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Technology in Craft-Building: The Experience of 2024 UNIUYO Model Theatre Fashion Crafts Session

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This study examines the concept of technology in craft-building, as a critical framework for enhancing creativity, self-reliance and sustainability within theatre praxis. It situates craft-building at the intersection of manual skill, art and technology, arguing that the integration of contemporary technological techniques with indigenous knowledge systems fosters innovative approaches to the production of costumes, theatrical props as well as general visual design elements. Drawing on both practical experimentation and theoretical discourse, the paper explores how technologically based skills in craft-building can empower theatre practitioners to produce essential performance materials with the use of locally sourced resources. The study further interrogates the evolving role of craft within the knowledge-driven and digital age, highlighting continued relevance despite increasing dominance of industrial and mechanized production systems. Adopting a practice-based methodology, including demonstrations conducted during the 2024 University of Uyo (UNIUYO) Model Theatre Fashion Crafts Session, the research documents the processes involved in creation of selected craft items such as fascinators, traditional costume accessories and bridal hand fans. These case studies illustrate the application of creativity, technical skills as well as resourcefulness in achieving aesthetic and functional outcomes appropriate for theatrical productions. Findings of the study reveal that while theatre practitioners array willingness to engage in independent production, there still exist significant gap in training, skill acquisition and technical knowledge. The paper underscores the fundamentals of structured pedagogical interventions, which include hands-on training, workshops to develop competencies in the technology of craft-building. The paper submits that the integration of technology in craft-building does not only enhance the authenticity and visual quality of theatrical productions, but they also contribute towards preservation of indigenous crafts, reducing production costs, and supporting the advancement of a more self-sustaining theatre practice in Nigeria.

Keywords: Craft-Building, Creativity, Props, Skills, Technology.

Introduction

Historically, theatre practice in Nigeria has historically reckoned on craft-building which could be described as the manual process of creating props, costumes, props and general visual elements, as a crucial conduit for cultural expression. The intersection of technology in craft-building processes can influence creativity adoption, self-reliance as well as sustainability in practice.

Technology came into existence out of human desires to experiment with available tools, methods and approaches in creating something physical from practical of application of necessary skills with experimental knowledge or acquired techniques (Ekpe and Okoronkwor). Craft on the other hand means the art of doing things that requires skills and technical know-how. The synergy of arts, craft and technology foster creative expression from human illusions and emotions to make visual aesthetics and realistic statements. Umoh confirms that "realistic art is a creative attempt to present the outlook of life as life itself is from the creative imaginations of powers of human faculty, brought to bear" (141). Craft in this context implies activities requiring manual dexterity, experience and artistic skills in the use of hands to make out visible objects that are needed and of useful purposes in the society and in the context of this work; props and items that are relevant to theatrical productions. In contemporary global economy, there is advocacy for technology in

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crafting of finished products and hence the focus on innovations with comparative advantage by every nation for services guarantee and efficiency

Nkan, Akaenyi and Bassey affirm that craft, a method of thinking and creating things, has played a significant role in bridging the gap between industrial design, design, and art during the past century. Making and crafting are essential human endeavours that are used in homes, galleries, factories, and hospital wards. Technology in craft-building is simply the applications of practical technique and skills acquired through a learning process involving the use of hands to creatively create things not limited to such as: Traditional Marriage Umbrella, Traditional Caps and Hats, Traditional Marriage Hand-Fan, Ceremonial Staff, Customized Headgears, Decorative Neck and Hand Beads as well as Decorative Flower Vase, weaving of customized bags, beads weaving, furniture making, costume sewing, etc. Iseyen submits that theatre and film productions can be achieved through supporting and encouraging the full utilization of costume designs from locally sourced materials and indigenous crafts to enhance visual appearance in arts as regards to performance with the same effects as foreign costume design products and by extension for cultural displays and other artistic exhibitions. Technology in craft-building entails the mastery of techniques and skills applied to produce useful decorative artistic objects from traditionally available raw materials like thread, wood, clay, ceramics, glass, leaves, textile, papers, gum, pencil, ruler, tape, sharp-sand, gravel, etc.

Technology in craft-building also relates to activities like fashion design, graphic design, costume design, interior design and other designs for specific aesthetic purposes. It is pertinent to state here that theatre and film productions can be achieved through supporting and encouraging the full utilization of craft technology for costume designs especially from locally sourced materials and indigenous crafts to enhance visual appearance in arts as regards to performance with the desired effects for performances, cultural displays and other artistic exhibitions. According to Ekeke and Ekeke, craft-building becomes a unique aspect in creating make-believe impression on actors during performances that cannot be ignored or underestimated in any artistic appearance" (111) and "the gothic architecture of the abbey provides a rich visual backup for the magnificent production" (115).

