



## EFFICIENCY, SUFFICIENCY AND THE EXPANSION OF THE NECESSARY

### AT WHAT POINT EXACTLY DOES A DISCIPLINE STOP DISTINGUISHING ITSELF?

Not in a single day. Never in a single day. Homogenisation does not announce itself, it creeps in through a thousand individual decisions, every one of which appears reasonable in isolation. Only in hindsight does it become clear that it is not just the tools that have changed, but also what an entire industry regards as good design.

The history of lighting design has taken this path. Not because it lacked means, but because it had too many of them.

Few creative disciplines have undergone a comparable technological development. Lighting technology, once shaped largely by craft, has turned into an extraordinarily complex digital system. Modern lighting consoles now process volumes of data that would have seemed inconceivable only a few decades ago. Networks now connect thousands of parameters in real time. Fixtures combine functions that once required a multitude of separate devices. Movement, colour, projection, focus and brightness can be controlled with a precision that was long unimaginable.

This development deserves recognition. It bears witness to the creativity of engineers, to continuous research and development work, and to an industry that has always known how to adopt technical innovations with exceptional speed. The advances in event technology rank among the most impressive achievements of recent decades. That is precisely what makes the following observation harder, not easier.



The further technical possibilities have developed, the more numerous international concert productions resemble one another in their visual language. This observation is neither a nostalgic idealisation of earlier forms of production nor a criticism of the work of today's lighting designers. It is not directed against manufacturers, production companies or promoters. It is directed against a preconception that has crept in unnoticed: namely that more possibilities automatically mean more diversity.

How can an almost unlimited spectrum of technical possibilities lead to a relatively limited spectrum of creative solutions?

This question forms the starting point of the present essay. It does not refer to individual works, but to the conditions under which creative work takes shape. Creative work never develops independently of its environment. It is embedded in a framework of technological possibilities, economic conditions, institutional structures and cultural expectations. Anyone who engages with lighting design therefore always speaks of the culture in which it is embedded.

Therein lies the actual purpose of this paper. The question is not whether lighting has improved or deteriorated today. The question is not whether modern technologies for the event sector fully exploit their potential. The question is, however, how technological progress changes the self-perception of a creative discipline, and at what point that self-perception begins to blend imperceptibly with whatever happens to be technically feasible at the time.

This distinction runs through the entire text like a red thread.



Technical progress is measurable. Higher luminous efficacies, more powerful processors and more precise control systems correspond to objective criteria. Creative quality eludes such measurability. It does not arise from the sum of technical parameters, but from their meaning within a cultural context. Technological innovation and creative progress are therefore not identical, even if the industry increasingly treats them as synonyms.

At first glance, a new fixture is nothing more than a new fixture. Likewise, a new piece of software is nothing more than a new piece of software. Innovation means change. It is not the technology that decides whether this change constitutes cultural or creative progress.

The decisive factor is the concept. The concept, however, has increasingly lost the ability to acknowledge this decision as its own. The rapid pace of technological change has created the impression that every innovation represents progress simply by virtue of its novelty. Novelty, however, merely describes a difference from what existed before. It says nothing about its value.

The real misunderstanding in today's understanding of lighting does not lie in the technical possibilities. It lies in our notion of what we mean by "progress".

## WHEN DIVERSITY BECOMES TANGIBLE

The notion that technical progress inevitably leads to greater creative diversity is one of the basic assumptions of the modern creative economy. It appears so self-evident that it is practically never called into question. From it one may conclude that more possibilities must necessarily lead to more varied creative solutions.



The development of lighting design in the world of concerts and international tours refutes this assumption when one considers it over a longer period.

Creative diversity is undeniable. Artists pursue different aesthetic concepts, and productions differ in terms of budget, technical equipment and visual style. And yet, with increasing experience, an unsettling realisation sets in.

Numerous productions draw on a shared artistic vocabulary. It is not isolated effects or particular types of fixture that create this impression. A shared visual language has developed. The dramaturgical high points follow comparable principles. The movements intensify at similar musical moments. Light opens up spaces, narrows them again and develops sequences of images that, despite their individual differences, reveal a striking kinship.

