



## **Theatre Director as a Creative Artist: A Study of Bayo Oduneye's Creative Process**

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### ABSTRACT

Theatre is a complex art involving not one or two elements but many simultaneously: script, performance, costumes, scenery, lighting, and point of view. These diverse elements, a mixture of tangible and intangible must be brought together into an organic whole, and that is the responsibility of the director. The theatre director is a creator, an interpreter, who must be versed and versatile in every aspect of the theatre. He is an instructor in the theatre field who oversees and orchestrates the mounting of a theatre production. He is in-charge of all aspects of a production, as an artist, he or she has a vision that ties all performance elements together. In this essay, we are going to look at Bayo Oduneye's creative process. We shall explore this creative process from selecting play, casting and to performance using a few of his plays as models adopting the auteur theory of Francois Truffaut that states that the director is the author of a production". The essential idea behind auteur theory is that a director exercises an authorship over his work, and this authorship is present in every production he or she makes.

**Keywords:** Art, theatre, script, director, performance, creativity, vision, artist.

## Introduction

However, divergent opinions have been expressed by scholars and theories alike on the nature of the director either as a creative or an interpretative artist. Some believe that the only creative artist is the playwright and that the director’s responsibility only lies in interpreting what the playwright has written. According to Tovstonogor (1972), on director’s duty and responsibility to the playwright, “the noble grandeur of our profession, its power and wisdom lie in deliberately restricting oneself, holding oneself in check. The limits of our imagination are set by the author, and crossing them should be punished as betrayal of the author” (p.70). On the other hand, some theorists believe that the work of the director is more than a mere interpretation of a dramatic text, inconclusive as a creative work, since the essence of a play script performed is not on the pages of the play text, but on stage with the director injecting life into it through the actors, designers and other collaborators in the process of play production and thus they see the director as equally a creative artist as the playwright. The assertion is further buttressed by the fact that the playwright’s work is suggestive and not necessarily conclusive. In that the director then is a creative artist as the author himself and he must share the author’s creative attitude. Also on the creative prowess of the director, Clurman (1972), stresses the fact that the "the director is a job, a craft, a profession and at best, an art. The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being" (p.60).

Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that the script as written by the playwright still plays a significant role in the director’s bid to create a theatrical performance. It is the foundation on which the director builds using his own creative imagination to breathe life into the characters in the script by using actors who will eventually convey the message to the audience. Thus, according to Tovstonogor (1972), the play is just like the key with which the director opens the playwright’s treasure house, "but the key to every production is always to be found in the play itself. Every author for every play finds a particular system of conventions,

the rules of play. If the director does not like them, then he should not stage the play. But if he likes the play, then follow them. Indeed it is finding the rules of play for each given work that constitutes the director’s main task" (p. 62).

However, the director’s dependence on the work of the playwright as his compass should not be misconstrued. That is why Tovstonogor (1972), makes a clarification that “the director’s dependence on the author must not be slavish obeisance. Their relationship must not be that of teacher and pupils, commander and subordinate. Each of them is perfectly independent in his own sphere” (p.61).

To put all these arguments to rest, this essay shall establish that a director is both an interpretative as well as a creative artist, using Bayo Oduneye’s creative process as authentic confirmation of the fact that a director interprets the ideas of the playwright through the tools of his trade, like actors, designers, publicity managers, etc. The director equally creates a theatrical experience which could feel the pulse of life, sense what interests and concerns people and what the audience could react to and identify with. According to Tovstonogov (1972),

The theatre is by its very nature contemporary, and a later concept involves a great deal. There is the thirst for truth, the protest against falsehood, the urge to see life in all its wealth and genuine beauty and grasp the wisdom of the great achievements of our day and age. The social and aesthetic are fused into one; question of skill have become one with questions of allegiance. Only in this way we can present aesthetic problems without sliding into aestheticism, ideologically without dogmatism. (p.74)

## **Literature Review**

Drama is another aspect of literature. Thematically, it performs the same functions as the other two types of literature—prose and poetry. However, drama is characteristically distinguished from prose and poetry because it is meant to be performed or staged. The yardstick for

evaluating the success of a play is to stage it. In other words, drama is a literary form designed for the theatre in which actors and actresses perform indicated actions designed for them. However, drama, like other genres of literature, deals with life in a more distinctive way through acting. Drama can therefore be defined as an “improvisation of recreation of life” (Ibrahim & Akande, 2000, p. 37). The real world or life is presented as an illusion of reality. The larger and real world is compressed into a world of illusion on the stage.