Arguably, some crafts can be saved from extinction through the adoption of technology, even as Ekeke and Ekeke allay fear that, "there is likelihood of many crafts facing moderation, reformation outside influence or possibly extinction" (39).The concept of technology in craft-building is examined in this work in terms of the practical experimentation in applying the technicalities and highlighting the different levels of applied skills with the use of hands in the process of independently crafting selected items, objects and props that relevant to theatre practice and often needed within the circle of theatre practitioners for theatrical productions– without relying on ready-made or imported ones from other professionals outside theatre

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that may be expensive and perhaps not readily available when needed. The afore-mentioned position also corroborates the position of Yankson et al that:

The influence of technology has an obvious impact on Arts of the Theatre. Visual design aspect of the theatre, which includes scenery, lighting, costume and make-up, has received much of the benefit that accrue from developing technologies. Further inventions of new technical devices have greatly boosted, enhanced and facilitated the design process. Design is an indispensable element of theatre practice and as such, it has employed technology to achieve its purposes. (386)

The above position translates to the application of technological skills, knowledge and available tools and materials in craft-building for theatre practitioners to learn the required skills and technicalities to independently make their desired items and props to aid the development of the theatre as reasoned by Unanka that, " the concept of technology cannot only be viewed in terms of physical infrastructure like machines and computers, but also includes the body of skills, knowledge and procedures applicable to production and employment useful things" (73). Technological skills in craft-building that are vital to the theatre should be given considerable attention by its practitioners. With the mastery of necessary skills through learning in craft-building for the theatre, the theatre practitioners will not be looking outside for assistance. Theatre practice will be independently positioned for more exploration to source local materials from within for their goods and services. Umoh observes that "raw materials for arts production which meets the required international standard are readily available in Nigeria" (202).

In the context of this work, the application of Technology in craft-building shall be focused on the selected items such as traditional costume accessories, fascinators, modular set piece and bridal hand fans which were practically experimented and demonstrated for teaching purposes during the 2024 University of Uyo (UNIUYO) Model Theatre Fashion Crafts Session.

The Concept of Technology in Craft-Building

If the production of commonplace items was first entirely dependent on human labour, it eventually shifted to the power of machines, and in our day and age, this productivity—and what we now refer to as innovation—is entirely reliant on the human brain. Our time can be referred to as the Knowledge, Information, or Digital Age. The most significant feature of this era is that not only is everything that can be produced tested beforehand by design, but design is now also a meta-activity: the conceptability of the products can now come before the design properly. Design appears to have entirely closed its doors for what we might refer to as a craft sensibility in the new era of designology, the study of design as a unified science. Advances in immersive media, digital fabrication and smart textiles have offered the arts more possibilities. It presents a convergence of skills and technology.

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Trend in global theatre in terms of technology in craft-building has become an indicator of the fact that theatre is fast developing to assume a state of independence in its professional process, activities and productions. According to Ekeke, technology in craft-building "has been globally recognized and accepted as a key vehicle for heralding change in various societies" (89). The concept of craft-building is simply borne out of acquisition and invention of additional tools, skills, techniques and knowledge to already known and existing traditional ways of doing things in terms of trade, occupation, skills, tools, techniques and knowledge in creating useful and purposeful objects and items. The concept of technology in craft-building here relates to practitioners in Theatre, undertaking theoretical and practical training in the area of producing required creative objects and items for theatrical productions. Bassey supposes that the concept of technology implies the different perspectives in purposeful application of creativity to all activities necessary to bring ideas in the realms of skills, techniques and knowledge in the building of theatrical crafts and designing visual props for the actors on stage.

Technology in craft-building is aimed at solving the problem of theatre practitioners not being able to independently create and build the desired objects, items and props for their theatrical productions with the aid of discovered, available and accessible technological tools. Ekpe and Wekpe suggest that technological processes emanate from needs thus they serve to solve identified problems. It entails the development of practical aesthetic and thinking skills and creativity through conception and production of works and an in-depth engagement with materials and available technological equipment. Craft-building concept refers to the manual dexterity and artistic skill which is required in using the available technical instruments and working with material. According to Ekeke, craft-making involves "the fabrication of clothing for the overall appearance of a character or a performer" (138). It connotes the creation of objects, items and props that can be monumental or functional or both in productions relating to the theatre. Technology in craft-making has been there in various communities based on traditional technology. However, in a developing world, new ways are constantly discovered, new techniques are invented, new skills are acquired and innovative knowledge is imparted in an effort to sustain craft-building.

