

THE DRAMATURGY OF COLOUR

EDIT ZEKE

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Abstract

In my study I organise and analyse my findings concerning the problems of colour design I have met in the course of my scenographic work. With this study I summarise the principle of image editing and that of the colour pyramid I use.

As a designer I am most interested in the problems of colour-conscious design, the rendering of the relations, the optical and aesthetic impact of colours corresponding to the contextual requirements of the work to be staged. The task comprises the designing of the colours reflecting the relations of the space, the characters and the groups, as well as the creation of the relations between the colour patches of the characters and the whole of the space, together with the development of the concept of the colour system before finalising the blueprints.

Scenography is a process where the birth of the performance is the designer's work of art. The scene is part of the performance. The establishment of the colour dominance and the construction of the colour schemes according to dramaturgical aspects and emphases constitute one of the most important phase of my work. The challenge of designing is yielded by the creation of a colour context where the emphases interpret and assist the work of art, at the same time they reflect on the dramaturgical events with the changes of the imagery.

The colour pyramid as a method

I developed a method to achieve this goal with the establishment of the colour pyramid. Its essence is the definition of the mass of image patches present in the space, and the arrangement of the colours according to the dominance relations. This is actually the colour map of the performance: an inventory of colours.

The design of the scene basically includes two elements, the set- and costume designs. The unified picture of the set is represented by the scale model or the stage design, that of the costumes is comprised by the blueprints for them. The two units are designed separately, though they appear as one image during the performance. The set is the field that encompasses the picture, while the characters appear as moving points of the image. It is a frequently occurring problem that the two elements do not sufficiently become an organic whole. When the set and the costumes are designed by different designers it may happen that no discourse or negotiation takes place between them, or their visual solutions fail to match. Ever since the beginning of my career I have often been entrusted with the creation of the

whole scenographic design, which offers the advantage of having full control over the visuality of the performance. The set and the costumes have to be treated as one single unit, since they together create the full picture of the performance. Thus their relationship to one another has to interpret the play. The set, as the largest surface of the performance is relatively static and constant. Its changes are influenced by the changing scenes that accompany the light and the plot. The colouring of the light is of course the simplest technical effect to alter and reshape the atmosphere of the scenery, but I analyse the basic situation of colour designing as a given scope, which includes the possibilities of revising the scenery with light.

The importance of the construction of the colour pyramid, besides the aesthetic aspects, lies in the clear colour scheme, the more precise emphasis and the transparency of the entire complex. In the course of my work my aim is to interpret the play, and consciously channel the attention of the spectator with the help of colours. This process I can accurately model with setting up the colour pyramid; with its use the scenery and colour dramaturgy of a given play can be designed in the most circumspect fashion.

For this method I employ and analyse the opportunities offered by the contrasts of different colours. Although every designer works with colours, no theatrical analysis has been written from the point of view of colours. Hence the field of methods and findings of summaries of colour compositions has not been processed.

My study examines the relations of colours, it investigates the weighting of colours within the creation of a colour-imagery, which I build from my studies of colour and fine art with the addition of my own subjective experiences.

The colour pyramid in practice

When working on my designs I place the colours and textile samples in a pyramid-like chart, with the help of which I illustrate the colour scheme of the stage design. In this colour pyramid I represent the quantitative relations of the colours, the strength and interpretation of the colour contrasts and the effect of their accentuation. This method yields the exact rendering of the successive colour atmospheres of the changes of the scene and the process of accentuation during the performance. Scale models or scenographic blueprints of the set are made, accurately representing the entire visual world of the set. The blueprints of the costumes, however, do not display the effect the expanse of the surface composed of the characters featured in the scenes create. It is also difficult for them to reflect the colour relations of the whole picture. I am trying to find the answer to the questions the aspects and

design concepts of building the colour pyramid raise and the summary of their conclusions through my own works.

Most of my designs can be classified as works made for musical plays. The colour pyramid I have developed bears the highest significance in this genre, since the relationship of the characters and the distribution of the groups have multiple layers here.

