

Aesthetics of costume and make-up for stage and screens: a contextual discuss on AMIRI festival of Agwatashi, Obi Local Government Nasarawa State

Abstract

In theatre and film (screen) productions, costume and makeup designers make the aesthetics choice of what the characters wear based on the historical background of the production. Students' lack of interest in technical theatre is affecting the quality of costume and makeup in production design. Exposure to social media is also affecting the style of costume and makeup for students' productions. This paper is theorized based on the design aesthetic considerations of Albright, William and Lee which are appropriateness, individuality and unity. The research adopts content analysis methodology in conducting the study. The article finds that proper costuming and make up of characters enhance aesthetics grandeur of production as exemplified in *Amiri* festival of Alago community in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The article concludes that costume alone does not guarantee the success of a production so also a poorly costumed character's interpretation and line delivery is affected in a production. When, when properly coordinated with other production elements, costumes and makeup enhanced aesthetic functionality to screen and stage productions. The article recommends that students research and visit locale if possible for truthful depiction of costumes. There is need to engage specialists and well trained costumiers to handle practical in the tertiary institutions. The culture of dress and technical rehearsal should be revived to ensure that visual and performance elements are harmony in production before opening night. Students in should be motivated in technical theatre courses serious because they can be established in fashion business and event management.

Keywords: costume, aesthetics, dress, make-up

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Introduction

No matter how richly or poorly dressed, people tend to consider how they look in what they are putting on. Aesthetics is what inform the decisions people make in life. In the theatre and film (screen) productions the costume designers make the aesthetics choice of what the characters wear. Costume and Make-up is an aspect of visual design that conveys crucial information on screen and stage productions such as films, music videos, festivals and play productions etc. Sadly, students' lack of interest in technical theatre is affecting costume and makeup in theatre productions as most students do not want pass through the rigorous training in practical fabrication of the costumes. They prefer to hire or select from their personal wardrobes without understanding the cultural background or significance of the costumes to a selected performance. Though these are also means of getting costumes for a production, it would be interesting and profitable for a costume designer to be a specialist in fabrication and back to design theoretically. The laxative in students' attitude could be to some extend the lack of interest in hard work, on the other hand, it could be the departments that are not well equipped or have the resources to train them.

Educational theatre are not profit oriented, sponsorship are hard to come by. At the departmental level, it enjoy just a little budget to allow students experiment on productions. This impact negatively on the technical output of the production in general. With low budget allocated costumes and Make-up are hence, worn by students on stage not on the dictate of the production demand but based on availability of their personal wardrobe. It therefore become difficult to distinguish between the performer and the characters they represent onstage. With this, they carry their personality instead of the character they are meant to portray in the theatrical production.

Negative usage of social media to a large extend affect the youth and character and personality development. Students' exposure to social media affect their mode of dressing which can be transferred to a given performance and could alter the production setting. Students are dominantly a larger percentage of youth and mostly emulate some celebrities as models. Consequently, they slavishly facsimile theirs style of dressing, lifestyle and may transfer this to the stage if not properly guided. During productions, they fall back to their wardrobe for costumes especially when they have to volunteer for the performance to cut down cost. The choice of costume then depends on interest of the character and how they wish to appear, an act which can downplay the role of the costumier in production handled by students.

Theoretical framework

H. D. Albright, William Halstaed and Lee Mitchell aver that 'appropriateness, individuality and unity constitute the aesthetic requirement of design... Appropriateness is the first standard by which the quality of the design is judged. The best design gives visual substance to the same emotion and ideas as are revealed in the course of the performance. The worse design is that which in one or another of many possible ways is out of keeping with the nature and style of the performance. The design impairs the performance when it causes the spectator to expect a different kind of play from that which is unfolded (pp. 234-235).¹

These scholars argue that appropriateness of design should assume importance in a play because it is an interpretative creation and has no independent existence. Design is always tied to a particular production or play, hence its appropriateness should always be of significance. To achieve individuality, design must abstain from impersonating preceding genius work and be able to penetrate new depths of author's

intention in order. Designers must therefore be creative and bring out fresh ideas to create originality of concept instead of repetition of ideas in similar assigned task. For instance, when costumes are often used in a particular, theatre company, the audience would not expect any significant or spectacular creativity or innovation in the use of costume, because they had established mental stock image of costume anytime they are coming to watch a play in such theatre. Designers must break that barrier through innovations. Also as an aesthetic factor, there is the need for oneness (unity) in the visual scheme. The design must unite with other visual elements to create a harmonized theatre experience for the audience. This means costume must portray the characters as expected when they are under the stage light and the background set. Characters should not be absorb by the stage backdrop and light making it difficult for the audience to identify and separate them.