Bridal Hand Fans

Bridal Hand Fan is an accessory that Africans, especially Nigerian brides use during the traditional marriage ceremony to aesthetically complement their dressing. We have several types of hand fans, but feathers and petals hand fans are illustrated in this paper. Items needed for feathers hand fan include: Locally made hand fan or a skeletal fan, Fabric (Lining), Feathers, UHU Gum or Candle Gum and the machine, Needle and threads, Trimmings, Scissors, Hand drier.

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Process for Making Feathers Bridal Hand Fan:

1. Cut the locally made fan to the size and shape you desire
2. Place your fabric (lining) on the already shaped fan (the fabric must be the same colour with the feathers
3. Cut the excess fabric out
4. Apply gum on the fan
5. Place the fabric (lining) on the fan and arrange the edges neatly.
6. Dry it with a hand drier
7. Apply gum in a straight and orderly manner
8. Stick the feathers where you have gum
9. Embellish it with your desired trimmings

Figure 1: Sample of Feathers Bridal Hand Fan
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024.

Items needed for Petals Hand Fan are: Locally made hand fan or a skeletal fan, Fabric (Lining), Petals, UHU Gum or Candle Gum and the machine, Needle and threads, Trimmings, Scissors, Hand drier.

Process for making a Petals Bridal Hand Fan:

1. Cut the locally made fan to the size and shape you desire
2. Place your fabric (lining) on the already shaped fan (the fabric must be the same colour with the Petals
3. Cut the excess fabric out
4. Apply gum on the fan
5. Place the fabric (lining) on the fan and arrange the edges neatly.
6. Dry it with a hand drier
7. Apply gum in a straight and orderly manner
8. Stick the feathers where you have gum
9. Embellish it with your desired trimmings

Figure 2: Sample of Petals Bridal Hand Fan
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024.

Fascinators

Fascinator is a formal headwear worn as an alternative to the hat. It is also a large decorative design, attached to a band or clip which covers little of the head unlike the hat which covers the entire head. There are two types of fascinators namely, Moulded and Wired fascinators.

Items needed for Molded Fascinator include Molds (comes in different types, shapes and sizes), Fabric or Sinamay, Stiffener, Ribbons or trimmings, Gum brush, Scissors, Fishing line, Fish bone, Needles, Tomb tag, UHU, B-6000, Candle or any good

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Gum, Petroleum Jelly, A little water and container to mix the stiffener, Millinery wire, Paper or Masking tape, A plastic or nylon bag, A peck or clip.

Process for Making Molded Fascinator:

1. Tie or wrap the mold with a nylon bag

2. Apply petroleum jelly on it (or any oil like olive or groundnut oil) it will enable you to take the sinamay from the mold after drying up.

3. Soak the sinamay /fabric inside water

4. Cover the mold with the soaked sinamay /fabric

• You have to double the fabric/ sinamay

• The sinamay /fabric should be able to cover the mold properly

• You should have 4 inches extra on both sides

• Cut out the remaining and use towel to take out excess water. the mold

5. Pin it with thumb tags. You have to be conscious of the shape of mold you are using.

6. Turn the reverse side and pin the four sides

7. Pour some stiffener into container and add a little water (maybe 2-3 tablespoons and stir it well

8. Use the glue brush and apply the stiffener on the mold (ie sinamay/fabric. (be sure your stiffener is thick because if it is too light, you may not gain any positive result.

9. Allow it to dry for like 6-7 hours. When it dries well the white stiffener will disappear and will be the colour of the sinamay.

10. Take off all the pins, take off the sinamay /fabric from the mold gently.

11. Cut out the added 4 inches

12. Measure the edge to ascertain the length of the millinery wire needed. When you get the inches, you add 2 inches to overlap the wire.

13. Insert the wire into the edge and sew it up with needle and fishing line.

14. Use gum to gum the edge and clip to hold it roundabout. When it dries up, you remove the clip.

15. Use trimmings to gum on the sinamay/fabric use clips to hold the trimmings. Take the clips once it dries up

16. Place elastic or Alice Band on the inside with glue. You can attach it using needle and fishing-line

17. Cut a piece of fabric, apply gum on it (cut it to cover the part the band is placed on. Apply pressure and allow it to dry.

18. You can now design or embellish it as desired.

Figure 3: Sample of Molded Fascinator
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024.

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Items Needed for Wired Fascinator are Ankara Fabric, Scissors, Needle and thread, UHU, B-6000, Candle or any good Gum, Paper or Masking tape, Millenary wire, Head Band.