This observation does not describe copying. It describes convergence. That is to say, different actors arrive at similar solutions under comparable conditions. Such a process requires neither prior agreement nor a shared intention. It arises wherever the same technological possibilities, the same economic conditions and the same cultural expectations meet.

The term homogenisation is therefore more precise than uniformity, even if both ultimately lead to the same conclusion: the differences are not eliminated, they are attenuated. It is not the limits of technical possibility that lead to comparable works, but their almost complete limitlessness.



The more extensive the available set of instruments becomes, the greater the need for orientation. Orientation rarely arises in the unknown. It builds on experience, on successful projects and on proven images.

Successful productions become benchmarks. Benchmarks become models. Models shape expectations.

And over time these expectations shape those aesthetic conventions that eventually appear self-evident to us. This process takes place out of sight. It is neither planned nor steered. For precisely that reason it remains invisible, and for precisely that reason the debate about lighting design still concentrates mainly on technical innovations. New devices can be presented, compared and assessed. Aesthetic conventions establish themselves gradually. They are not the subject of a market launch and they are not accompanied by technical data sheets. Nevertheless they shape the appearance of an era more profoundly than any single device taken on its own.

A look beyond the boundaries of the events industry confirms this. Architecture, industrial design and automotive design are going through the same development. As technical maturity increases, shared standards emerge first and shared formal languages afterwards. This is not a sign of declining creativity. Rather, it shows that a discipline has mastered its tools so well that shared notions of what counts as successful develop unconsciously.

Lighting design today finds itself in exactly this phase. Not at the end of its development, but at a transition. There are practically no fundamental limits left to technical possibility. The decisive question therefore now presents itself differently.



No longer: which possibilities will be added in future? But rather: how can creative autonomy be regained in the midst of almost unlimited possibilities? The next step in the development of lighting design does not begin with a new technical revolution. Either it has a cultural dimension, or it does not happen at all.

## THE TOOLS SHAPE THE WORK

Tools are generally regarded as neutral means. They serve to realise thoughts, to bring ideas to life and to make creative intentions visible. The more powerful they become, the greater the freedom of their users appears to be. This view is not wrong. It is, however, incomplete, and this gap has consequences.

Tools do not only serve to implement ideas. They influence them from the very outset.

This observation can be made in almost all creative disciplines. An architect designs differently when building with wood rather than with steel or exposed concrete. A photographer develops a different view of the world when working with analogue rather than digital photography. Even writers state that writing by hand and typing on a keyboard trigger different thought processes. The tool does not only change the implementation of an idea. It also changes what can arise as an idea at all. Lighting work is no exception here; it is merely the discipline that engages least often with this mechanism as such.



The history of stage lighting can be regarded as the history of its tools. Every technical advance has opened up new possibilities and extended the boundaries of creativity. The transition from fixed fixtures to moving systems was far more than a technical innovation. Movement, too, became a creative means of expression. Digital colour mixing freed colour from its material constraints. Media servers enriched light with animated visual worlds. Timecode united light, video, automation and sound in a shared temporal structure.

Each of these steps constituted progress. Each opened up new freedoms. And each brought forth new certainties, which in turn became new bars of a cage.

What initially appeared extraordinary has gradually become a matter of course. Moving beams of light have lost their sensational character. Colour transitions have become self-evident. The highly complex effect sequences have shifted from technical demonstrations to familiar elements of a visual language that is by now so familiar that it is practically no longer perceived as a conscious decision.

The more mature the tools become, the further their influence recedes into the background. Hardly anyone consciously decides on a particular technical approach. It fits itself into daily practice. Anyone who has worked with the same tools for years develops an intuitive feel for their possibilities. Some solutions almost suggest themselves, while others receive hardly any attention. Not because they would be unsuitable, but because they lie beyond the accustomed frame of thought.

This is exactly where that quiet form of homogenisation begins, which is barely measurable statistically and nevertheless shapes an entire era.