Shakespeare gives the analogy between drama and real world –“Life is but a stage.” Aristotle’s definition of drama can be mentioned to buttress our analysis that drama represents people in action. It is an improvisation or representation of an action. Being closely related to the theatre, drama is audio-visual in nature. It is meant to be heard and seen.

Theatre means performance and its processes include playmaking. Theatre is the art of presentation and staging. Both drama and theatre are components of performance. Drama and theatre, according to Amankulor (1993), are “technique of telling a story directly to an audience or spectators, through actors who impersonate the characters in the story to give the feeling and sense of presentness and immediacy” (p.13).

According to Worthen (2010), “Theatre is a transitional space, not where we suspend disbelief, but where we are visible and lively part of an event.”p. XI. In the opening lines of *Empty Space* (1968), Peter Brook states, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (p.9). In line with Brook’s view, Barranger (1995) writes:

Theatre is where people make art of themselves for others to watch, experience, think, feel, and understand. It is a performance art that places human experience before a group of people...For theatre to happen two groups of people must come together; actor and audience must come together at a certain time and in a certain place. There, on a stage or in a special place, actors present themselves to an audience in a story

usually involving some aspects of human being. The audience shares in the story and the occasion. They listen, gather information, feel emotions and actively interact with actors and their events that define in some way what it means to be a human being in a certain circumstances- both familiar and unfamiliar. (p.3)

Ultimately, theatre needs three elements—actors, play and audience, but for theatre to actualize its potential, a person would need to impose his or her point of view that would penetrate all aspects of the production. That person is the director. In his own opinion, Hochman (1972), states that, "It is the art of controlling all the elements in the staging of a play" (p. 118). To buttress this point, Oga (1999) states:

The directorial art involves the ability to peruse a playwright’s script thoroughly, discover the intended message for the audience and be able to communicate such a message to the actors and actresses who, ultimately, constitute the conduit between text and the audience. The directorial art entails determining how the spatial medium would best project the playwright’s message. Directing also involves the harmonization of the efforts of the lighting personnel, the set designer, the make-up person, and costume and wardrobe workers among others. (p.65)

It is the task of the director to fashion the way to achieving expressive and communicative movements, gestures, appropriate verbal nuances, songs, dance, music, stage business and an effective use of eloquent silences. Because of the all-embracing nature of the directorial art, it becomes important that the director should have a fair knowledge of his anticipated audience as well as a mastery of his working environment. Dean & Carra (1980) define directing as "the presentation of a play on the stage for an audience interpreted both in terms of dramatic action and dramatic sound and in terms of the emotional and intellectual concepts of an author" (p. 24). Judith (1996) defines it as "an adaptation of a script" (p.5). Clurman (1972), sees it as "a job, a craft, a professional and at the best an art" (p.90). According to Brook (1989), "People so often misunderstand what the work of directing is.

They think, in a way, that it’s like being an interior decorator who can make something of any room, given enough money and enough things to put into it. It is not so. What is not there, what isn’t latent can’t be found” (p.5). While directing seems to be a mystery to Brook, it is very easy to Guthrie (1963), who believes that “as long as one can lay his or her hand on a good play, get a number of actors who will be willing to work, the rest is history... a genius can emerge through constant practice” (p. 121). Clurman (1972), holds a different view. He believes that "good scripts plus good cast make directors" (p. 105). According to Whiting (1954), “the proof of directing is in the performance. Good directing generates behavior in the actors. Rules and systems are but a means to an end, of value only to those with enough taste, judgement, and theatrical sensitivity to know, when, how, and where to use it” (p.166).

