

EMERGING TRENDS IN SCENOGRAPHIC DESIGN IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL OF SOME SELECTED WEDDING CEREMONIES AND PLACES OF WORSHIP

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Abstract

In the pursuit of an aesthetically pleasing performance, scenography, being a visual component of a production, is almost impossible to deemphasise. As a matter of fact, its prominence is not only for fulfilling technical and artistic qualities in the theatre and film productions but also for its intervention for achieving an excellent production. This study, therefore, examines the emerging trends in scenographic conceptions with particular attention to scenery, lighting, and make-up, among other performance spectacles, in some selected wedding ceremonies and religious programmes in Nigeria. The paper employs the descriptive and participant-observation methods, while the interview instrument complements the two methods. These methods enable us to study the emerging trends and techniques of scenographic presentation engage in some technical interpretations of the selected productions. Relevant journal articles, textbooks and online materials are employed as secondary sources of data. More so, postmodernism is adopted as our theoretical framework. Our findings reveal that scenographic input does not only assist in the classification and delineation of both technical and dramatic qualities of a production, but indeed, contributes significantly to ensuring a pleasing performance. The study concludes that scenic artistry is the hub of any theatrical production and recommends that technical designers should promote the emerging design trends beyond the theatre and filmmaking.

Keywords: Scenography, Postmodernism, Trends, Emerging

Introduction

Depending on which side of the global divide and practice one finds himself, scenography is differently referred to as production mise-en-scène, scenic artistry, cinematic design, filmographic spectacle, scenographic input, and performance aesthetics; all refer to the technical and artistic interventions that advance the overall visual concept and aesthetic values of a production. Being a visual concept of a production, scenic artistry in the overall production process cannot be overemphasised in the pursuit of an aesthetically pleasing

performance. This is because scenographic input is an integral component of performance tradition, all over the world.

Scenographic designs consisting of scenery, lighting, costume, make-up, among other performance spectacles, are arguably too important to de-emphasise in any production. Their additive functions of embellishment gives high technical and artistic qualities to both the theatre and film productions; not also leaving out other performative arts that we encounter in daily life, such as carnival, wedding, political campaign, advertisement and sales promotion, to mention but a few. This confirms the reason why Lotker and Gough quoted in Hann aver that, multiple scenographics are encountered in daily life, and the “notions of expanded scenography such as environments that we perform in – our home, a restaurant, a cruise ship, a parking lot, a public square, a theatre venue, a parliamentary building and Everest - make us rethink scenography as a system” (6).

However, while so observing the systemic concept of scenographic presentation in the performance-making, it is noteworthy to mention that scenography is rooted from the classical period be it Western or African perspective. Informed by the foregoing observation, Oni and Ododo explicate that:

Starting from the Alarinjo fare, through the boisterous popular Yoruba travelling theatre championed by Hubert Ogunde and the literary theatre in Nigeria, instituted by Geoffrey Axworthy/Martin Banham/Dereck Bullock galvanised by Wole Soyinka and his contemporaries to the present day theatre enterprises, a quantum of technical inputs must have been made to sustain these theatre heritage (p.xv).

A cursory look at this citation will undoubtedly reveal that scenographic design is one of the mechanisms used to sustain theatre tradition from the beginning to date. This authenticates the fact that, it provides a background for the artistic interpretation of dramatic and technical concepts of any cultural production.

In this respect, it has to be borne in mind that scenography goes beyond performance spaces in the theatre-making, but indeed, includes all human and non human aspects of a performance that are carefully drawn to ensure pleasing and satisfying production. But interestingly, its advancement and adaptability starting from indigenous, popular, literary, modern, and postmodern theatre, makes the art of scenography indispensable, and as well fundamental in the production conception and performance-making.

This paper, thus, examines how scenographic design has been creatively discharged and adequately used in our postmodern society using some selected wedding ceremonies and religious service programmes in Nigeria as paradigms. In doing this, any form of temporal assemblage or ornament, whether physical, technical, or artistic in the selected productions are given attention. Specific areas of focus include trend, approach, technique as well as equipment used in their scenographic conceptions and design execution.