It would be wrong, however, to attribute responsibility to the tools themselves. Technology has neither intentions nor aesthetic ideas. It develops no concepts and formulates no creative goals. And yet it plays a role. Not as an author. But as a conversational partner who never contradicts.

Creativity arises from the dialogue between people and tools. Experience, intuition and cultural imprinting meet technical possibilities. From this interplay come decisions that are determined neither solely by the creator nor solely by the tool. The decisive question is not whether modern lighting techniques lead to aesthetic uniformity. That is already the case. The decisive question is whether we reflect sufficiently on the influence they have on the way we think.

Only once one becomes aware of this influence does the freedom arise to make a new decision. Not against technology, but in favour of creative work that uses its possibilities consciously instead of submitting to them unconsciously. In favour of a stance that shows responsibility towards the work and not only towards what happens to be technically possible at a given moment.

## TIME AS AN INVISIBLE DESIGNER

Light does not only shape spaces. It also shapes time.

This observation may appear obvious, yet it is one of the fundamental characteristics of all lighting and nevertheless one of the least often mentioned. Light never appears in isolation. It always unfolds its effect over time. It arrives too early or too late. It lingers. It disappears. Its meaning arises from the interplay of duration, rhythm and expectation. Anyone who designs light therefore always designs time as well.



This is precisely where concert and theatre differ in a way that is decisive for this text. These two art forms use the same means of expression. Both combine space, light, sound and movement in order to create a shared staging. Their inner dramaturgy, however, follows different principles. The concert has an exceptionally clear temporal sequence. A piece of music begins, develops and ends. The structure is fixed. Rhythm, form and musical high points form a precise dramaturgy by which all the departments involved orient themselves. Modern production systems make systematic use of this quality. Timecode synchronises lighting, video, automation and special effects with a precision that would have been practically impossible a few decades ago.

This development testifies to outstanding professionalism. It ensures reproducibility. It provides safety.

It also enables a precision that has by now become indispensable for productions on international tours. This precision, however, also changes the role of the concept. The more clearly the temporal sequence is defined, the further the creative work shifts into the preparation phase. The performance then becomes the implementation of a concept worked out beforehand. The decisions are essentially made before the first concert and are then carried out with great precision across the many performances. This is neither a shortcoming nor a limitation. Rather, it describes the particular character of an art form.

Theatre follows a different logic. Here, too, there are rehearsals, lighting sessions and carefully prepared sequences. But time here runs more closely in step with the content of the performance. Language has its own rhythm. Acting lives on reactions, on pauses and on the tension between the characters. Even with an identical staging, every performance remains unique through its nuances.



Light therefore does not only accompany the course of a scene. It accompanies its meaning. A change in lighting can highlight an idea, make an inner state visible and direct the gaze of the audience towards a new interpretation. Light thus attains an independence that goes beyond mere illustration. It becomes an integral part of the interpretation itself.

At a concert the emphasis lies elsewhere. Here light adapts to a musical form that already exists. A crescendo calls for an intensification. A pause creates expectation. A chorus opens up the space. These relationships are not schematic, yet they have proven themselves over the decades and still shape the visual language of large concert productions today. This is precisely why comparable design responses arise.

Not because the artists are pursuing the same ideas. But because they are responding to the same dramaturgical conditions. Part of the similarity described at the outset can be explained precisely by this. This similarity is not only connected with the tools. It also results from the temporal framework in which these tools are deployed. The question of the independence of lighting design thereby gains a new dimension: it depends less on the technical equipment of a staging than on the willingness to question the dramaturgical possibilities of this medium anew again and again, instead of settling for a repetition of what worked last time.

Every art form has its own time. Every lighting design begins with the decision as to how this time is to be made visible.



## THE LOGIC OF PERPETUAL GROWTH

Every era develops its own notion of what progress means. In the age of industrial modernity, progress was inseparably bound up with the machine. Later, speed, performance and technical precision became symbols of social development. Today progress is associated above all with the new. What is new counts as forward-looking. What changes is often perceived as an improvement, if only because it represents a break with the previous situation. The events industry is part of this cultural development and one of its most important driving forces.

