that costumes can either be built, rented; or borrowed. Costumes must also be comfortable to and usable by the actor. Costumes should analyse given circumstances like sex, age, health, social, class, focal importance, shape, movement of costume, texture and dragging.

CATEGORIES OF COSTUME DESIGNER

Professional costume designers according to [en.wikipedia.org>wiki, generally fall into three categories:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/)

Freelance designer: A freelance designer is hired for a specific production by a theatre, dance or opera company, and may not actually belong to the theatre that he or she is designating for. A freelance is traditionally paid upon hiring, on delivering of final renderings, and opening night of the production. Freelancers are not obligated to any exclusivity in what projects they are working on.

Residential Designer: A residential designer is hired by a specific theatre, dance or opera company for an extended series of productions. A residential design's contact may limit the amount of freelance work they are allowed to accept. Unlike the freelancer, a residential designer is constantly on location at the theatre and

is readily available to work with the costume studio and his or her other collaborators. Residential designers tend to be more established than strict freelancers, but this is not always the case.

Academic Designer: An academic designer is one who holds professorship at school. The designer is primarily an instructor, but many also act as a residential designer to varying degrees. They are often free to freelance as their schedule allows. Both residential and academic costume designers are generally required to act as shop master or mistress of an on-site costume shop, in addition to designing productions. In a residential theatre, there is almost always a shop staff of stitchers, drapers, cutters and craft artisans. In an academic environment, the shop 'staff' is generally a student who is learning about costume design and construction. Most universities require costume design students to work a specified number of hours in the shop as part of their course work.

ELEMENTS OF COSTUME DESIGN

According to Michael Gillette in his book: *Theatrical Design and Production* elements of costume design are:

Colour: Colour in theatrical design is the quality which allows the eyes to see the difference between the objects that are of the same shapes and size such as red and blue. Colour is therefore the eye's perception of wavelength of light. It has to do with attribute of objects appearing differently according to their ability to emit, absorb or reflect light of difference wavelength. Colour is more important in theatrical design because it has the ability to capture emotional and associative responses.

Shape: Shape refers to the appearance, the outline of the contour of a line. It has to do with the definite form of lines. In theatrical design, it is the shape that defines the form and the outline.

Space: Space in theatrical design has to do with the ability "to judge, the size of objects and the relative distance between the objects, without the aid of measuring device" (Gillette 74). A space however is largely the skill of intuition.

Texture: Texture in theatrical design is simply the degree of roughness or smoothness, coarseness or fineness. Gillette is of the idea that texture refers to "the visual or textile surface characteristics or appearance of an object" (77). In theatrical design, both lightening, costume, make-up and the scene designers make good use of texture to provide the visual reference to the psychological environment of play; texture in theatrical design usually is related to the sensuous value.

Line: Line as one of the elements of theatrical design. According to Gillette, line is "a relatively narrow, elongated mark" (74). Line represents edge of forms. It corresponds to the direction of movement, the distance between two points or the boundary of an area, Russell sees line as:

a record of movement of the eyes when it examines an object..., even the simplest lines have mood, meaning and emotional associations, and thus we feel a strong difference in the effect of vertical and horizontal lines, of curved and serpentine lines... it may be complex, with zigzags, scallops, and intricate patterns" (Jacob 6).

Mass: Mass as an element of theatrical design is applicable and relevant to all areas of the theatrical design. Mass is better appreciated at a distance that allows the viewer to take in all objects at once. Therefore, mass is described as the three-dimensional manifestation of shape that creates an orderliness of depth and spatial arrangement.

Position: This has to do with where something is being placed, kept or hung, in relation to other objects. Gillette says "Position refers to the relative location of adjacent shapes or masses" (77). The definition encompasses both the distance between objects and their placement relative to forms around them.

COSTUME DESIGN AND THE REQUIRED STEPS

The costume design process involves many steps and the basic and commonly used steps are stated as follows:

Analysis: This entails analyzing the script, musical composition, choreography, etc. The listed parameters, according to....., must follow:

- a. Indication of events happening before the piece took place if possible.
- b. Geographical location.
- c. Day, month, year or specific season.
- d. Who the characters are regarding relationships and socio economics, government and religious rule, and ethical conducts, marriage or family.
- e. The function of each character in regards to protagonist, antagonist etc.
- f. Dialogue mode of text.
- g. Text action sequences. This is used to create a Costume Plot or Action Charts, which lists which characters are in what scene.
- h. Theme of the text.

Design Collaboration: This process is an important phase in design because it is a meeting with the director and fellow designers. However, there must be clear study and understanding of:

- 1 Script or text.
- 2 Budget.
3. Time table or calendar.

Costume Research: Once guidelines are established, the next step is gather materials for the research.

- a. A research outline is important to focus your attention, listing questions necessary to complete your study.
- b. Using primary sources for the majority of your research, such as museums, periodicals, newspapers, sculptures, paintings etc.

Preliminary Sketching and Colour Layout: Once enough information is obtained to begin drawing preliminary sketching conveys an accurate depiction of:

- a. Line, which will show the silhouette of the targeted piece of clothing.
- b. Proportion, of not only the garment but also the actor's body.
- c. Details, of not specific but general ideas such as the indication of what type of fabric or pattern may be used.
- d. A colour layout, using either fabric swatches, or paint samples needs to be represented.