I have grouped the possibilities of emphasis as follows:

1. Monochromatic scenery

In the theatre black space is the starting point. I call the visual setting created from this blackness by the use of one colour the monochromatic scenery. The choice of this only colour is going to define the basic visual tone of the performance. This colour continues to be present throughout the performance and does not allow even a shade of difference in the patch, since then the scene would fail to remain monochromatic. It presents difficulties from the point of view of emphases, as we can only rely on the contrast of tones, factual and formal accentuations.

2. Colour contrasts

Colour contrast may be the most frequently used tool in theatrical scenographic design. When set in contrast, the colours can create tension, express the opposite poles of emotional charge, or increase the tension between opposing groups. Depending on the structure of the play this contrast can build up gradually or be impeded as well. The sharpest tool of expressing these tensions is setting the cold and warm colours in contrast. Multiple contrasts, that is the concurrent use of different types of colour contrasts can break the picture up into pieces, accentuating the individuality and equality of the characters. To design the proportions of the colour relations within the picture means an analysis, a task of interpretation. All in all, the use of colour contrasts is one of the best tools to create tension.

The colour pyramid:

The components of the colour scheme follows subjectively from the dramaturgical structure of the play. The groups and the hierarchic relationships within them can be distinguished and interpreted by the colours and their relations. The sign system within the colour structure directs the audience's attention to the given character, space or event. The more layered and intertwined the structural composition of the play, the higher the colour pyramid becomes. From the perspective of the play this pyramid is, of course, more like a moving spiral or a

changing, colourful, three-dimensional shape, but the creation of the colour pyramid offers the most help for me to build the colour scheme to be used for my design.

1.1. Accentuation in monochromatic surroundings

Keeping the surroundings, that is the set and the groups of characters representing a larger patch of the picture in one colour supports the more emphatic rendering of the protagonist or main characters. When a chorus, corps de ballet or supporting characters are present on the stage, it is necessary to channel the attention of the audience. Uniform costumes or the use of *ton-in-ton* colours make this task easier. The *ton-in-ton* colour scheme is more elaborate, all of its elements are valid in themselves, whereas the use of uniform costumes renders the characters faceless, creating an extended patch-like surface. Accentuation can be achieved by the use of a range of colour contrasts, even by the concurrent use of several different contrasts.

1.2. Accentuation in monochromatic surroundings with the use of a different colour

In this case it is necessary to use for the costumes an assortment of colours different from the characteristic colour scheme of the set. The definite separation of the set and the costumes is a strong visual effect. The movement of the characters and their situation in the space receive more emphasis, at the same time they are made uniform. To create such a differentiation between the set and the costumes, hence the creation of a tension between them is a delicate task of visual representation, which requires a very harmonious agreement between the set- and the costume design. The image can only be built thinking together in harmony.

A less intense solution is when the base colour of the set continues in a part of the costumes, or this colour may gradually dissolve with the use of shades, and the designer only aims at the accentuation of the protagonists with a new colour.

1.3. Accentuation among mixed colour schemes

In the chapter concerned with layers I endeavour to analyse works of art where several groups equal in rank are to be distinguished. I unite the groups in order to create a unified colour balance. It is essential to set up the relations of the colours, and the definition of the intensity of colours is a delicate issue. Although the colours unify the group, at the same time they will, to some extent, characterise it as well. The distribution of the colours can be done following the principle of relations and according to the aspects of the interpretability of the ultimate scenery. The logistics of the distribution of colours is assisted by the use of the colour pyramid, which renders the entire scenery of the stage visible as a whole unit. Here we should

consider not only the choice of colours, but also the qualitative unit of colour patches in the picture, and the accentuations expressed by the relations between the colours. I always use the colour pyramid to design this especially complex colour formula.

This study offered me the opportunity to organize the above questions, and by revising and examining my experiences to systematise those possibilities I have been able to try out during my work as a designer. This examination of the designs I have made exerts an influence on the concepts I developed; I am going to employ my findings in my future works.