Theoretical Underpinning 'Postmodernism'

There are several arguments and counter arguments that revolve around the intrinsic nature of postmodernism and its concept in the academic towers. Some intellectual bodies, scholars and critics argue that postmodernism is a complex and controversial philosophy of the century. But in spite of all these counter discourses from both pro and anti postmodern schools of thought, its relevance cannot be overemphasised in the present-day 'theatre enterprises'. Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979), Jean Baudrillard (1983), Fredric Jameson (1984), and David Harvey (1989) as quoted in Richard Devetak, Anthony Burke, Jim George, describe postmodernism as "both a changing attitude and a fundamentally novel historical condition" (92).

The above citation stems from the fact that postmodernism believes in the frequent changes over the world views, thoughts, principles, rules, cultures, and traditions; and the "key features of this new postmodernity are associated with processes of globalisation, such as rapid evolution and spread of mass media, computers and other communicative features" (Devetak, et. al, 93). This suggests that, postmodernism is a term with multidisciplinary applications. Besides, it also points to the fact that we live in a 'pluralised society' circumscribed by a multiplicity of style, knowledge, interpretation and understanding.

The above explication may inform why Pauline Rosenau as quoted in Doki and Odeh opines that:

Postmodernism rejects epistemological assumptions, reflects methodological conventions, resists knowledge claims...postmodernism is against any form of totalitarianism, the possibility of truth or moral universals, any form of objectivity, logo-centric world views, they question authority, and the arbitrary imposition of any singular, systematic point of view (32).

This corroborates the fact that postmodernism is an art movement that reexamines the conventional templates of most modernistic theatrical works to give place to the contemporary trends in the areas of interpretation and understanding. Postmodernism also advocates for pluralism which utilises multiple ways of knowing, cultural transformation, new communicative arts and media society particularly in the phase of scenographic presentation and representation in the wedding ceremonies among other religious service programmes.

Therefore, the following features of postmodernism will be adopted in our examination of the emerging trends of scenographic design in some selected productions:

- Deconstruction styles in the scenographic conception in the selected works;
- Pluralistic concepts in the creation of scenographic art in the two media;
- Multiple use of techniques in the scenographic design in the wedding ceremonies;
- Flexibility in the design process and execution in the religious service programmes;
- Post-structural methods in the scenographic presentation in the selected productions;
- Technological involvement and adaptability in the production process; and
- Radical approaches and constant changes in the presentation and representation design concepts in the selected productions.

However, the underlying factor for the adaption of postmodernism as a theoretical construct for this paper is due to its relevance in our contemporary society, particularly in the aspect of scenographic conceptions and execution in performance-making via technological involvement and adaptability, as evidenced in the selected productions.

Scenographic Design Beyond Theatre and Film Orthodoxies

It is worrisome to note that scenographic presentation has been suffering from multiple marginalisations in recent scholarship. This constant discrimination could be specifically associated to its ill-defined term and ambiguous concept right from the start of the Greek theatre. Historically, scenography revolved around the developmental stages in the theatre. These stages had continually influenced developmental trajectory of the theatre and had resulted in various

production styles, theories, principles, with no exemption to theatre design and technology.

Evidently, scenography evolved from the Greek word *skenographia*, which literally translates as scene-painting. In the Greek theatre, *skene* from which the word scene derived is a fragmented hut or temporary background where actors changed their masks, costumes and other performance spectacles. Besides, Roman theatre was an extension of the Greek theatre models. Roman designers also built their performance spaces either on the flat surfaces or hillsides just like their counterparts in Greek theatre using makeshift wooden or stone structure, to celebrate various Roman festivals known as *Ludi* 'game'. Whereas in the medieval theatre, religious plays were performed under the supervision of clergy within and outside the church premises. Subsequently, liturgical drama were moved to the street where elaborate scenery, costumes, lighting, among other spectacles were sufficiently used.

However, these notable periods in the theatre history marked the beginning of elaborate and extensive use of technical elements in productions. They also recognised scenic artistry as one of the major components of a production, rather than a supplement to other practices like directing, acting, playwriting, music, and dance, as is currently being experienced. Brockett and Ball share this view when they state that "most performances require the creative efforts and cooperation of many people: playwright, director, actor, designer, and technicians" (8). Why lending his voice on the importance of scenography in the overall performance dramaturgy, Baugh argues that:

Scenography has become the principal dramaturgy of performance-making—perhaps close to a direct translation of '*scaena* and *graphos*' drawing with the scene – where all aspect of 'the scene' (scenic space, embodied action, material, clothes, light and sound) may become the materials laid out on the performance-maker's palatte (240).

