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This is the Second Edition of the
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THE SOCIAL DILEMMA OF NEW MEDIA/TECHNOLOGIES OF FREEDOM AND THE CULTURAL 'EXCLUSION' OF THE 'OTHER' IN THIRD WORLD POST-MODERNITY.	
Liwhu Betiang.....	118
SIGNIFICANCE OF VIDEO ADVOCACY IN CURBING RAPE.	
Dan Onche Ella.....	132
CO-OPTATION OF CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND NIGERIA'S ONLINE AND OFFLINE NEWSPAPERS: AN ASSESSMENT OF <i>THE PUNCH</i> AND <i>VANGUARD</i>	
Lwahas, Sarah and Akila, Mabas.....	140
CULTURE AND COLONIALISM IN WOLE SOYINKA'S <i>DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN</i>	
Victor Anaelechi Anyagu.....	152
ETHNIC POLITICS IN DANCE AND MUSIC PERFORMANCE; A FOCUS ON FELIX AKINSIPE'S <i>UNITED WE STAND</i>.	
Yaki Daniel Musa.....	167

THE ART OF COLOUR SYNCHRONIZATION IN STAGE DESIGN: THE EXAMPLE OF VICTOR EZE'S *WAILING GRAVE* DANCE PRODUCTION

Shadiat Shuaib Olapeju

Department of Performing Arts,
University of Ilorin.

Abstract

Generally, the concept of colour has been acknowledged by various scholars, scientists and artists as a universal phenomenon with multifarious functions in diverse fields of human endeavours which include Sciences, Arts, Humanities, Engineering and Medicine among others. In the light of this observation, this paper explores the principles and functional values of colour within the Arts with special focus on theatre practice. It employs descriptive, analytical, and participant observant methods to examine how the theory of colour is synchronized into art of stage design by theatre designers or theatre technicians by using Victor Eze's "Wailing Grave" dance production as a paradigm. The findings reveal that colour is creatively harnessed as communicative and expressive art by theatre designers to effectively reveal the theme of the performance to the audience. This is achieved by using elements of design such as costume, make-up lighting, properties and scenic design to facilitate and project dramatic actions, influence the mood of the production, and create the necessary aesthetic and psychological effects necessary for the successful realization of a production. The paper therefore concludes that for effective synchronization of colour in the stage design of any theatrical production a deep understanding of the workings of colour theory is necessary for theatre designers at the level of theory and practice in order to transmit an artistically and aesthetically pleasing production to the audience.

Introduction

Beyond rhetoric, the unique phenomenon known as colour is the most exciting element of design that can only be perceived visually. Interestingly, colour is not new to us, although we seldom explore its intricate nature because we are all acquainted with it. This is because we see colour everyday in nature as in leaves, fruits, flowers, animals, earth and so on. Therefore, it is generally considered to be a natural entity. Although, Over the years, scientists and artists have studied and designed several variations, definitions and design applications of this concept as far back as 1616 when Sir Isaac Newton, the great scientist, first developed the first circular diagram of colours from nature as perceived in rainbow colours called spectrum. After which different researches on the authenticity of one format over another continues to provoke and generate debates in varied fora of scholarly engagements such as the Sciences and the Arts.

In the scientific parlance, however, colour is considered to be characteristic of light by which an individual is made aware of objects or light sources through the receptor of the eye described in terms of dominant wavelength, luminance and purity (*American Heritage English Dictionary, 118*). From this definition, it can be deduced that man's perception of colour is a function of how light is refracted, reflected and absorbed by various objects. Adegbite (106), further states that the extent to which coloured object appears to our eyes, is

determined by the amount of light available at a particular time for the brain to interpretatively process the mixing of the colours. Hence, the common denominators for the definition of colour by the eyes of man can be referred to as the light, the object, and the brain because the visual perception of colour is derived from them.

Aside the scientific understanding of colour, the knowledge of colour is equally very imperative in the field of Arts, especially for the visual artist; be it in the theatre or among other allied artistic endeavors. To substantiate this observation, Gillette (89), surmises that "colour when carefully applied is easily the most noticeable of all design elements and is arguably the most dominant". Being a powerful communication tool that is employed by designers and artists to signal action, influence mood, it causes physiological reactions and create aesthetic effect also. Thus, designers like costume and make-up artist, props manager and lighting designer harness and use it in the expression of their arts.