Methodology

This paper adopts participatory observation and content analysis approaches as research methodologies. As a community member, the researcher was able to witness some of the festival processions and recording observation in the field. Content analysis is also explored, as texts were systematically investigated so as to comprehend the meaning that circulate in them. The researcher analyzed the textual contents and the contexts of their conceptions. Qualitative content analysis cites and defines in Patricia Leavy's *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches*, according to Roller and Lavrakas is, 'the systematic reduction... of content, analyzed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretation of data' (p. 146).²

Differentiating cloth and costume

Life is governed by choices; the choice of what to wear, how to set the room, bed kitchen utensils' arrangement, decoration of office, style of writing etc. are products of one's aesthetical appeal and judgment. Thus, aesthetic forms the nucleus of the choices we make as individual. Aesthetics entail beauty and ugliness. The whole essence of costume and make-up is to cover the skin, enhance and beautify the actor. From the Garden of Eden in the story of creation, the value of cloth has being emphasized when Adam and Eve covered themselves with leaves due to shame from the presence of God. In Genesis 3:21 it is recorded that the Lord God made garment of skin for Adams and his wife, and clothed them. They realized they were naked and decided to hide. The early man developed leaves and animal skins as wears. Clothes or apparel come in form of textile or fabrics, leather or animal skins designed to cover the skin. Clothes are typically categorize as human civilization as animals are not concerned with it.

The style and usage of clothes are determined by sex and geographical locations of the user. Clothes serve many purpose; ranging from protection and barrier against external attackers like germs, insects, harsh seasons i.e. cold and hot weather. In the contemporary society, wearing clothes is a social norm. It portrays ones modesty or indecency. It is alarming how indecent dressing dominates the lives of youth in the contemporary society. Little wonder, there are high rate of rape cases in the society today.

In a stage and screen production, characters do not wear clothes but put on what is technically referred to as costumes. Clothes are everyday wears people put on to their places of assignment, relaxations at home or occasion. But once a performer appears on stage for performance, he is no longer the person he is known to be,

but the character he is impersonating. What he puts on is no longer clothe but costume to depict the character he is representing. To buttress this, Apeh Columba observes that costume and dress are words that can be used interchangeably. However, he acknowledges that, 'dress refers to the common clothes and attire worn by men for practical purposes, whereas a costume is a disguise used by an actor to enhance personality' (p. 33).³ Closely related to clothes is make-up. Make-up goes hand-in-hand with costume. It complements the attire, and beautifies or exaggerates some features of the character.

Media influence on costume and make-up

Youths in the contemporary society are fashion freaks. They follow trend of fashions on all social media platforms. Some of the channels they get updates on fashions are from music videos, celebrities, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram etc. Majority of them imitate the dressing of their favourite celebrities' lifestyle not minding the kind of performance and events or situation that warrants the artists to use such costume. Some youths use artists' costumes as clothes. To create sexual appeal to the audience in their video or stage performance, the artists mostly use special costumes and exaggerated make-up that reveals all their body features leaving them virtually nude in the process. The youths in their love and passion for celebrities, imitate and copy their lifestyle slavishly. For this reason, there are high rate of indecent dressing, tattoos, piecing of different parts of the body, youth with coloured hairstyle and dreadlock and men with ear rings piecing all over. Cross gender dressing is now a way of life and business for the likes of Bob Risky and James Brown. This is a condemnable act in Africa. It is an obvious and worrisome phenomenon in and around the universities and the society at large. Individuals with such lifestyle would likely transfer it to the character they represent onstage in a performance. This would subsequently downplay the character. Mostly, this is what is noticeable in the academic Theatres of Tertiary Institutions where students are left to experiment a production on their own or their class.