There are few industries that live so much on the anticipation of the next event. Every tour tries to set itself apart from the previous one. Every production strives to develop its own visual identity. Manufacturers develop new tools, production companies explore new possibilities, and creatives try to respond to this with new forms of staging. This process has shaped the industry over decades and was originally the basis for its capacity to innovate. This is precisely why this concept deserves closer examination.

A novelty denotes a difference from what existed before. That is all. It is the cultural effect of this change and not its technical specifications that decides whether it constitutes creative progress. This distinction seems obvious, yet it quickly loses its sharpness in the everyday life of the creative industries. The faster technical developments succeed one another, the more attention turns to what will be possible next. The question of direction recedes behind the question of change.



Meaning is not the focus of attention. Rather, novelty takes that place.

With every successful production, expectations of the productions that follow rise ever higher. These have to be more ambitious, appear more complex and offer an entirely new visual experience. From these expectations arises a dynamic that cannot be traced back to any single decision. It is the result of the interplay between audiences, media, promoters, producers and creatives.

No one demands it explicitly. Nevertheless it is present, like a silent backdrop against which today's large productions play out.

What happens when the possibilities for improvement reach their natural limits? Not every stage can be enlarged. Not every production can deploy more technical means in the long term. Not every staging gains by becoming more complex. Beyond a certain point, mere enlargement loses its cultural persuasiveness, and it is precisely at that moment that the question presents itself in a different way. It is no longer a matter of the question: "What else can we add?" But rather of the question: "What actually contributes to the message of a staging?"

This question shifts the focus from technical feasibility towards creative necessity. Merely having possibilities is no longer enough. One has to justify them. In this sense, professionalism means not only mastering the technology, but also being able to explain one's decisions, even when no one asks. Herein lies one of the most important developments of the coming years: not in a renewed acceleration of technological innovation, but in a growing awareness of the quality of creative decisions.



Technology opens up new possibilities. It is design that decides which of them gain significance.

In future, advances in lighting design will be measured less by which technical limits they overcome than by how clearly they distinguish between the possible and the necessary. Only here does that creative maturity begin which strives not for the most spectacular effect, but for the greatest possible expressive power.

## THE EUROVISION SONG CONTEST AS AN EXEMPLARY PRODUCTION

Large international events fulfil a dual function in all creative disciplines. They are both public occasions and places of professional orientation. What is presented there reaches not only an audience of several million people, but also those who themselves conceive, develop and produce. Flagship productions therefore have an influence that extends far beyond the success of a single evening. They shape expectations. They set benchmarks. They redefine what counts as modern within a discipline.

The Eurovision Song Contest has held a special position here for many years. Few other productions manage to combine such great international renown with such a high degree of technical and artistic complexity. For the audience it is a television programme. For the industry it is a showcase for technological advances. Manufacturers observe the implementation of new systems, production companies analyse the workflows, lighting designers study design solutions. What is presented here as an advance glimpse can be found a short time later in touring productions, at festivals or in television programmes.



This effect occurs regardless of any intention. The Eurovision Song Contest does not have to be a marketing event in order to achieve a considerable marketing effect. Therein lies precisely its significance as a trend-setting production. Visibility attracts attention, attention guides direction, and direction influences creative decisions in the long term.

Against this background, ZentrumNeueLichtkultur has been systematically observing the development of the lighting installations at the Eurovision Song Contest for several years. The focus here is not on assessing individual manufacturers or conceptual decisions, but on one overarching parameter: the theoretical total luminous flux of the lighting installation deployed. This indicator describes the technical potential of a production. It permits no conclusions about how the light was actually used during the show, and it in no way replaces an artistic analysis. It provides a comparable point of reference by which the development can be traced across several years.