Process for Wired Fascinator:

1. Take measurement on the particular size of fascinator you are making
2. Cut the millinery wire
3. Measuring Tape and Tailor's chalk
4. Bind the wire with either thread or tape
5. Cut the fabric (1 ½ inches), sew both edges and iron it.
6. Use it to wrap around the wire. Apply UHU gum on the wire and fabric and wrap. Cut out the remaining fabric
7. Wrap the wire with a lace and bring out the desired shape and tie the edge.
8. Use thread to tie it
9. Cut out the remaining net
10. Cut 5 inches width of Ankara fabric, 30 inches length, fold it to two equal parts run a stitch on it, drag the thread to form a rose. You can use feathers, flowers or any desired trimming to decorate it.

Figure 4: Sample of Wired Fascinator
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024.

Zara Cap: This is a contemporary mini hat suitable with either native or English outfits.

Items needed for Zara Cap include Fabric of your choice, Measuring tape, Needle and thread, Marco, Sewing machine, Trimmings.

Process for Making Zara Cap:

1. Take measurement of your model's head
2. Transfer the measurement to your desired fabric and cut
3. Cut the Marco according to the model's head (width must be 3.5 inches and the length will be according to the model's head circumference).
4. Place the 3.5 inches width Marco on the fabric
5. Cover the Marco with the fabric
6. Sew the tip of the fabric, leaving the Marco inside the fabric.
7. Turn it and mark the appropriate circumference and sew it
8. Turn it to the front phase and embellish it with trimmings of your choice

Figure 5: Sample of Zara Cap
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024

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Gele Tying

Gele is a head wrap worn by women in Nigeria and some African nations. It can be tied in diverse ways. But the most common and easy going gele is tied in round style. Items needed include a piece of fabric that is 70 inches long in length and 25-30 inches in width and office pins

Processes of Tying Gele on a Model's

1. Fold the tip of the Gele, place the scarf across the model's forehead (Make sure that the scarf is off-centered, with the right side being longer than the left side. The long-folded edge should be against the model's forehead).

2. Get your finger into position (Place both of your thumbs on the bottom edge of the fabric, right above your model's eyebrows. Place your forefingers under the fabric, right against her skin).

3. Use your forefingers and thumb to pleat the fabric. (Hook your forefingers while bringing them to the thumbs, meanwhile, pin the folded fabric down against the rest of the fabric, creating a pleat. Smooth the pleat down and create four more behind it).

4. Extend the pleats down the right side of the fabric. (Have your model reach up and hold the pleats against the left side of her head. Use your thumb and forefinger to create more pleat, making sure that they connect with the ones that you already created. Then keep the fabric nice and taut here)

5. Wrap the fabric towards the back and cross the ends. Take both end of the fabric towards the back of the model's head. Take the end that you just finished pleating (The longer one) and cross it over the other (shorter) end.

6. Pull the pleated end over the top of her head and refold the pleat. Take the long, pleated end of the fabric and drape it over the model's head. Work your way from the right ear down towards the left ear. Keep the pleat tight and the fabric above them loose. And have your model hold the short, left end out of the way.

7. Tie both end of the fabric behind the model's head. Manipulate the fabric in such a way that the edges facing the floor are tight, and the edge facing the ceiling are loose

8. Shape and pleat the fabric on the top of her head. By now, you will have lot of loose fabrics on top of your model's head. Using your fingers, pleat the fabric from top to bottom, centre outward. Think of it as creating a halo or crown. Leave a layer of fabric covering the top and back of the model's head. Tuck or fold the fabric at the back. At this point, you will have lots of loose fabric at the back of your model's head. You can fold this fabric upward a few times into a nice, neat band, or you can tuck it into the nut.

Figure 6: Sample of Gele (on a model's head)
Source: Researchers' Field Work, 2024

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Conclusion

This paper has examined the imperative of integrating technology in craft-building within theatre praxis, emphasizing its role in enabling theatre practitioners to independently produce the props required for theatrical productions. It observes that many of the materials used for theatrical productions are sometimes produced by persons outside the discipline, thus, resulting in availability of products which may not adequately meet theatrical demands. This approach could be termed expensive and also cumbersome. The research underscores the need for theatre practitioners to develop proficiency in craft-building techniques and also acquire technological competencies, thereby enhancing their capacity to create required production materials through creative innovation and manual skills. With drawn instances from the researchers' practical engagement during the 2024 UNIUYO Model Theatre Fashion Crafts Session, where techniques of craft-building were demonstrated to Theatre Arts students; there is table inclination among practitioners to engage in independent production. However, this disposition is constrained by gaps in training, skill acquisition and technical knowledge. Consequently, the paper advocates for comprehensive training, structured orientation programmes and the organization of specialized workshops positioned to equip theatre practitioners with technical expertise and requisite skills in craft-building. Such interventions are crucial for fostering improved production quality, self-reliance and the advancement of sustainable theatre practice.

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