Costume and colour psychology

It would be erroneous to generalize that colour has a universal psychological appeal or interpretation. Colours mean different things to different cultures. The judgment and value of colour in any art work or performance should be done in consideration of the cultural background of such work. Red might means love to some people, to others it depict danger or evil. J. Michael Gillette maintains that, 'the meanings of color are constantly changing. Color meanings are influenced by many factors: cultural background, personality, adjoining colors, and individual mood' (p.99).⁴ In design or analyzing costumes for a performance, it is imperative to study the meaning and psychological impacts of used colours as apply to the culture of the people. This would enable the researcher gain more insight on the work and provide authentic information to his reader. The costumes and selected colours must portray the locality, the cultural heritage and values in the context in which it is presented.

Costume and make-up in relation to other elements of design

The choices of costumes and makeup must be taken into consideration by other design teams such as scenery and lighting design in order to circumvent disarray in the harmonization and projection of the performance objective. Drew Campbell notes that:

Costumes must also knit together well with the other design elements. If the set, lighting, and costumes are not of the same "world," the show will feel disjointed, although the audience might not know

why. Furthermore, these three elements must connect closely with regard to color, so the actress in the beige dress doesn't end up in front of a beige wall and completely disappear (pp. 177-178).

It is important to take cognizance of lights, set when designing or costuming a character. The choice of colours must be put into consideration by all the designers. For instance, if a character is costumed in a white garment, with the set background highly saturated with bright paint, while the light designer lit the composition with high light intensity, the picture composition will be blurring to the audience. It will automatically leave the audience in a discomforting position. There must be meetings and discussions between the designers to update each other on progress and possible change of plans when necessary to ensure the production goal and objective is met. To support this, 'The costume designer also meets the lighting designer and set designer to coordinate the production (Prince, p. 259).⁵

Costume and makeup design in stage and screens

Costumes are the clothes the characters wear to complement their actions and line delivery in a performance.

The costume should help the actor to move as the character would move, giving the actor another tool with which to create the role. To paraphrase Shakespeare, "Clothes make the man." But perhaps it is more accurate to say, "Clothes reveal the man." Costumes take the inner working of the character and put them on the outside. They are like X-ray machine (p. Campbell, 177).⁶

Though costume are textiles material or skins, or leather worn and can be seen by a layman as clothes. A student that is dressed for lecture is not in costume but cloth. An individual fully dressed in his outfit going to his duty post cannot be said to be wearing costume. So also, security guard on his duty post is putting on his uniform not costume. Generally, clothes are worn to first of all cover nakedness, protect the body from harsh weather condition. Again, people wear clothes to defend their body from germs and other harmful insects. An effective and appropriate costume and make-up worn by a character should enable the character move freely and help to depict his role and project the character.

A cloth becomes a costume when worn by a performer to depict a character other than himself onstage or screen set. When a performer comes to act on set, it is expected that who the audience see is not the performer but the character he portrayed on the set. For instance, when a performer named Andrew is acting the role of President Bola Ahmed Tinibu, through his costume and makeup, the audience should be able to deduce that he is acting as the President even without uttering any word. The costume should not portray the performer as the popular Andrew known on the street but the role he is playing. If the audience saw the character in the performer, the costume becomes appropriate, then credit should be given to the costume and makeup designer.

It is imperative to note that costume in performance are not worn by the aesthetic choice of the actor but based on the specification and the requirement of the scripts as well as the interpretative focus of the production team.

Each play takes place in a particular period in history. The costume designer will spend time researching the style of the period by looking at pictures, reading books, and visiting museums. Once an impression of the period is established, the costume designer makes colored sketches of costume ideas and meets with director to finalize the concepts (Prince, p.259).

It implies therefore, that an actor should not just wear anything that is available in his wardrobe but should follow the directives and recommendations of the costume and makeup designer. The makeup designer works closely with the costume designer to plan and design the make-up to be worn for a production. Makeup is specially used to project and enhance the appearance of a character to the audience in addition to the costume.

Aesthetics functionality of costume to productions

In as much as people wear clothes to cover their body for numerous reasons, the choice of their outfit is governed by aesthetic. These choices are made from the point of purchase even for underwear that is not meant to be displayed outside.

Consciously or not, you make many aesthetic choices every day. When you decide what to wear, arrange stuff on your desk, or choose what flowers to put on the dinner table... you are engaging in basic perceptual and aesthetic activities. Even the everyday expression "I know what I like" requires aesthetic judgment (Zettl, p.3).⁷

Basically, clothes are chosen and worn by people based on aesthetic judgment to cover or protect the skin. This is deliberately done to attract attention and admiration of people around. Once the user noticed that the aim of the dressing is achieved, it energizes the courage and ego of such persons. A bad critique on the outfit might dampen the spirit of the user. This can subsequently lead to changing the clothes and colour combination, change in style or total abandoning of such attire. Ordinarily, clothes are worn for certain reason.