The studies carried out so far show a clear trend. In Liverpool a total luminous flux of around 28 million lumens was determined. In Malmö this figure rose to around 41 million lumens. In Basel the lighting installation exceeded the mark of 63 million lumens despite a smaller hall. For the Eurovision Song Contest 2026 in Vienna a total luminous flux of almost 68 million lumens was calculated. ORF confirmed a design rating of 3,000,000 VA, routed redundantly as two independent networks. The actual requirement was around 2,000,000 VA for the entire show hall, not for the lighting alone, plus a further 500,000 VA for the TV compound. The power came from the Vienna city grid, buffered by battery-backed UPS systems with a bridging time of around eight minutes, before emergency generators would have taken over. This system stood in parallel to the standard supply of the Stadthalle, not in its place.



These figures are in themselves neither good nor bad. They describe a development. Their significance only becomes clear in the light of a second observation: the spatial dimensions of the venues have changed only very little over the same period. The stage space is not growing to the same degree as the installed lighting power. It is not the space itself that changes decisively, but the density of the technical lighting.

What understanding of lighting design is reflected in this development? Is it a finer differentiation of creative possibilities? A redundancy within complex stagings? Or a cultural expectation that international reference stagings must achieve a higher visual density with every generation, regardless of whether the dramaturgy requires it or not?

The available data provide no answer to these questions. Rather, they make them visible in the first place. Therein lies their value. An essay is no substitute for a scientific study. It can, however, point out developments that would easily go unnoticed without empirical observation. The surveys carried out by ZentrumNeueLichtkultur therefore do not constitute an evaluation system. They award no quality ratings and compile no rankings. Their aim is to document changes and thereby to enable a debate that has so far barely taken place.

Cultural changes rarely announce themselves through individual events. They only become recognisable when one considers numerous small changes over a long period in their entirety.



## THE INDUSTRY'S LOGIC OF EVALUATION

The fact that the installed lighting power of large reference productions is steadily increasing must not be considered in isolation. It is the expression of a deeper logic of evaluation that extends far beyond the scope of individual productions and requires examination in its own right. In today's events industry, visibility depends above all on new technologies.

That is understandable. A new system can be named, illustrated, quantified and compared with its predecessor. A design stance eludes this kind of communication. It has no product data sheet, no model designation, no press release. Anyone who writes or speaks about lighting design therefore reaches, understandably, more often for what can be shown than for what can be justified. From this arises an imbalance that is not intended but structurally conditioned. What is quantifiable becomes visible. What is not quantifiable often remains invisible, even when it played a more decisive role in the result than any installed power.

In this context, the role of the trade media can be considered objectively and without an accusatory undertone. The trade media deal with topics that lend themselves to reporting. A new generation of control systems, a new range of fixtures or a new performance record can be the subject of an article that can be summarised in a few sentences. A creative statement setting out why a particular effect was deliberately forgone requires space, context and a vocabulary that is rarely available in the hectic working day of an editorial office. This is not a criticism of particular editorial teams. Rather, it describes a structural dynamic that practically no area of the media can escape when its attention economy is geared towards novelty and comparability.



From this arises a discrepancy that is not apparent in the individual articles, but only comes to light in their entirety. Technical innovations are visibly documented, discussed and catalogued. The creative approach, by contrast, remains largely invisible, even though it constitutes the actual core of every production. Over time, this imbalance ultimately influences the self-image of the industry. Anyone who is assessed for years mainly by technical key figures eventually begins to think in those categories themselves.

What this sector undoubtedly lacks is less the capacity to innovate than a language in which creative approaches can be described as naturally as lumens, pixel pitches or data rates. What is missing are terms with which a stance can be defined as precisely as a technical specification. Without this language, aesthetics remain a private matter for each individual lighting practitioner, instead of becoming a shared professional point of reference. This is not a reproach. It is a description of what a discipline that is already mature at this point still lacks.

## SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ASSESSMENT OF DESIGN

In recent years the concept of sustainability has become established in the events industry. International promoters develop strategies for reducing emissions, optimise transport routes, deploy energy-efficient lighting systems and strive for a more responsible use of resources. This development represents important progress. It shows that environmental responsibility is by now a firm part of professional production planning. This is precisely why it is worth examining this concept more closely instead of regarding it as a closed subject.



