

# LIGHTING-BASED STAGE-SCREEN INTERSECTION PERFORMANCES AS PANACEA FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Lighting design as practiced in today's theatre, started as illumination of communal events; organised and financed by the community, state, churches or wealthy citizens. Initially, attendance was mandatory and cost free to citizens and members. However, financial patronage was withdrawn from the theatre by these benevolent donors in the sixteenth century when Elizabeth 1 of England prohibited the theatre from staging plays with religious and political themes. Thus, the theatre was forced to become a commercial enterprise and theatre blossomed once more. However, economic recessions have combined with other factors to cause drastic reductions in gate-takings and the live theatre dwindled again especially in Nigeria. Therefore, the aim of this study is to revive public live performance once more through lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances. Thus, the researcher's objectives include evolving lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances that will make live performances attractive to the audience amidst strong competition from the electronic media. To assess the potentials of the lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances as panacea for economic recovery, the experimental interview and impact analysis approaches of mixed method of research are used. The researcher experimented the lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances at the Mbari Cultural Centre, Owerri. The research findings reveal that today, most Nigerian audiences are unwilling to patronising theatre events, unless they are sure of the quality. There is need therefore to save the theatre from the present as well as future economic hazards through lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances. This approach can pave way for new ideas to be accommodated in stage lighting performances. Hence, the paper concluded that the adoption of this new lighting approach will not only help to entertain the audience well, but will also help to blend with the electronic postmodern performance culture.*

## **Introduction**

Light is crucial to human existence. It occupies central position in all human affairs. In fact, it is of fundamental importance as it enables the visibility of things around human environment. The importance of light as a factor that is responsible for seeing,

underscores its adoption by the theatre as an element in the making of dramatic events. Its roles include both enhancing the development of the theatre and as well as the sustenance of its values. According to Robert Cohen, “light is the basic condition for theatrical appearance” mainly because “without light nothing can be seen” (5). This implies that the contributions of other artists of the theatre, like the actor, playwright, director, set and costume designers, etc., must require light to make them visible and appreciated. It is at this time that their impact in the repositioning of the theatre for onward economic vibrancy could be felt.

The fluid nature of the modern stage lighting has remained the bane for its ability to render various services to the theatre other than the usual and all-known function of illumination. Stage lighting can play vital roles in the areas of creating mood and atmosphere, emphasising and subordinating visual elements and, above all, blending the entire stage picture for the overall interest of understandability. Milly Baranger speaks in the affirmative as he traces the early use of light in the theatre for dramatic effects. He informs that in the staging of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*, “the story of the king’s return at the close of the Trojan War begins with a watchman standing atop the place to watch for beacons shining from distance mountaintops that will signal Agamemnon’s return to Argos” (264).

The above indicates that stage lighting can as well be used to communicate to influence audience’s perception and sensibilities. Nigerian theatres in particular need this and other kind of innovative lighting strategies. This makes more sense even now that the country is undergoing through economic recession because it has the capability to build audience confidence once more in a live stage performance, especially since the audience is the major financier of the theatre businesses in Nigeria. We see innovative stage lighting as the key to the progress of the theatre because it has over the years established its capability to inspire experimentation of new methods of presenting plays in the theatre. Stanton and Banham, as cited by Duro Oni, speak in this regard and said that, “stage lighting, particularly...since the first use of electricity in the theatre, has had a profound effect upon staging, scenery, style of production and acting, and even upon the shape of the theatre building itself” (76). Many of such methods have in the past demonstrated the ability to attract positive responses of the audience and by so doing improved the economic and social well-being of the theatre.

Record of this can be traced back to the classical societies. The classical cities of Greece, Rome and Middle ages were very popular and well known for their taste for strict adherences to the lighting and religious cultures of the period. These cities maintained close similarity in their cultural and religious festivals. Those of their festivals were dedicated to the worship of various deities. The Greek ritual festival for instance, was performed for the glorification of the god, Dionysus. During those days, religious ritual festivals were considered theatrical because theatrical elements were infused in them. Lighting was not then as it is today, it was not considered vital and indispensable element of those ritual theatres.

The classical festival and medieval theatres were regarded as communal happenings, where every member of the community was a stakeholder; therefore its funding was less cumbersome because most of the costs incurred for staging were borne

by the state, churches and/or wealthy individuals in the society. Stage lighting benefited immensely from this arrangement because not only that it enjoyed large audience participation, sufficient fund was made available to cater for all lighting production expenses. It has been observed for instance that lighting production cost in the Greek and Roman theatres were benevolently incurred by the state while that of the medieval theatre was borne by the church and wealthy individuals. It is possible, therefore, that the waver granted to the audience on gate-fee in those early theatre practice days was partly because the money for mounting the productions were drawn from public fund.