Hameed O. notices that 'A player those not look right; does he feel his best when playing in his everyday cloth' (p. 140).⁸ This observation points to the fact that costumes are not our everyday wear. Thus, when you use a shirt regularly at home, the moment you step on the stage with it, people see you and identify you as the person they know at home not the character you claim to portray. For the costume worn by chief priest to perform ritual is not day to day regalia the character use for his domestic activities. The attire is specifically designed for such event and is symbolic to the user. Anybody who dons it outside the context of the ritual looks odd and weird to the community.

Wilson E. observes that the power of symbols is more manifested in clothes and personal adornments.⁹ He claims that, 'Primitive people put animal skin to give themselves the characteristics of an animal-ferocity or courage...Feathers and elaborate headdresses were worn to accentuate height; bracelets and belts with charms were as source of power' (p. 304). Certain costumes contain supernatural powers to influence certain action desired by the user. They can be used to guard the user from attack. Understanding such help the designers to know what kind of costume and character they are costuming. Such costumes are not everyday kind of cloths. This can only be achieved through adequate background research. In assessing costume for everyday life and costume for the stage, he observes that,

Stage costumes communicate the same information as ordinary cloths with regards to sex, position and occupation, but on stage this information is magnified because every element in the theatre is in the spotlight. Also, on the stage, costumes must meet other requirement normally expected in everyday life (p. 355).

Thus, costumes are not worn just to cloth the characters but to pass vital information in relation to other design elements such as light, scenery and sound design. The extent to which the intended message is communicated is dependent on the appropriateness and unity of the

costumes in relation to other visual elements such as light and the set design. In their book, *Theatre the Lively Arts*, Wilson E. and Goldfarb A.¹⁰ highlight the following as a requirement a stage costume should meet:

- a) Help establish the tone and style of a production.
- b) Indicate the historical period of a play and the locale in which it is set.
- c) Indicate the nature of individual characters or group in a play: their stations in life, their occupations, their personalities.
- d) Show relationship among characters: separate major characters from minor ones, contrast one group with another.

To expatiate on the above functions of costume for stage and screens, some selected scenes from *Amiri* festival an oral performance of the Alago people of Olosoho (Agwatashi) Obi Local Government in the Southern part of Nasarawa State, Nigeria would be analyzed as a paradigm.

Amiri festival

Amiri (grave) festival according to Elijah Oyigbenu's account comes up usually between February and March of every year after the farm harvests are completed.¹¹ Its significance revolves around a thanksgiving to the ancestors for good harvests or where harvests were lean, prayers are still offered for bumper yields in the coming year. Members of community resident within and in diaspora are expected to return home to commune with resident community members and

the ancestors. Since death is inevitably bound to take place during the preceding year, these non-residents are expected to come home to cleanse the graves of their departed ones who had joined the ancestors. Such non-resident members get to know the graves of their ancestors as the deceased might have been buried while such members of the family were away. *Amiri* is a festival of communal-ancestral worship and a time of festivity and merry-making. Oyigbenu says from a traditional perspective, *Amiri* is a time of the year when the livings give the departed food and drink. It is a period to ask for forgiveness from the ancestors for any wrong done to them. Be it a plea for forgiveness or for misfortune, this is done through libation so that the ancestors can partake of the drink and food as a symbol of penitence. The festival is sub-divided into four identifiable phases:

- 1) *Ikponya* and *Agye nehe*,
- 2) *Agye* and *Iwooko*,
- 3) *Okpa joja* and *Afu tota*, and
- 4) *Oba ko'ogboga* dances

In the *Agye* (male dance) scene the costumes donned by the actors met the above requirements. For instance, the costumes worn by the characters show the relationships among the characters. This variety in role can be seen in the costume of the *Akato-shagye* as the leader of the *Ayi-akato* and the director of the festival. He is the only person that wears specifically designed gown made up of red and white with a long red cap to match. His costume distinguished him from other members of the group. All other performers must put on *opa* as it can be seen in the Figure 1 and Figure 2 below.



Figure 1 Akato-shagye in his costume during the Agye dance.