Sustainability cannot be reduced to a single objective. It is a multifaceted concept that connects technical, economic and cultural aspects. When one speaks of sustainability, it is not only about the energy consumption of a device or the efficiency of a production chain. It is also about asking to what extent the consumption of resources is regarded as appropriate.

At this point two perspectives meet that are often named together but have different meanings.

The first point is efficiency. This is about how the same output can be achieved with lower energy or raw material consumption. Modern LED systems, improved optics and intelligent control systems are impressive examples of this. They make a considerably more economical use of energy possible than earlier technologies.

The second point is sufficiency. It raises a further question. Not the question of how efficiently something is done, but the question of how much is actually necessary.

These two perspectives do not contradict one another, they complement one another. Efficiency makes optimal use of the available resources possible. Sufficiency places the emphasis on their extent. The calculation of luminous flux presented earlier fits into this context: the increase in installed lighting power in large reference productions coincides with the period in which the industry has increasingly defined itself as sustainable. This parallel alone deserves closer consideration.

It is not a matter of whether a production is sustainable, but of what this sustainability is measured by.



By the energy efficiency of the technologies deployed? By the logistical processes? By the life cycles of the materials? Or perhaps by the overall extent of the technical services provided?

These observations do not call the existing certification systems into question. Every certificate is based on clearly defined criteria and fulfils its purpose. Nor do they call the creative quality of particular productions into question. They merely widen the perspective. Sustainability has not only a technical but also a cultural dimension.

Every large production conveys an impression of what counts as modern design. Flagship products therefore influence not only investment decisions or technical developments. They also shape aesthetic expectations. What appears extraordinary today will count as the new standard tomorrow, and this mechanism has in itself no ecological limits. It is not enough to regard sustainability exclusively as a question of technical optimisation. It begins where planning engages with the relationship between effect and effort, and thus also where a stance becomes an ecological and not merely a technical question.

It is not necessary to exhaust all the possibilities available to us. Not every technical improvement necessarily contributes to strengthening creative expression. Quality often lies precisely in the precision of a decision and not in its scale.

In future, the debate about sustainability will be able to concern itself less with which technology can become still more efficient. Rather, it will concern which scale is actually justified for the realisation of a design idea. This also changes the role of the lighting practitioner.



It is then subject less to ecological requirements alone. It is part of a cultural responsibility. Every creative decision is at the same time a decision about how we perceive our technical possibilities. As a limit. Or as an invitation to make a conscious selection.

## THE LACK OF SPACE FOR DISCUSSION

Technical disciplines do not develop through better tools alone. They develop through the ability to reflect on their own foundations. Every mature profession creates spaces in which one does not merely produce, but in which one thinks.

Architecture has its own culture of building. Design has museums, research institutes and universities. In theatre, dramaturgy and theatre studies have long accompanied artistic practice. These institutions do not come into being because professional everyday life would be sufficient to guarantee their work. They come into being because every practice needs a place where it can make itself its own subject.

In the field of lighting design this question presents itself today with particular urgency. The technical advances of recent decades have been extremely dynamic. New light sources, digital control systems, networked systems and complex production processes have brought forth a discipline whose professional expertise enjoys high international standing. The practical professionalism of this sector is beyond question. That does not yet answer the question, however, of where this development is reflected independently of specific productions.

Where are concepts developed with which creative quality can be described?

Where are technological advances not only presented, but also placed in their cultural context?

Where is the responsibility discussed that comes with the deployment of ever more powerful tools?



These questions are not addressed to existing professional associations or trade organisations. These fulfil indispensable tasks. They represent the interests of their members, promote professional exchange, organise further training and build networks. It is precisely their closeness to professional practice that constitutes their value. Yet it is precisely from this closeness that their limits also arise. Organisations that represent the interests of their members or maintain close ties to industry and the market inevitably pursue aims other than those of an independent forum for thought.

This is not a contradiction. These are different functions which can complement one another but must not be confused.

It is precisely here that a gap becomes apparent. What is missing is a space in which one can engage with lighting design without being exposed to immediate production pressure and economic expectations.