As an expressive and communicative art, the theory of colour is therefore extremely useful to designers and artists in depicting and conveying pertinent messages encoded in their works to the viewers or audience. These messages could however be coded or directly transmitted depending on the cultural background or the religious and political beliefs of the society where it is utilised. To this extent, in the theatrical domain, colour has become the most dynamic unifying force that binds all the arts of theatre together via reflecting the theme of the performance and facilitating dramatic actions through the coordination and projection of the aesthetic and psychological values of a production. This is because the wholesomeness of a performance can only be achieved when colour is creatively and artistically complemented in all the artistic and technical elements of a production. The artistic apparatus here is regarded as the directorial and acting components of a performance while the technical appendages are costume, make-up, lighting, scenery and properties etc.

The Principle of Colour Synchronization in Design

Unequivocally, the understanding of the basics of colour theory principle is the benchmark for ensuring a synchronized colour combination in any artistic design concept particularly stage design. There are some colours that naturally look so good together when combined while some other colours when blended look so painful to the eyes that one needs to click away before the eye is strained. The idea of synchronization is defined in *Meriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* as "the arrangement of events to indicate unison or co-existence" (1267). Therefore, for effective colour synthesis, the understanding of the basics of colour theory is essential in achieving harmonious whole in overall design outlook of any work of art. To this end, a designer or artist needs to consider the theory of colour wheels to create colour harmony in any design concept or stagecraft.

Properties of Colour

According to Okunola colour has three distinct properties: "hue, value and saturation" (37). To understand colour one must understand how these three properties relate to one another. This is because without a specific set of terms to describe the various properties of colour, almost all discussion on it would quickly degenerate into rather meaningless comparisons. In this wise, the terms this study adopts are as follows:

Hue

The traditional name of a specific wavelength of light is referred to as a hue. It can also be regarded as the name of a distinct colour of a spectrum. Another description for it is "spectral colour" All colours of the spectrum are hues. There are only limited hue names: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, magenta and cyan. It is important to note here, that hues can be mixed to create other hues, therefore, complementing, Gillette's observation that "hue is the quality that differentiates one colour from another, such as blue from green or red from yellow" (81).

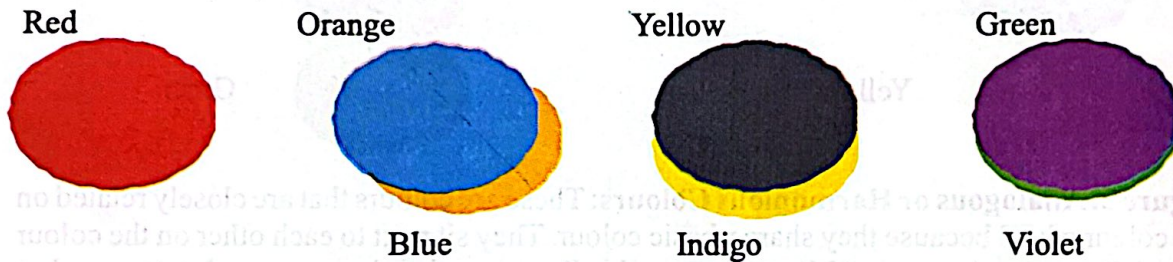


Figure 1: Shows the seven colours of the spectrum (Rainbow)

Value

Value is concerned with the light and dark properties of colour, in other words, the lightness or darkness of a colour. It is equally significant to state that all colours exhibit these properties. The hues have a natural value where they look the purest. Some colours, like yellow, are naturally light, while, some like violet are darker in shades as a result of the intensity of light present in them. When light is at its fullest, colour becomes bright, when at its least, colour becomes dim.

Ogumur, opines that "all hues can be made in all values" (15). Adding white to any pigment will make any pigment lighter. Adding black will make most pigments darker, it can even cause yellow colour to shift in hue to green. It is also important to note that value can exist without hue. These are referred to as neutral colours. Black, White, and Gray are values without colour. Since these values are used extensively in art, it is important to understand their relationship to one another. This is because they are useful in tinting and blending other colours in their environment to achieve a harmonious whole.

