The Historical Evolution of Stage Costume in Its Material and Technical Use Since The Second World War

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I. Introduction

Since its advent in the history of theatre, the stage costume, coming from an exaggerated form of the civil costume, has become an important element of the theatre. Whether it is for visual appropriation or symbolic dramatisation, the artificial emphasising of the stage costume constitutes one of the principal techniques in setting off dramatic expression on the stage. From this fact, such a variety of styles throughout the history of stage dressing can be translated into an effort to express dramatic effect through diverse technical and material exploitation. Therefore, in the analysis of this specific process, when a costume maker operates, a material-effect can be served as a tool which allows us to decode a dramaturgic idea of the performance.

In view of the importance of both the technical and material effect of stage costume, especially in its contribution for contemporary theatre, our study on the subject of, "The historical evolution of Stage costume in its material and technical use since the Second World War", aims to analyse the perspective of stage costumes after Second World War from the material and technical point of view by the examination of historical and material contexts: the history of materials' utilisation, the influence of technical advances and some associated cases. It is also necessary to analyse various material processes and the techniques used to give dramatic effect such as colouration, volume setting, choice of a specific material and texture work. In each of particular cases, the historical, material and dramatic contexts were examined because different material-effects were looked for.
II. Methods

Concerning the sources and method for this research, we consulted a large number of documents such as books on the history of costumes, textiles or theatre, articles, programs of spectacle, press releases, exhibition catalogues, as well as Master Degree Theses at L' École du Louvre in Paris. The degree theses are particularly precious sources as we know it is not very common to have published documents or studies which analysed a performance, or an artist, from the point of view of costume design and its contribution on the stage. The examination of stage costume from its material-effect point of view would enable us to better understand such a considerable aesthetic diversity on the stage through the 20C and the methods operated to underline a dramatic effect for stage costume as well as the change of criteria, on which the creativity of stage costume in contemporary stage is based.

III. Results and Conclusion

Our study led us to reveal multiple typologies of the costume and its various methods according to the stage direction. This research began with the idea that the stage costume is a work "of art", which means both the skill of a craftsman and of an artistic expressivity, especially when the stage costume is made in the practical process. The costumier transforms a dramaturgic concept into a concrete substance made of fabric, wire, paperboard, resin, or transparent film. Thanks to the technical craftsmanship of the costumier, the singularity of each material nature of costumes can create a dramaturgic signification with the help of the lighting. In order to understand better this sheer technical process, from the original costume design up to its final realisation, we tried to analyse the "technical" operation of the material effect.

Opposed to decorative and superficial stylisation of stage costume, some directors of the twentieth century, especially those who appreciate the research for "The Art of the Theatre" prefer to underline the harmony between the costume and dramaturgic idea of spectacle. However, materials and techniques as they originally existed were not always suitable for the elaboration of the symbolic aspect of costume while a spectacle is playing onstage. It became then indispensable to exploit materials and techniques,
whose original application was often diverted. That is the reason why stage costume creation during the second half of twentieth century was highly marked by technician's artistic contribution such as the stage costume maker or fashion seamstress. Diverse research for material-effect has been operated from all technical angles such as colouration, volume-setting, choice for specific materials and texture-work. Regarding the textile progress of the twentieth century, acceleration in the synthetic and technologic research for new dress materials opened other exploitable domains for stage costume. The artists for contemporary set design began to take into account the polyvalent effect of costume made with multi-technologic materials. From then on, the presence onstage of costume itself has been considered as a sheer plastic art work, which the dramaturgic intention of its spectacle director can be decoded within.

Thus research of the effect-matter of the twentieth century, exceeding its usual references which were hitherto a simple imitation of certain textile effects, led to the audacious introduction of a new materiality, for a new technological material or technique would predetermine the final aspect of the costume before the accomplishment of its realisation. In order to meet this new need, the professionalisation of the costumier craft moved its statute as an anonymous technician, who used to apprehend a technical interpretation behind the whole of the scenic play, towards that of a "holder of a highly qualified knowledge", who is able to propose the unicity of each costume, while making its polyvalent contributions exploited on the stage.

References
Barthes, Roland. (March-April 1955). Les maladies du costume de théâtre, Théâtre Populaire. n° 12 (pp. 64-76), Paris:Théâtre Populaire.