A space in which the same question can be discussed over the long term, even if it does not lead immediately to a practical solution. A space in which a language can also develop with which an approach that has so far been lacking can be expressed.

Not: "Which system is the most powerful?", but: "What effects does this development have on the concept?"

Not: "Which technology will prevail?", but: "Which cultural notions does it evoke?"

ZentrumNeueLichtkultur emerged from this observation.

It understands itself neither as an interest group nor as a competitor to existing institutions. It makes no claim to formulate definitive answers or to set creative benchmarks. Its aim is an entirely different one: to enable an independent debate.



A reflection on light as a cultural carrier. On design as a conscious decision. On technology as a tool. On sustainability, which is as much a question of stance as of technology. On the responsibility of a discipline whose possibilities have expanded considerably.

ZentrumNeueLichtkultur understands itself as an open place of exchange. Its aim is not unanimity, but insight. Scientific and cultural progress rarely arises where everyone holds the same position. It arises where different perspectives meet in a well-founded discussion and everyone is prepared to question the position of the other.

One of the essential prerequisites for the lighting design of the future does not lie in the speed of technical progress. Rather, it lies in the quality of the dialogue between professionals and in the willingness to attach as much importance to the conceptual approach as to the technology.

## LIGHT IS CULTURE

This essay began with a question: at what point exactly does a discipline lose its independent character?

Over recent decades the technical possibilities in the field of lighting design have developed to an extent that earlier generations could hardly have imagined. At the same time the visual language of many international concert productions has converged. From this observation a question arises that is by no means easy to answer.

It is not a matter of whether technical innovation is desirable. Nor is it a matter of whether modern technologies in the event sector serve their purpose. Rather, it is a matter of understanding how technical progress changes the self-perception of a creative discipline and whether this self-perception is still capable of counteracting homogenisation.

The answer to this question is to be found neither in the technical data sheets nor in the luminous intensities. Technology has no meaning in itself. It opens up possibilities. It is design that determines which of these possibilities become reality. This is precisely what distinguishes lighting from almost all the other technical departments of a production.



It does not only fulfil a practical function. It creates atmosphere. It directs attention. It shapes spaces. It influences the perception of music, architecture and movement. Light does not only make things visible. It also determines how they take effect. Every decision regarding lighting therefore inevitably has a cultural dimension, whether the planner intends this or not.

Progress does not consist in pushing the technical limits ever further. Rather, it shows itself in the ability to use the existing possibilities more consciously. Not every technical advance necessarily leads to greater creative freedom. Not every improvement necessarily produces a greater effect. And no innovation has cultural value simply because it is new.

The next step in the development of lighting design does not begin in the research and development departments of industry. It begins where their results are analysed, placed in context and discussed. It begins with the will to regard design not only as a technical discipline, but as a cultural practice.

A practice that takes responsibility. Not only for the success of a production, but also for the images it creates. For the expectations it raises. For the notion of progress it conveys.

Therein lies the true future of lighting design. Not in the search for ever new possibilities, but in the development of an approach that can distinguish between possibility and necessity. An approach that asks what a staging really needs instead of asking what it can afford. Process-oriented, because it makes every decision comprehensible, including to oneself. Responsible, because it does not call technical excellence into question, but rather always also gives it a cultural direction. Sustainable, because it unites efficiency and sufficiency. And above all self-critical, because it always has the courage to question itself before calling on others to do so again and again.

The actual task of a mature discipline does not consist in knowing all the answers in advance. Rather, it consists in asking the right questions and developing the language necessary to be able to formulate one's own answers to them.



This essay is therefore not intended to be a conclusion. It understands itself as an invitation: to regard light not only as technology but also as a cultural carrier; to measure progress not solely by technical parameters but also by the quality of creative decisions; and to conduct the debate about the design of lighting with the same seriousness that stood to the fore in the development of its technical possibilities.

In the end, it is not the output of a fixture that decides whether technical diversity leads to a shared language or to an unquestioned alignment.

The decisive factor is the concept. And the concept always begins with a decision: the decision not to conform.