Theatre became a total commercial venture in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; Queen Elizabeth 1 ascended the throne in England and with the intention to restore normalcy in her kingdom, passed a decree, which prohibited the theatre from staging plays with religious and political themes. The effect was that the sponsors of the theatre who have been using the medium to propagate their variant ideologies were as a result of this development made to withdraw their financial patronages and thus forced the theatre to become a commercial enterprise. “Rather than remaining occasional (part of a religious festivals), officially supported, and free, the theatre became continuous, self-supporting and sufficiently entertaining to keep a paying public coming back” (Brockett and Ball 100). This was possibly part of the reasons that brought about the introduction of indoor performances, which the professional theatre practitioners used to control access and collect entrance fees. However, the adoption of the alternative means of free sponsorship advanced and reinvigorated the theatre and made it to blossom once more.

The adoption of the theatre as a full commercial venture however, instigated persistent oppositions to the activities of the theatre. The first of its kind was the dangerous advances made by the guilds of England in about the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The guilds of England initially accepted and approved the theatre as a worthy leisure activities but later rejected it after the theatre was commercialised as it could not find reason to justify it as a means of livelihood. This eventually resulted in the dangerous advances towards strangulating the revenue sources so that the theatre will die a natural death and thus stop the actors from “corrupting” the society (Brockett and Ball 100).

Today, the challenges being encountered in the theatre are no longer connected with social relevance and values, but some other kinds of hindrances. In the contemporary Nigeria, for instance, economic recessions have combined with other factors to cause drastic reduction in gate-taking. This constitutes a big problem because it has the capacity to cause the industry to dwindle dangerously. This study is therefore a designed attempt to contribute in the efforts toward reviving live stage performance in Nigeria in a way that will guarantee economic self-sustenance. It intends to achieve this through lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance strategy. Though the proposed performance is live performance, unlike most stage performances in the recent past, its aesthetics are to a large extent dependent on lighting. Its major point of departure however is the utilisation of lighting to intersect both the stage and the screen media in a single performance. To intersect is to meet at a point; therefore, as a mathematical term, intersection as the point or sect of points means where two or more lines or plane surfaces cross each other. It is the relation of two or more classes which includes parts of the other to result in a set of elements common to both. The study

basically aims at introducing Intersection Performance Techniques (IPT), as a technical stage performance approach for enhancing the survival of the live theatre in the economically traumatised Nigerian society.

Lighting-based screen-stage performance through intersection performance technique is therefore, a radicalised stage performance approach aimed at a more effective realisation of performance objectives in Nigerian theatre practice to make live theatre relevant to the realities of our time. It emphasises a set of techniques that utilise potentials of both the stage and media to put the directors' message across. The study, therefore, attempts to find answers to the following questions:

- a) What is the indicator that the Nigerian live stage is on the declining lane?
- b) What are the factors responsible for the consistent decline of live stage in Nigeria?
- c) How has this affected the economic state of the Nigerian live stage?
- d) How can the lighting address the dwindling fortunes of live stage in Nigeria?

### **Theatre Business and Economic Recession**

Business activities and standard of living have been conceived as strong indicators of economic vibrancy in any economy. It permits easy circulation of money into different hands, groups of businesses, cooperate enterprises for consequent meaningful development. Therefore, any action that leads to stoppage or slow down activities in businesses will consequently spell doom to the economy since such will no longer allow people easy access to cash for transactions. This kind of situation leads to economic recession. Simply put, economic recession is drop in production of goods and services, poor turnover and inflation.

The present condition in Nigeria aptly fits into the description of economic recession. The *World Book Encyclopaedia* defines *economic recession* as, "a period of temporary economic setback or decline during which trade and industrial activities are reduced". It explains that, it is "generally identified by a fall in GDP in two successive quarters" (231). Similarly, The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) sees economic recession as, "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in a real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales" (EduCacInfor.com). Economic recession is generally characterised by:

- a) High inflation: this will cause a general rise in price of goods and services, leading to low purchasing power;
- b) Accumulation of debt servicing, especially foreign debts;
- c) High interest rate: this usually discourages investors from investing in the country;
- d) Fall in aggregate demand; and
- e) Mass unemployment.

Judging from the above indices, it becomes sufficiently clear that Nigeria is currently undergoing economic recession. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) foreshadowed this situation years back and declares that, “Nigeria economy has plunged into recession. The economy will not regain stability until late 2017” (Soludo 12). Economic recession in Nigeria was induced by multiple factors as articulated and discussed by economic analysts yet the consciousness and awareness was not adequately publicised. Even though, the situation traumatised the theatre and other businesses, theatre if adequately utilised could have helped to raise the awareness so that individuals, organisations and government will be at alert and re-strategise.

Another analyst, Emmanuel Noko, highlights four principal factors which he said are responsible for the economic disaster in Nigeria today. He identifies poor economic planning as one of those factors. He posits that the policy to eliminate dollar purchase privileges for importers of certain items into the country by devaluing the home currency is a miscalculation on the side of government. Such a policy which permitted banks to sell dollars at an official rate of N315 created opportunities for businesses in the hands of privileged and highly placed individuals who purchase dollar at N315 from the banks and resell at the parallel market rate of N480. According to Noko, the huge profit made from this venture adds towards widening the gap between the rich and the poor and by so doing worsen the economy because majority of the people live in abject poverty while only few individuals enjoy good life. In line with the position of Noko, Emmanuel Ebo and Canice Nwosu assert that, most economic downturn occurring in any economy is usually caused by some anomalous policies of the government which usually manifest in unemployment, high inflation and ravaging poverty in general (41).