Saturation

Saturation is the purity of colour concerned with the intensity, or the brightness and dullness of colour. A saturated colour is high in intensity – it is very rich and bright. A colour that is dull is considered to be unsaturated or low in intensity. For example in the blue family, royal blue is a highly saturated colour, while steel blue looks muddier and less pure because it has gray undertones which diminish its brightness.

Colour Terminologies

There are various categories of colours that are obtainable on the colour wheel such as the following:

- I. **Colour Triads:** The most basic colour triads is the three primary colours which are Red, yellow and blue, while others are secondary as seen in green , violet, orange.

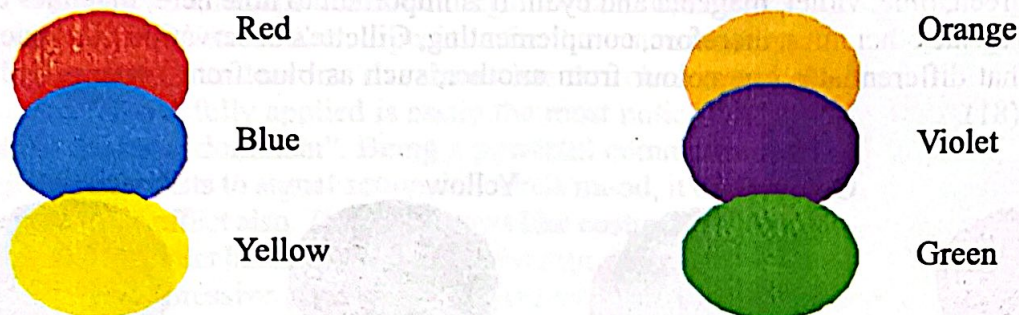


Figure 2: Analogous or Harmonious Colours: These are colours that are closely related on the colour wheel because they share a basic colour. They sit next to each other on the colour wheel. For example, green, Yellow-green and yellow, or red, red-orange, and orange and so on. Designers are therefore advised to play Primary and Secondary Colours with the hues and saturation of analogous colour to create a harmonious colour scheme when initiating their design idea.