From this, it is evident that scenographic design is a synthesis of all the audio-visual elements of a production and without its complementary roles; other parts of the production may not be properly accomplished.

Be that as it may, scenography has been identified as one of the predominant tools that is currently in vogue in the production of advertisement, sales promotion, wedding, and carnival, birthday party, convocation, funeral and ceremony, among other religious programmes in any technological-driven society. Although many people tend to think or assume that scenographic

design and decoration are the same, however, there is proof to show that this is not so, because scenography is a logical process characterised by so many underlying design principles and elements.

Nevertheless, irrespective of design nomenclatures such as interior decorations, exterior designs, flower arrangements, furniture materials, draperies and curtain placements, floor coverings, wall finishes, lighting designs as well as set designs and colour applications are set out mainly to create pleasing and enabling environments. Decoration is any ornament, material or embellishment used to enhance a particular setting, place or thing such as home, theatre, hall, hotel, school, office and so on.

Singh lends credence to the relevance of decoration and their materials in the production process, when he submits that “some textiles are used in interior environment, such as homes, offices, hospitals, hotels, schools, aircraft and automobiles interiors...” (31). It is generally believed that the nature and form of an event determine the type of decorations, colours, textiles and materials to be used. These materials include ribbon, china cloth, flowers, flower vase, lanterns, rug, paint, wood, thumb pin, scissors, and so on.

It therefore, goes to say that scenographic art is an extension of decorative art. Because any decoration using LED screen, LED lantern, LED cloth, and Gobo template, 3-D design, animation design, chromatic and superimposition designs, as well as flats, among other multimedia technologies, software and computer-generated images, can never be regarded as a mere decoration, rather could be placed within the cannon of scenographic designs.

Scenographic Conceptions in the Places of Worship and Weddings

It is an incontestable fact that modernity has come to stay in our contemporary society, and Nigerian places of worship and wedding ceremonies are not exempted. Churches, especially the new ones generation, have been rebranded and transformed through the use of scenographic interventions, such as sophisticated lanterns and lighting equipment, scenery design and virtual background, digital studios and advance musical instruments. This portends a current trend in Nigerian society. Identified churches with manifested of this trend include Synagogue Church of All Nations, Christ Embassy, Rhema Chapel, COZA, among others. The conventional churches also, such as Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Christian Life Ministry, Living Faith Worldwide are gradually tilting towards postmodern scenographic designing, but not as radically as done by the new generation churches. The reason, therefore, for the massive population of the new generation churches

by the Nigerian is not only because of their pentecostal principles and styles of worship, but due to their technological involvements and adaptability in the postmodern society.

In the same vein, scenographics have recently occupied a central position in most of the Islamic programmes, and this will continue to be so because of its potency in ensuring aesthetically pleasing and satisfying production. Islamic programmes where elaborate technical inputs have been constantly deployed include *Lailatul Qadr* prayer (night of decree) where the making of *dua* (prayers) and *dhikr* (praising) supplications take place. This night is usually organised among the Islamic sects, primarily for praising and worship of Allah (SWT) and Prophet Muhammed (SAW). These sects include Nasirul-Lahi-Faith Society of Nigeria (NASFAT), Quorribullah Faith Society of Nigeria, Qadirriya Movement and Tijaniyya Group among other Islamic *Da'wah* (propagation) groups.

On the other hand, though wedding ceremonies take on nomenclatures such as traditional wedding, white wedding, court wedding, church wedding and Islamic wedding. Regardless of this, scenographic design has contributed impressively, not alone in the area of promoting stunning and colourful ceremony, but also, assists to facilitate pleasant and memorable event.

Arguably, no wedding may possibly claim to be complete without the involvement of scenographics. It is interesting to note that after the couple in the wedding ceremony, scenographic design such as scenery, make-up, costume, sound and lighting occupy another important position.

Emerging Trends in Scenographic Design in Wedding Ceremonies and Places of Worship

For the appraisal of the emerging trends in the scenographic designs in wedding ceremonies and religious programmes in Nigeria; the following areas such as trends, dimensions, techniques as well as equipment used in the scenographic conceptions and execution, particularly in set design and stage lighting, will be examined through the use of media mapping projection design and virtual design.