Noko also identifies high inflation rate as yet another factor that precipitated economic recession in Nigeria. He believes that the banning of certain essential agricultural products such as rice, without first putting in place an alternative measure that can mitigate the effects and the policy to remove fuel subsidy alongside the banning of agricultural products culminated to high inflation rate where prices of almost all household items skyrocketed. The case of high bank interest rate on loans and other draconian policies were considered by Noko as major contributors to low investment and economic depression. He regrets that this happened within the season where investment in the country recorded very low growth. Noko observes finally that high taxation policy operating in the country also has negative implications on businesses operation. Small business outfits including theatre business hardly survive under high taxation conditions.

The present economic recession in the country has contributed to the low theatre activities in our live theatres. The unprofessional attitude of most theatre producers in Nigeria to lighting productions has also help to aggravate the already traumatic economic situations affecting the live theatre. Some practitioners think that lighting is an applied art to stage performance, those producers often treat lighting with gross neglect. Duro Oni conscientiously condemns the avariciousness with which most Nigerian theatre producers apply the theories of ‘Empty Space’ and the ‘Poor Theatre’, in most productions on the Nigerian stage. According to him, “they virtually perform their plays

in the moulds espoused by Brook and Grotowski and almost disregard the technical elements of production” (qtd in Nwadike 31). However, Robert Cohen maintains that lighting plays very vital roles in theatre performances; so, should not be disregarded. Though he acknowledges that the actor and the play scripts are very central to the theatrical experience, Cohen further observes that no matter their pivotal importance, they are incapable of full expression in and by themselves (5). The allusion here therefore is that light is still required to reveal their status.

We need to be reminded at this point that light is not all about illumination. According to Michael Gillette, “if illumination were the only function of stage lighting... you could hang a bank of fluorescent lights over the stage and forget all about the dimmers, control boards, cables and instruments” (1). Gillette is alluding to the fact that stage lighting is capable of creating other possibilities in the theatre through proper design. Design is “a process and a craft for creating an artistic result” (Gillette 4). It was conceived as a revolt to the passive use of light in the early days of the theatre and the very need to introduce innovativeness in the modern stage lighting practice.

Most lighting theorists are of the view that the introduction of design into the practice of lighting has affected the live theatre in positive ways. The views of Stanton and Banham are apposite in this regard. According to them, design and innovative lighting “...has had a profound effect upon staging, scenery, style of production and acting, and even upon the shape of the theatre building itself” (qtd in Oni 76). It is regrettable, therefore, that the opportunities availed by design and improved modern technologies have not been fully exploited by Nigerian theatres whereas such benefits have been harnessed over the years and used extensively to expand the frontiers of stage performances in the Western world.

One can assert that the retrogressive tendencies of the Nigerian live theatres whereby the theatre is constantly in search of the audience and not the other way round as it used to be, is an unhealthy development that results out of rigidity and non-willingness of the practitioners to embrace the prevalent postmodern digital technology-driven performance which is achieved through lighting and design. This is why all the efforts that have been made in the past by some committed Nigerian theatre scholars to address the economic ailing situations of the live theatres have not yielded much result. For instance, Rasheed Musa, from a study of the past and present states of the performances in order to determine the level of progress observes that the contemporary stage performance is retrogressing badly. He attributes this to the dysfunctional attitude of theatre workers who he said have not shown much commitment towards improving the theatre. He suggests that attitudinal changes of the theatre workers, especially the younger ones will add positively in the sustenance of theatre practice in Nigeria (16).

Innocent Ohiri also shares the opinion of Rasheed Musa that something seriously needs to be done to resuscitate the deteriorating state of the Nigerian theatre. Having discovered through series of investigations that gate-takings in our stage performances have reduced greatly to the extent that they can no longer cater for future productions in the theatre, Ohiri suggests that to sustain theatrical activities in the country, funds should be sought from agencies and cooperate organisations to support stage performances (146). In as much as these and other related postulations are quite

scholarly and innovative, they have not really addressed the reoccurring incidence of poor audience turn up and low economic returns to the live theatres in Nigeria. In one of his studies, Duro Oni advises that the downward movement of live theatres in Nigeria can be addressed by “repackaging of theatrical productions by paying more attention to the design and technological aspects of production” (75).

This study, therefore, aims to revive live stage performances in Nigeria through lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance. The evolving of lighting based stage-screen Intersection performances is hoped to be used amidst strong competition from the electronic media, to win the minds of the audience back to the theatre again. The researcher also intends to assess its viability as a means for economic recovering. This is because lighting as an amalgam of art and technology is believed to be capable of creating avenues for the improvement of the theatre. Molinta Enendu also alludes to this when he states that,

Aesthetic and foundation of theatre production are rooted in the arts, technology is only for supportive and complementary roles which enhance and broaden human capacities, imaginations and creativity (qtd in Ejike 40).