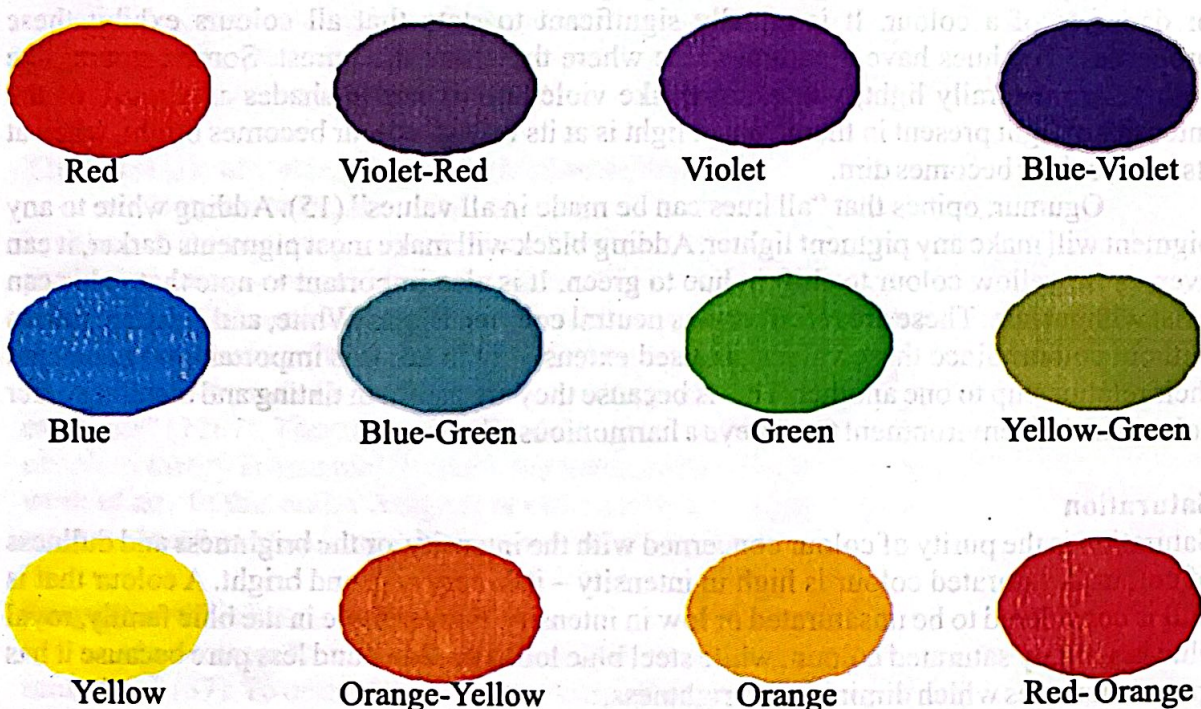


Figure 3: Shows Analogous colours

Complementary Colours

These are colours that are opposite one another on the colour wheel. By using colours that are opposite one another, one can create the colour that has high contrast as well as brighter and more vivid look. Some contrasting colours are: red and green, blue and orange, yellow and purple among others.

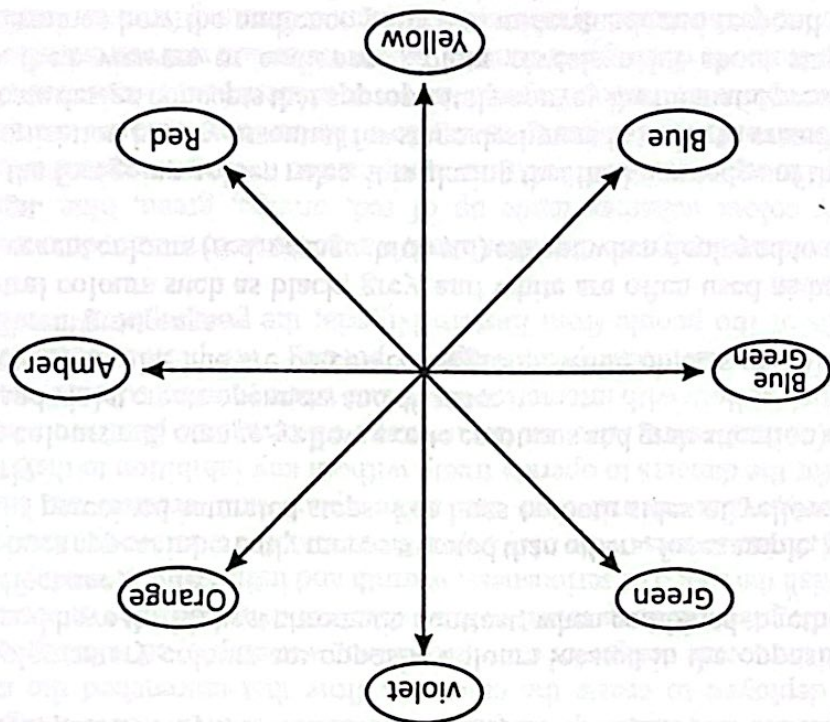


Figure 4: Complementary Colours

The above diagram shows the arrangement of some complementary colours that were discussed earlier on the colour wheel.

Basic Golden Rules for Colour Synchronization in Stage Design:

Douglas (1), espoused that professional designers and artists are quite cognizant of the rules that guide the design of colour pallets in stage technology, not only from aesthetic point of view but also from an attention-guiding salient stand point. Since visualization is not only concerned with providing a pleasing image, but, also has a mission of helping the viewers to gain quiet and accurate insight into the visualized objects. Our aim in this paper is therefore to combine colour scheme to other stage craft. Therefore, the following golden rules among others should be consciously considered in theatre design by designers in order to achieve an aesthetically and artistically pleasing performance for the audience.

Rule 1: When vivid colours stand out they guide attention to a particular feature (bright, saturated colours)

Rule 2: An excessive amount of vivid colours (bright, saturated colours) are perceived as unpleasant and overwhelming. They are best used in between duller backgrounds.