Virtual Design

This is an extension of physical or conventional method of scenographic design. This concept of design can only be accomplished via the use of modern technology and emerging software such as laptop, notebook computer, and desktop. Other devices include camera, AutoCAD, Sketchup Pro, Adobe Photoshop, and other electronic gadgets such as projector screen and flat screen

which are employed to ensure three-dimensional effects in the production. Examples of this design are 3-D design, animation design, chromatic and superimposition design, direct image printing, graphics design, as well as computer-generated images.

In his explanation, Sanni opines that this design concept is also capable of creating representational and presentational designs “through the use of lanterns, such as Moving Head LED Spot, Moving Head LED Wash, MAC lanterns” (87) and so on. Therefore, most of the scenery, lighting, makeup, and props, among other performance spectacles that we encounter daily, particularly in the places of worship and wedding ceremonies, are possible as the results of these evolving trends in the scenographic presentations. In this respect the below will be illustrative:



Fig 1: Virtual Design that depicts Postmodern Trend in Set and Lighting Design at “The Redeemed Christian Church of God; 75 Hours Marathan Praise, 2017”. Photo Credit: RCCG Platform, Lagos.



Fig 2: Virtual Lighting Design thrown from Cyclorama using LED Lanterns to give Dimensional Effects and Depth at Wedding Ceremony, 2020. Photo Credit Jaf Clothings

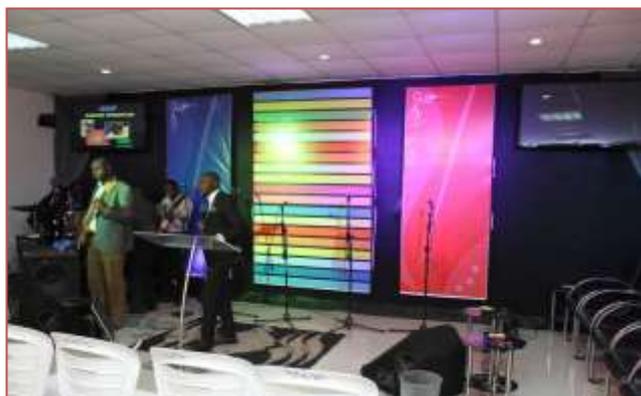


Fig 3: Virtual background design that portrays new dimension to set design at Triumphant Assembly City of David, Overflow Conference, 2015. Photo by Oladeji Taiwo, Ibadan

Media Mapping Projection Design

Media mapping projection design is a postmodern design concept that is capable of providing multimedia designs and dynamic performance backgrounds simultaneously through the use of digital gadgets, sophisticated lanterns, among other lighting equipment in order to add extra dimensions and depth to the performance. This design method is the combination of physical and virtual design. From this, it is believed that media mapping design comprises tangible and intangible aspects of scenographic design to facilitate a luminous production via the use of Giant LED Screen, LED lantern, LED cloth, gobo template, as well as green-hippo software, TurboCAD among other virtual design equipment. This form of design concept is common in most of the Nigerian churches. Figures four and five below provide visual examples that buttress our point:



Fig 4: MMPD Lighting Dimension generated through LED Lanterns that favours Postmodern Lighting for Special Effects at “Synagogue Church of All Nations, 2019. Photo Credit: Emmanuel TV



Fig 5: MMPD Scenographic design via LED Screen that provides Special Background Effect for Church Service at “Triumphant Assembly International 20th Anniversary”, 2017.

In this end, we could state that postmodernism is considered appropriate and relevant as our theoretical framework, because, all of the above illustrated in the structure of this paper are postmodern scenographic designs and the concepts beyond the four walls of theatre and the film orthodoxies.

Conclusion

This paper, has examined the emerging trends in scenographic designs beyond the theatre and film orthodoxies in Nigeria, with particular attention on wedding ceremonies and places of worship. The paper, therefore, concludes that scenographics are being creatively deployed and adequately used in Nigeria’s day-to-day cultural and creative productions such as advertisements, sales promotions, carnivals, and churches. And these quarters of emerging designs should be appreciated and thoughtfully explored by the theatre designers in the country. In this, we conclude that, scenic artistry is the hub of any production and without its interventions technically and artistically theatre and film productions, among others performative arts, may not be properly accomplished.

It is further concluded that scenographic input does not only assist in the classification and delineation of both technical and dramatic qualities of a production, it indeed contributes significantly to the achievement of an artistically pleasing and audience-satisfying production in the wedding ceremonies and other celebrative and performative events. The work recommends that, technical designers should promote the emerging design trends beyond the film and the theatre.

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