### **Lighting-Based Stage-Screen Intersection Performance as Panacea for Economic Recovery**

To give a definition, in the general case, *Wikipedia* informs that the intersection multiplicity was the major concern of André Weil's book, *Foundations of Algebraic Geometry*. Bartel Leendert van der Waerden's works around 1920s had already addressed the question; in the Italian school of algebraic geometry the ideas were well known, but foundational questions were not addressed in the same spirit. However, its application by other disciplines started with the works of Kimberley William Crenshaw an American civil rights advocate, in 1989 who in her study about Black feminism in America, describes *intersectionality*, as overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. Crenshaw argues that the experience of being a Black woman cannot be understood in terms of being black and of being a woman considered independently, but must include the interactions, which frequently reinforce each other. She therefore noted that the classical conceptualisation of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, and so on, within the society, do not act independently of each other, rather these forms of operation interrelate to create a system of operation that reflects the convergence of multiple forms of discrimination. Crenshaw identifies gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, mental and physical illness and disabilities, etc. as forms of identity that can intersect.

The theory proposes that all aspects of one's identity need to be examined as simultaneously interacting with each other and affecting one's privilege and perception in society. The idea is that these facets of identity cannot simply be observed separately. Intersectional theory therefore provides an insight into how multiple systems of oppression interrelate and are interactive. While William Crenshaw conceptualises this theory to address the poignant social injustice and violence that is being meted against

Black American women, intersectional theory is used in this study to provide basis for the intermingling of video film sequence and live actions in a stage performance through intersection performance technique. This is to make stage performance attractive to the contemporary audience known for their high sense of aesthetics, with the intention of addressing perennial economic and related problems in Nigerian.

This new production culture inspires the desire to “make the representation of place in the theatre as transformable as it is in film and television” (Brockett and Ball 233). This is to ensure that the theatre can address issues regarding to changes in artistic taste and audience perception demand on the need for consistent rapid change of time, place and focus between scenes in a live theatre performance as being practiced in film and television. The impressive need also was to encourage experimentation with lighting-based screen-stage intersection performance, a practice that encourages combination of elements from several media and utilisation of the electronic culture.

Though there is a thin dividing line between multimedia and intersection performance technique, they are both electronic culture friendly. Multimedia, though older than intersection performance technique, dwells more on combination of media like the Brechtian theatre; intersection performance technique focuses on intersection of media. It is improvement on theatre technology of the time to support the realisations of the great imaginations about lighting. It was at the time of the Czech Scenographer, Josef Svoboda (1920-2002), however, that the vision of Adolph Appia and his contemporaries were brought to bear in the theatre. Tapping from the ideas of his predecessors, Josef Svoboda, who in 1958 used his works: *Polyekran* (multiple screens) and *Laterna Magika*, to demonstrate the possibility to incorporate elements from other media particularly the television, into his stage design experimentation “to show the theatre world what could be accomplished with light” (Parker, Wolf and Block 394). Oren Parker, Craig Wolf and Dick Block explain further that, in the theatre at Prague, Svoboda experimented extensively with low-voltage light sources thereby demonstrate the ability to “suspend electrostatically charged particles in the air to act as reflectors of light” (394). Svoboda achieved this by relying heavily on imaginative use of projection surfaces. Brockett and Ball comment on the functionality of multimedia production in the theatre. According to them, the notable

Feature of multimedia productions has been the liberal use of projected images frequently several shown simultaneously on a number of screens. The images may be fragments of the same picture, or each may be unlike the others. All are chosen for their appropriateness to the mood or theme of the piece; some may suggest comparisons between the dramatic events and those of other times and places (424).

The images projected on multiple screens serve as scenic background of a performance. They provide audience with the choice of projected pictures to watch. This early experimentation endeavours later instigated new ways of thinking about stage lighting design in Western theatres.



In the Nigerian scene however, multimedia technology production approach is still at the incubation stage. Charles Nwadigwé tells us that the works of Dexter Lyndersay, Sunbo Marinho, Duro Oni, and *Molinta Enendu* (emphasis mine) are quite remarkable, as pioneer works that inspired interest in the use of multimedia production in the Nigerian stage (30). Like other places of the world where it has been practiced, multimedia technology production in the Nigerian theatre tends to bridge the existing gap between live and electronic performances; usually through the combination of elements of the both media to address peculiar performance challenges. In 1998, for instance, Molinta Enendu executed the design for the production of J. P. Clark's *The Raft*, with multimedia technology. With the use of sophisticated special lighting gadgets like the strobe lights and other special effects lights such as clouds and thunder storm, Enendu deployed the means of projection techniques to project all the created effects against the backdrop surface of the stage and was able to simulate the notion of a sailing raft on a sea (Enendu 32). Solomon Ejeke confirms that, Enendu "relied heavily on (multimedia) technology for the effective realisation of the thematic concepts... of the play" (40).