Rule 3: Conspicuous background separate works best, but, if the foreground colour is bright and highly saturated, then the background must be de-saturated.

Rule 4: Colours can be better distinguished, if they differ simultaneously in hue saturation and lightness from one another.

Rule 5: Colour separation is poorer for small objects, therefore, hue, saturation and lightness must decrease.

Rule 6: Complementary colours are opposite colours located in the opposite side on the colour wheel and have the highest chromatic contrast; when combined together, but riotous colours may affect one another.

Rule 7: Some hues appear inherently more saturated than others, for example, yellow has the least number of perceived saturated steps. For hues on both sides of yellow the saturated increase linearly.

Rule 8: Warm colours red, orange, yellow excite emotions and grab attention). Cool colours such as green and violet create openness and distance.

Rule 9: Objects of similar hue are perceived as group, while objects of different hues are pictured in different groupings.

Rule 10: Neutral colours such as black, grey, and white are often used as background for other brighter accent colours (red, orange, blue etc) except when deployed to create specific effect in a design.

From the foregoing golden rules, it is glaring that the knowledge of the workings of colour synchronization is very essential for stage designers in order to creatively articulate and communicate design concepts that appropriately convey the thematic preoccupation of a production to their viewers or audience. Colour reveals a lot about stagecraft which invariably determines how the audience perceive, understand, and respond to the various messages inherent in a performance. So in a design layout or process, it is advisable for theatre designers when implementing their design ideas to wisely combine their colours with consideration to any of the highlighted categories above, apart from other relevant colour models not mentioned under this categorization, so as not to distort and destroy the focus and overall outlook of the theatre production they are involved with.

Synopsis of the Play

The libretto *The Wailing Grave* by Victor Eze centres on Umogu community in the South-East of Nigeria, where a King's irrational decision leads to the doom of the community when he enters into an agreement with the Chief Priest of the land to marry the chief priest daughter for his son, after the priest uses his supernatural power to release the community from the bondage of their enemies during a war expedition. But, along the line, the agreement of the union between the Chief Priest's daughter and the king's son was breached and consequentially, the chief priest's daughter loses her life. The Chief priest then decides to seek vengeance at all cost by eliminating the royal family, but as fate will have it, the blood of the innocent ones cry out for vengeance against the Chief Priest and peace is restored to the land.

Analysis of Colour Synchronization in Victor Eze's *Wailing Grave* Production

Wailing Grave is a dance drama produced by the 2010/2011 final year students of the Performing Arts Department, University of Ilorin at the Departmental Theatre on the 15th of April 2011, in partial fulfillment of their Bachelor of Arts degree in Performing Arts. In the production, the synchronization of colours was well established in all the elements of visual design from the beginning of play to the end. This was visible in the scenery, costume, lighting, properties and make-up designs of the dance drama, where imaginative colour scheme was deployed to create the cinematic flow that entrenched the success of the production. In the scenic design for example, colour was employed to bring to life the tragic undertone of the play via deep-toned colours that had their qualities in brown and gray in order to establish the mood of seriousness, warmth and intimacy that was synonymous with the palace and shrine scenes of the play. Apart from that, the creative synthesis of colours on the scenic design also demarcated the stage space and created an enabling acting environment for the dancers to operate freely without any inhibition to their movements in the projection of their roles. Also, on the up-stage of the scenic platform a blend of toned-yellow or whitish yellow with interactive black and white (neutral colours) totemic symbols were integrated into the scenery drawings to portray the period, cultural identity, and religious ideals of Ibo people from Eastern Nigeria; the geographical location where the dance drama is set.

The costume design on the other hand, was realistic in nature, colours from primary and secondary colour schemes made up of red, orange, green, blue, and violet were predominantly incorporated into the colour composition to create a contrastive effect against the dominant brownish set design, so as to allow the costume colours to stand out and not absorbed by the colour of the set. Beyond the set consideration, colour was also used in the play through costume to distinguish dancers' characterisation and communicate the inherent messages encoded in the dance-drama to the audience. Starting from the tableaux scene, the significance of colour as important tool of mood, aesthetic and artistic communication was visibly seen in the characters' costumes found in various dyes of colour spectrum. From the opening scene, colour was used in costumes as status marker through tonal qualities to delineate the principal characters from others, for instance the king and the prince were dressed in expensive violet and wine flowered printed georgette materials with beads to match to connote their royal ancestry and showcase their opulent status, which reflected a stark contrast against the red costume of the chief priest (antagonist) and other colours of the costumes worn by other men in the play who belong to the lower economic class.