Final sketches: This is the final stage in design process. This final costume sketch could be completed in any medium to include:

- i. name of text.
- i. name of character/actor.
- iii. scene(s) in which costume is represented.
- iv. signed signature of artist.
- v. swatch of fabric being constructed.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COSTUME DESIGN

There are seven identified principles in costume design. These principles, according to Slayqueen are:

Unity: This refers to agreement of all the elements of design in aims and interest. This means that "in practice, unity in design means that each part of a design should have some kind of logical connection with the production concept" (Gillette 78). Unity as a principle, relates to all aspects of theatrical theatre.

Harmony: Harmony is the second principle of theatrical design composition. It is closely related to unity. Harmony has to do with perfect combination of different elements of design. That is the peasant effect made by all parts being coordinated into a single whole.

Contrast: This simply refers to all the differences or unlikeness. Contrast has to do with noticeable difference between one element of theatrical design and others. Contrast in theatrical design composition can give life to a design scheme. It is also through contrast that forms are revealed. However, it should be noted

that the application of harmony and contrast brings about unity in theatre. Therefore, what is needed in theatrical design is the right balance between harmony and contrast.

Contrast: In theatrical design composition, variation is an important principle. It has to do with the differences in design composition. It is important in theatrical design because variation adds interest to the design composition whenever unnecessary repetition produces monotony.

Balance: This is an important principle of design which demands that all the elements of design be effectively controlled and considered in the theatrical design process. These elements must be properly weighed for mental stability towards an organic design composition. However, we have two types of balance: symmetrical balance (exact likeness, in sizes shape, form, etc) and asymmetrical balance (being the opposite of symmetrical balance).

Proportion: This principle of design is closely related to balance. It emphasizes the correct relationship between size, position, and the shape of different theatrical design elements for the purpose of aesthetics - the production of beautiful effect.

Emphasis: This principle deals with special interest or force given to Particular ideas or details in design to show that they are particularly important. This refers to a point where the eyes are attracted or directed. In costume design, emphasis can be realized through colour selection. In costume, emphasis is placed on the middle of the body, just like in scene or lighting design that emphasis is on acting areas.

THE PLACE OF COSTUME IN A THEATRICAL PRODUCTION

The place of costumes in films and other theatrical performances cannot be easily overlooked, being a very conspicuous and visible element of design. Ogden states that "the essence of costume in theatre is to be found in its appeals as a means of communication" (8). He elaborates, further, that "to wear a costume on stage or to wear no costume at all, for that matter, is to engage in a complex art or expression. And to design a theatrical costume is to engage in a complex art of interpretation" (8). The crux of this paper, therefore basically focuses on the expressiveness of costume design as handled by the costume designer in any artistic performance is measured by its ability to recreate the script on the stage and complement the works of other designers in lighting, sound and scene areas.

However, a careful analysis of costume in any theatrical production or performance is built around the communication and signification features of the elements used. Costumes in this aspect must fit into the period of the story, the story's locality, time, the occasion dramatized and the mood of each scene; each costume should be stage-worthy, in that, each of the time the designs are sufficiently exaggerated to carry over to the audience important hidden message through the revelations of characters

SUMMARY

Costume, in any performance, establishes status, wealth and relevance of each character in a performance. One cannot ignore the air of authority around any character in a performance each time he or she appears on set or scene. This paper revealed the primary purpose of costume design in any artistic performance and in transforming characters into the world of the performance. It should be that costume as a visual element in any film or theatrical production is a silent and non-verbal language when effectively applied. Finally, the essay considered costume design as expressive artistry in aiding understanding, clarification and intensification of performance.

CONCLUSION

The art of costume is a practical art that requires adequate professional standard and practice. Thus, this paper calls on costume designers to carryout appropriate research standard before applying this art to either a screen or stage production. Costume designers should read and research appropriately before taking any decision on costume designs for stage or film production. The activities of the theatre globally require adequate planning and orderliness in both procedure and technique regardless of minor cultural differences. This explains why a theatre artiste/artist can fit into the ensemble theatre family anywhere in the world.

In modern theatre practice, there are many areas of specialization ranging from Playwriting, Theatre Administration and Management, Theory and Criticism, Directing, Acting, Choreography and Theatre Design and Technology. Technical theatre comprises several areas of designs: stage/lighting, scene, sound, make-up and costume. These stressed specialized areas are highly relevant and remain inevitable to ensemble theatre practice. Costume Design cannot work in isolation but in collaboration with other areas of design in any theatrical production.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consciousness and carefulness are highly demanded in the art/design of costume, considering the fact that a wrongful application of costume can ruin an entire production. This paper recommends effective delivery of the functions of costume design in artistic performances. The costume designers should endeavour to identify the type of costume design he/she wants to use, to be well positioned for his/her professional demands and delivery. There is also the need for a research into more innovative methods in costume design. There is the need to understand that the world of theatre is dynamic - with constant modification on design elements and continuous inventive efforts in technical theatre. Costume designers should be more creative as to achieve the best in their area and in order to meet the demands of any performance. Costume designers should carry out investigations on setting, cultural demands and other visual demands in any production to enable them design appropriate costume for the characters. Above all, any costume designer should undergo the necessary professional training as required in costuming performances.

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