About a year after (in 1999), Duro Oni did a work in which he also relied on multimedia technology in the actualisation of his production concept. It was in the stage production of Biyi Bandele's stage adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* that Oni, using multimedia technology, substituted stage sets with stage lighting in the creation of scenic environment in which the dramatic presentation took place. However, in this and other related cases, the use of multimedia technology production in the Nigerian theatre has not extended beyond the creation of patterns that serve as scenic background. Duro Oni even confirms this thus:

...the scene-by-scene analysis of *Things Fall Apart* attempts to demonstrate the effectiveness of utilising stage lighting as an alternative to the use of stage set in establishing spatio-temporal relationship in a dramatic presentation.... This further corroborates, in practical terms, our proposition of the exigencies and expediency (in material and aesthetic terms) of substituting or diminishing the use of stage sets, through the use of lighting in the creation of a dramatic environment (149).

The aforementioned multimedia production experimentations were carried out in Nigeria over 18 years ago. Not only that, there has been lack of continuity in the application of multimedia production technique to improve our live theatres, but also that the experimentations of the multimedia production that have so far been demonstrated in the theatre did not capture and address dramaturgical issues, which in the opinion of this paper has been bulging down the progress line of economic successes of the theatre. Consequently, this study, which received inspiration from those early works, engages in further research to determine other possibilities that will help address the current and future problems of live theatres in Nigeria. The study, therefore,

proposes lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances as a viable method to restore the vibrancy of live theatre practice in Nigeria.

Lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances can permit the possibility to juxtapose video film footages in an onstage live performance. The aim is to enable the stage performance to realise in action some fascinating and thought provoking scenes in the Nigerian theatre, which hitherto have been very difficult to achieve and/or give adequate representation perhaps due to lack of appropriate technical means for their effective realisation. For example, scenes like dream sequences, automobile crashing, actions in pathways and farmyards, flashback and memory recalls, etc. have not been represented well in the Nigerian stages to enable them portray their full intended meanings.

According to Joel A. Fanyan, the present manner those aspects of the performance are played “seriously lacks in aesthetics for audience appreciation of the art” (105). The flashback scenes, in particular, which constitute the focus of this paper, have often been played in a way that denies plausibility even in this present digital age that believes much in empirical evidences. The practice of “freeze and unfreeze” technique for instance, in an attempt to actualise flashback segment of a performance in our live theatres, is quite unrealistic in appearance. The position of this paper is that any method in our productions that does not help to transfer the message of the performance to the audience very correctly, should be replaced with the technology of the stage lighting for easy, plausible and effective actualisation without going into some unnecessary fakery. This is because by trying to create an illusion that would be difficult for audience to accept is an attempt to destroy the real illusion and to destroy the image upon which the foot of the theatre is strongly fixed. For this reason, lighting-based stage-screen intersection approach that can permit the projection of video record of such actions onto the stage for proper dramatisation is conceived as a better replacement of the old method. The adoption of lighting-based stage-screen intersection performances will introduction more meaningful, acceptable and realisable method that will enable flashbacks and other related ‘nagging’ scenes in the Nigerian stage performances to be acted independently but brought to the stage to intermingle with live stage actions through digital technology powered lighting. After all, Drew Campbell was very apt to have noticed quite early that, “society is becoming increasingly oriented toward movies and television” that “it often works to think about stage lighting in terms borrowed from those media” (71).

### **Synopsis of the Experimentation Play: *Silhouettes***

Tony Duruaku’s play, *Silhouettes*, addresses issues of succession and leadership in Amadike community. The face-off between Nwaeze, a man with inordinate ambition to become the next Eze in the community and Obialor, the custodian of the Royal Stool, who insists that things be done the right way, brings one to the knowledge of the past and the surrounding events involved in Ezeship succession in Amadike community. Amadike of the old was incessantly attacked, oppressed and chastised by Abobo Community. This nearly led to the wiping off the town out of existence. In order to prevent this, the people made a pact with the Apelle, a more powerful community to

protect the borders of Amadike land against the people of Abobo. This was agreed upon based on the condition that the child of the union between the Eze of Amadike and an Apelle woman shall be producing the Eze of the land for generations. The two communities further agreed to deploy a mystic man of Egwenga community to reside within and among the people of Amadike to ensure full compliance to this and to also protect the Eze Stool from any form of aggression and insurgence.

This arrangement grew overtime in the land of Amadike until the time of Nwaeze who desires to become the Eze of the people and perhaps because of his affluence wants the status quo be reversed. But it took the courage of Obialor, a descendant of the mystic man from Egwenga, to insist that the old order in Ezeship selection be maintained because though Nwaeze being a son of the Royal Household, does not belong to the ruling line because his mother is not an Apelle woman. However, Nwaeze was able to manoeuvre his way to get people to approve for a plebiscite to decide whether or not to reverse the old rule of Ezeship succession in the land. But having lost in the referendum, Nwaeze resorts to assassin squad arrangement to eliminate Obialor and his family for their involvement in making him lose in the election. But before he could realise this plan, Odejimjim, the community police invades his house on a crime of incest with her cousin, Ugonna and made away with him to an evil forest.