The synchronization of colour was also accentuated through the brilliant hue quality of the dancers' costumes to create psychological effect on the audience and set the harmonious mood and energy for the actions of the dancers. This was reflective in the white gown worn by the ghost of the late Princess (Adanna) against the startling dark grey colour of the scenic design of the burial ground that indicated the notion of the metaphysical world and the intricacies therein. Similarly, the love scene also showcased the blending of analogous and complementary colours as reflected in the blue and orange georgette materials worn by the Prince (Ibe) and his lover (Nnena) in their romantic escapades. Ibe as the Major character of the dance-drama was conspicuously costumed in orange Ibo georgette wrapper tied from his waist to the knee with some red coral beads to denote his passion, while

that of Nnena his (lover) was conceived in blue flowered georgette with red coral beads adornment on her head to portray the mood of love, friendship, sincerity and partnership.

Lighting design in the play also made use of colour as primary device to create psychological keys in support of the emotional content of the various scenes. Complementary colours of Roscolux gels were selected to modulate saturation for afternoon and night scenes because they were appropriately designed for such scenes. But in the ghost scene, where special effect is necessary full saturation from white gel of vertical Strip light and blue Fresnel spot light on both sides of the stage were used to enhance the full-spectrum of strongly coloured palette of costumes, make-up and scenery in order to create the resurrection effect necessary for the ghost scene. And for the sorrowful scenes, red gel from the follow spot was employed with solemn sound effect to highlight and create the mood of sadness and melancholy whenever death occurred in the play.

Properties and make-up in the play were also creatively harnessed through the juxtaposition of line, colour, and finish. The properties in the play were conceived in hand fans, stools, cutlasses, brooms, guns and horse-whisks found in shades of grey, brown, black and cream to connote the period of the play and complement the costume, set and light in the progression of the plot structure of the dance-drama to the audience. The make-up on the other hand was mostly amplified in white local chalk and black "Uli" concentric designs on the bodies of the dancers with red adornments to create colour contrast that enhanced the characterization of dancers and set the right mood for the play.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Attempts have been made in this study to critically examine how colour could be successfully synchronized through elements of colour like costume, make-up, properties, and light in Victor Eze's *Wailing Grave*, so as to project colour as an important element of design and a cogent force for mood and aesthetic creation in the theatre. It is however, worthy of note that although the principle of colours are applicable in practical use of colour, the theoretical mixing of colour may differ greatly from the practical realisation of colour. Conscious attention needs to be paid to the preliminary miniature experimentation of colour combination, before the actual production by the designers. This is because there is bound to be disparity between theoretical principles and the practical result. The end result of mixing paints, dyes, fabric, or light may be somehow different from the results projected by theory because of the impurities and contaminants found in stage, paints, dyes, lamps and other colour media.

It is therefore advisable for theatre designers to always carefully plan their craft ahead of production date to eradicate the mentioned inadequacies. For instance, costume designers should always use samples of costume fabrics as pre-test for the coordination of colours in scenery, costumes, make-up, properties and light. A lighting designer can also experiment with colour with the aid of a small-lighting fixture and a common dimmer board, in order to determine the intensity of the light before hand, since colour is rarely used in full intensity on stage (Richardson, 14).

In the same vein, a make-up artist can properly develop make-up for a production, through the technique of equipping the dressing room or make-up studio with colour fixtures that will be dominant on stage either through Fresnel spotlight or any kind of high intensity

lamp so that the effect of colour on make-up can be seen in advance to mention a few. But beyond the preliminary planning already mentioned, it is important to emphasize that consensus of colour scheme must be conscientiously reached by all stage designers during any production process for colour synchronization to be effective and efficient in theatre productions.

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