Figure 2 Osoho as chief host of Amiri represented by Okuba in his costume.



Figure 3 Asolokpageye in a dance procession to perform ritual rite.



Figure 4 An Igabo during Okpa-joja.

When the king (*Osoho*) as appears on stage, he distinguished himself from other members of the community through his dressing. In an event where he cannot attend some function due to ill health, religious inclination or belief, he delegates the *Okuba* to represent in such kind of event. The representative of the *osoho* must equally stand out as seen the the picture illustration above.

According to Columba Apeh, 'The traditional attire is the most distinctive aspect of Nigerian play. Similar to this, the performer in an indigenous theatre production, like carnival art, is dressed to reflect the ideals of his or her ethnic community' (p. 34). *Opa* is a general costume that every Kwararafa man likes to be identified with. The design and the type of *opa* distinguish a person from the other or position in the society. Thus, the kind of position one holds in the society is known by the type of *opa* one wears. As seen above, the representative of the osoho (king) is in red cap and white *opa* while the elders appear in different colours. They are expected to dance individually in the presence of the osoho. Notice also that the audience are dressed casually because they have no role to play other than watch the performance. The *opa* is also used to bury the dead; therefore, the people accord a high degree of respect to it. Though, the *opa* can be used to distinguish the royal from the non-royal family, however, the non-royal family who can afford the expensive one buy it as a show of wealth. So, whether you are from the royal family or not, if you can afford the costly *opa*, you can use it. There are situation where the royal families do not even have the money to buy the expensive ones but you would see the non-royal families using it.

Then beads (*ekye*) that accompany the dress are signs of riches of the people. Though there are ordinary ones but people can still buy the expensive ones to prove their worth in the society. However, the white *opa* is reserve for certain group of title holders like the *Asolokpagye* and the *Igabo* who usually wear it when going for performance of their rite. These *Asolokpagye* both male and female are the ones who use the white. The white *opa* is not for ordinary person as seen in the Figure 3 below.

Okpa-joja and the Costume: The spear dance is meant to be a celebration of victory and gallantry of the people. The spears are to show that the people are good hunters and accomplished blacksmiths. During this *okpa-joja* (spear dance) the *igabo* (title holders) and elders wear costumes different from other groups to perform the dance. The performers of this dance comprise the *Igabo* (traditional title holders). The *Igabo* are divided into two groups: those from the royal and non-royal families. Just like the *Asolokpagye*, the *Igabo* can also wear white *opa* for their performance (Figure 4).

Traditional oral performances such as festivals, circumcision, initiation, marriages and rituals etc. are rooted in the rich and robust cultural heritage of the people. They form the basis of our literary theatre performance. In design performance with such a rich history and culture like the *Amiri* for stage and screen, there must be proper investigation and research so as not to misrepresent or misinterpret the people's culture. The Eggon people of the state have a rich culture of traditional woven clothe similar to that of the Alago mostly used during traditional marriages and important functions. But they differ especially in colour. So it is necessary to research into the background of your area of coverage so as not to mix up ideas.

Conclusion

Costume is a crucial visual element of production that helps to give meaning to a production. Costumes provide aesthetics to stage and screen productions as exemplified in the above *Amiri* festival of the Alago people. Again, the researcher was able to understand that costume and makeup alone does not guarantee the success of a production. It takes the effort of the cast and crew as well as other technical units as, lighting, scenery and sound design to achieve a successful production. However, a character is poorly costumed, it also affect character interpretation, lines deliveries and the aesthetics value of the performance. When, when properly coordinated with

other production elements, costumes and makeup enhanced aesthetic functionality to screen and stage productions.

Recommendations

Students should be encouraged to research and visit if possible the locale to under study the costume intended to be used, as it goes beyond personal clothes to represent cultural heritage of people.

For costume and makeup to be utilized effectively in a production, there is the need to engage specialists and well trained costumiers to handle practical tailoring and makeup in the tertiary institutions.

The culture of dress and technical rehearsal should be actively revived in other to ensure that visual and performance elements are harmony according to the directorial vision.

University management and lecturers most stand firm against students' indecent dressings, braiding and dreadlocks, ear piecing by male students and coloured hair trending in higher intuitions.

Finally, students should be motivated to take technical theatre courses serious because they can be established in fashion business and event management. They are needed especially in events such as weddings, parties and more. They enjoy a lot of patronage in events.

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