### **Realising Flashback Actions in the Performance of *Silhouettes***

It is important to note that the realisation of this script by the playwright heavily depended on the application of flashback technique. Thus, in the stage production, the paradigmatic case of this study, many flashback scenes featured. The dramatisation of one of such flashback scenes will be highlighted in this study to showcase how the researcher used lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance to solve dramatisation problems of flashback scenes in the Nigerian stage. In the performance of the play, Obialor, the custodian of the Eze Stool in Amadike community was seen received Nwaeze and Maduka who visited him in his house. The visit was meant to appeal to Obialor to give support to the ambition of Nwaeze to become the next Eze in Amadike community. But Obialor who has remained unchanged in his earlier stance, insisted that the old order in the selection of new Eze for the people must be sustained. His response, which incidentally does not support Nwaeze's ambition, ignited a quarrel between Obialor and his visitors. The disturbances attracted the attention of Nwanyioma, Obialor's wife and her son, Chidi from the inner room to calm the situation:



Pix.1: Obialor and his visitor in serious argument.



Pix.2: Intervention by Nwanyioma and Chidi

At the exit of the visitors, Nwanyioma appealed to Obialor to consider discarding the old order and allow Nwaeze to have what he is asking, for the sake of his life and his family. But Chidi later picked this up with his mother. In a private discussion with his mother, Chidi disparages the advice of his mother to Obialor his father.



Pix.3: Chidi, reproving his mother for her advice to Obialor his father.

He admonishes his mother for saying that his father should relinquish his role as the custodian of the Eze Stool in order to allow Nwaeze to achieve his selfish ambition. Trying to recall the mind of his mother about the situation that instigated the role his father is currently playing in the community, Chidi declares as thus:

What! Break the custom that was established nearly two hundred years ago? Have you forgotten the reason for the peculiar Stool ascension in this town? How it happened? Do you propose to move us back over 200 years? Refresh your memory (*Silhouettes* 10).

This statement by Chidi was the main prompter that instigated the application of lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance because it insinuates the action of a flashback in the performance. Before now, flashback scenes in Nigerian stage productions have not been presented very well. This result has been that implied meanings have not often been communicated effectively to the audience. In such situations, it is either that the flashback actions are just attended in-passing or where attempts are made to dramatise them, freezing technique is usually applied. Freezing technique involves freezing of actions in a performance where they are not needed. It is often used when two scenes are presented side by side in the same stage. Usually dual stage method is applied. This implied that when an action is going on in one area of the stage, actors in the other area come to a complete freeze where they assume a dead posture, moving no limb or muscles. They also look away from the other scene so that the audience will believe that they are not part of the on-going action. This method has been fraught with inadequacy. It is believed to be representing a type of illusion that will be difficult for an audience to accept.

With the application of lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance production, the researcher was able to contend with the deficiency in the dramatisation of flashback scenes in the Nigerian stage. In the case of this study, the flashback scene that is demonstrated here opened with Dibia Ukama examining Amanna, the sick prince in the presence of King Amadi and his two wives:



Pix.4: Dibia Ukama and members to the royal house attending to the sick Amanna

The tension that gripped the palace is on the account that the herbs of Dibia Ukama have not proved effective in the healing of Amanna. The other reason is about the delay in the arrival of the “Shrouded Figure”, a Dibia from another community who is hoped that will heal Amanna. When the woman of “Shrouds” finally came, she healed Amanna and in the process revealed that Amanna’s sickness was caused by the poison by Nwanyimma. Nwanyimma admitted this and said she did that because Amauda her child, who is the first son of King Amadi and who by tradition should inherit the throne was denied the right. She blamed this on the husband and alleged that he ceded the throne to Amanna in order to please Obidiya, his favourite wife.



Pix.5: The King raging over Nwanyimma’s evil deed. Pix.6: Nwanyimma blaming her action on the King

Defying all explanations proffered as the reason for ceding the throne to Amanna including the explanation from her son Amauda, that Amanna’s choice for the throne was because his mother is from Apelle, Nwanyimma conspires within her to cause havoc in the kingdom. She grabbed a sword, advancing to stab the King but was at this time caught into the powers of the “Shrouded Figure”, which made her to collapse and die.



Pix.6: Cross actions of Nwanyimma in her attempt to kill King Amadi and how she met her end

### **Beneficial Effects of Lighting-Based Stage-Screen Intersection Performance Production**

Before the use of intersection lighting performance in this production, the old lighting method of the stage was being used. This was until when Chidi, through his speech as indicated in Pix No. 3, called up for a flashback dramatisation. The use of lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance method to dramatised the flashback scene was based on the inability of the old lighting method to give befitting dramatisation to the scene. Lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance production is an electro-technology lighting approach of the postmodern theatre. Its application in a performance requires that actions of the scene needing its usage, be first designed and dramatised independently with production elements of other media. The dramatised piece is to be stored in a clip for easy retrievable for future uses. In this performance, the researcher observed the rules accordingly in the design of the flashback scenes for this performance. Using Intersection Performance Technique (IPT), the researcher intersected the documented performance of the flashback to intermingle with the on live actions of the stage thereby creating a merger of performances of different media in a

single live performance. Compared to the old performance method of the stage, the lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance inspired a new dynamism in the dramatisation of a flashback scene in the Nigerian stage. In the first place, it enabled the researcher to accommodate the eight characters involved in the scene and enabled them to dramatised their roles uninhibited. This was not the case with the old method.

The effect created in Pix No. 7 below during the healing process of Amanna is another merit of this new lighting approach, which also attests to its potentials for the improvement that is being canvassed for economic rejuvenation of the Nigerian live stage.



Pix.7: the Dibia dragging away columns of the poison from the body of Amanna

The use of this new lighting approach facilitated the researcher's ability to create the above aesthetic effect, where the poison that was transmitted in Amanna by Nwanyimma was removed from him. With this method, the poison, which was dragged away from Amanna was conspicuous before audience in the form of columns of white particles. This particular effect gratifies the audience and helped to sustain their interest in a stage performance. Another effect created in the performance, which also helped to sustain audience interest was the vivification of the mystic powers that was used by the woman of the "Shroud" to trap down Nwanyimma.





Pix.8:Nwanyimma attempting to stab King Amadi

In the pictures displayed above, Nwanyimma made frantic efforts to stab King Amadi with a sword she grabbed from the floor but was constrained by the “Shrouded Figure” who intercepted her with a mystic staff in her hand. She pointed the staff in the direction of Nwanyimma; using the staff, she disgorges conspicuous particle-like mystic powers, which blinded Nwanyimma, penetrates into the brain and made her to slump and die.

The black and white background created in the performance portrayed the message that the flashback actions are mere recollection of lost memories. It means that it is not happening in the present. Thus, the clarity of the original idea has been washed. This explains why black and white colour background is used in representing actions in the scene. To support this, the researcher returned light to the stage actions after the onscreen demonstration where Chidi and Nwanyiomma resumed their actions



Pix.9: Chidi and his mother

Chidi is heard saying this to the mother:

Those are the facts mama, Nwanyimma had poisoned Amanna, the heir to the throne so that, her son would ascend the throne at Eze Amadi's death. There was no known cure for the poison given to Amanna. But the woman of the "Shrouds" absorbed the poison from his system (*Silhouettes* 16).

### **Methodology**

The research method used in this study was mixed research method, whereby qualitative and quantitative research methods were applied. Data for qualitative method was collected using interview model whereby selected Nigerian lighting designers were interviewed. Data for quantitative method was collected, using survey approach, which involved the use of the questionnaire model in collecting data from members of the audience who watched the performance.

### **Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis**

The collected data are presented on a table and analysed using simple percentages. A total of 102 audience members who watched the performance formed the population of the study. The sampling technique adopted by the researcher is the purposive sampling technique. This is because the researcher had to look for certain characteristics that must be represented. Using this technique, a sample size of 62 respondents was drawn from the population and copies of questionnaires distributed to them. Out of the

questionnaires distributed, 54 were returned but only 50 were properly filled. Thus, this analysis was based on the 50 copies of the questionnaires that were properly filled and returned.

**Research Question Two: What are the factors responsible for the consistent decline of the live stage in Nigeria?**

Table 1 Responses on the causes of the decline of the Nigerian stage.

S/N	Question Item	Respondents	Response	Freq. of Response	
1	Influences of the screen media, insecurity, poor performance method of the stage etc, have been acclaimed to be the cause of the deterioration of the live stage in Nigeria. Do you agree?	50	Yes	45	90%
			No	1	2%
			No idea	4	8%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	Which of the factors among these do you think is the major cause for the decline of the live stage in Nigeria?		Activities of the screen media?	15	30%
			Poor performance approach of the stage?	31	62%
			Insecurity?	4	8%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Responses from table 1 show that influences from activities of the screen media, insecurity problem in the country, method of play dramatisation adopted by the stage, etc., are among the factors that are causing the decline of the live theatre in Nigeria. From the results of the first questionnaire of the table, 45 (90%) respondents said yes, 1 (2%) respondent did not agree; while 4 (8%) respondents could not make meaning from the question. But amongst these identified influences, it was further gathered that performance style of the stage is the major factor that is driving the audience away from the stage activities. This is ascertained from the responses to the second questionnaire of the table 1, where 31 (62%) respondents responded in the affirmative. Only 19 (38%) respondents believe that the problem is caused by insecurity and activities of the screen media.

**Research Question Three: How has this affected the economic state of the Nigerian stage?**

Table 2: Responses on the effect of poor performance method on economic situation of the Nigerian stage

S/N	Question Item	Respondents	Response		Freq. of Response
1	Could it be said that your non-regular participation in the stage activities is caused by the performance method of the stage?	50	Yes	40	80%
			No	10	20%
			Can't explain	0	0%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	Given an alternative approach to performance method, would your interest be restored to the stage?	50	Yes	40	80%
			No	3	6%
			May be	7	14%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Results from table 2 indicate that 40 (80%) respondents are willing to return to the theatre if there is an improvement in the performance method of the stage. 3 (6%) respondent indicates complete loss of interest in the stage activities, whereas, 7 (14%) respondents are indecisive. Based on this response, economic situation of the Nigerian stage can be improved if the audience patronage is restored to the stage. This can be possible if the performance method of the stage is improved.

**Research Question Four: How can the lighting address the dwindling fortunes of the live stage in Nigeria?**

Table 3 Responses on the effect of lighting in the revival of the Nigerian stage.

S/N	Question Item	Respondents	Response		Freq. of Response
1	Is this your first time to watch stage-screen performance in the Nigerian stage?	50	Yes	48	96%
			No	0	0%
			Can't remember	2	4%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
2	How will you describe the lighting method used in this performance?	50	Good	47	94%
			Fair	3	6%
			Not good	0	0%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
3	Would you want the stage to adopt this type of lighting for dramatisation of flashback scenes and related 'obstinate' scenes of the Nigerian stage?	50	Yes	49	98%
			No	0	0%
			May be	1	2%
			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

			<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
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The responses in table 3, in which 49 (98%) respondents approved the lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance productions and would want it to be continuously used as a lighting method of the Nigerian stage, as against only 1 (2%) respondent who is indecisive in his decision, shows that lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance method is effective in addressing dramatisation problems of flashback scenes and other ‘nagging’ scenes of the Nigerian stage.

### **Analysing Responses from Interview with Respondents**

The interview was targeted at lighting designers of the Nigerian stage. Thus, Alani Nasiru and Alphonsus Orisareme were selected and interviewed by the researcher. The researcher’s choice of these designers was motivated by their verse knowledge on the subject of discussion in this paper. The interview was meant to ascertain opinions of these designers regarding the declining status of the Nigerian stage and the possibility of using lighting approach to address this problem.

When asked if the progress level of the stage in Nigeria today is commensurable with what was obtained in the past, the interviewee (Alani Nasiru in particular) responded that productions in terms of play creation and the realization of plays on stage have reduced terribly over the years in the Nigerian stage. He cited that during the days of Duro Ladipo, Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi, and Wale Ogunyemi, among others, quality plays were written and performed regularly for members of the public who were very enthusiastic about stage performances. When asked about the factors responsible for the consistent decline in the activities of the stage in Nigeria, the interviewees pointed out that despite the rising of social insecurity, the activities of the video film in Nigeria and other related malignant factors, performance method of the stage and the recent parlous economic situation in the country have persistently threatened the well-being of the stage in Nigeria. They noted in particular that the effect of the retrogressing economy is witnessed in the rising cost of production with the result that producers rarely mount productions. When asked the possibility for lighting to address the problem of the live stage in Nigeria, the response received was that the potentials of lighting lean heavily on the growing technology; a lighting that takes advantage of technology can offer numerous possibilities for artistic explorations. They further noted that the present state of lighting in our educational theatres in particular, needs to be improved to allow room for meaningful changes in performance to evolve. In a follow up question on the possibility of transfer of technology from other media to the stage to boost the lighting performance, the response from Orisareme indicates that there is the need to have a change of emphasis in performance pattern of the stage. He said that the primordial method of production in our theatres should be improved upon to accommodate the prevalent technology of the time. He emphasised the need to upgrade our lighting system for it to function effectively so that it can assist the stage to actualise certain scenes of the stage that depend on electro-digital lighting approach to be dramatised. These amplify the point that, the present performance

approaches of the stage need to be reviewed and improved upon to encourage economic growth of the stage.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examined one of the perennial causes of the recent decline in the Nigerian live theatres. It observed that the manner, in which stories are dramatised in the Nigerian stage, does not encourage audience participation in the stage. This situation has been worsened by the current retrogression in the Nigerian economy, which has made production cost to skyrocket abnormally. The study observes that the funding of theatre can be improved by attracting huge patronage of performances even in the midst of the recession, if the performance method of the stage can be improved. The result available in the study shows that lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance production is an effective method to reinstate audience support to the live stage in Nigeria. This is discovered to have lean on its ability to achieve effective dramatisation of flashback scenes and other “obstinate” but fascinating scenes of the Nigerian stage. Thus, the study recommended for the adoption and subsequent use of lighting-based stage-screen intersection performance production by lighting designers on the Nigerian stage. This is to facilitate attempts to bring back the interest of the audience to the stage and thus, improve the economy of the Nigerian stage. The study, therefore, concludes that the survival problem of the Nigerian stage can be addressed by relying on effective lighting for the stage.

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