Cole (1992) states that, “the director may be considered as standing in for the author even when the director is the author not voicing the playwright’s position on matters of interpretation or by editing or altering the script but as the agent of the authorial process itself” (p. 8). This obviously explains the principal aim of director. He is to produce the playwright’s ideas as faithfully as he can. He is to discover the values and meanings of the script and bring them out through the actors, the scenic artist, and other resources at his disposal.

The job of directing, according to Whiting (1954), “calls for the imagination and sensitivity of an artist, the skill and patience of a teacher, and the efficiency and organization of an executive” (p.169). Henderson (1986) sees the director of a theatrical production as "a psychoanalyst, author’s surrogate, actor’s conscience and ideal audience" (p. 98-112). Craig (1987) believes that a stage director is “a super artist to whom even playwright is subservient” (p.90).

A good director must be identified with some traits of artistic personalities. According to Henderson (1986), "Director must be a creative being. Ideally, he should know literature, acting, the psychology of the actors, visual arts, music, history and above all, he must understand people and inspire confidence" (p. 98). In his own claim, Frerer (1975) says, "the process of directing a play involves

skillful use of craft, reasoning, and good common sense. This process must also involve such qualities as emotion, instinct and intuition" (p. 142). He concludes that the director must have histrionic ability as his first equipment. He requires knowledge: knowledge of language, human nature, manners, customs, dress, geography distinction, historical differences, mechanical construction, architecture, and religion ethics.

The essence of the above metaphorical statement is that a good director must have sharp eyes and good sense of rhythm. It is not necessary that he must be a good singer, but he must understand music and how to incorporate it into a production accurately. He may not be a terrific dancer but should be versed in different dance steps and must be theatrically complete in every aspect of play production; and he must be worldly. Henderson (1986) concludes that a good director deals in something that is seen yet unseen, a conjuring act that lifts printed words from paper and transforms them into actions, conversations, characters and places (p. 98-112).

### **Play Directing Process**

The directing process is basically a dynamic and intelligent series of actions performed during the art of play directing which evolves the individual’s age or convention. Directing principles, approaching, concepts, techniques and fundamentals of such individual’s age and convention often become the dominant factors in the process.

In play directing, we have various styles. Directors adopt a form of directing that falls into one or more of the following categories: The Dictator, the Negotiator, the Creative artist, and the Confrontationist.

According to Wilson (1988), “style in a theatrical production means the way in which a play is presented” (p.280). When a director arrives at a style for a production, two things are essential:

- It should be consistent throughout every aspect of the production.
- The style should be appropriate for the play.

For the director to embody the spine in a production and to implement style is to develop a directorial concept. The concept should create a unified theatrical experience for the spectator. Robert Wilson,

author, designer, and director as documented by Barranger (1995) says, “I usually find a form before I have concept. Before I’ve gathered material, I have a form. Once I have a form, it is a question of how to fill in the form” (p. 266). The best concept is one that remains true to the spirit and meaning of the script, but if a director is too intent on displaying his or her own originality, the integrity of the script may be distorted.

Essentially, the traditional directors strive to be faithful to the play and the relevance of the playwright’s intention. They consider the dramatic purpose and the dramatic structure of the play texts which help them to draw a directorial concept. The traditional director also works collaboratively with other arms of the theatre.

Auteur-director is a directing technique whereby directors re-create, interpret and presents plays in conformity with their own vision not minding the intention of the playwright whether it is distorted or violated. The auteur-directors control all the theatrical elements for their own interpretation and change or retain the image or metaphor expected of the play text. Whiting (1954), describes Vsevolod Meyerhold’s (1874-1940) method in this manner–“He was the dictator, the super artist from whom all ideas springs. At rehearsals his common statement was ‘observe me and do likewise.’ He created all parts: the actors merely imitated him” (p. 164).

Many contemporary directors use a creative amalgam of styles depending on the genre of the theatrical work, the nature of the project and the types of cast. In the preparatory stage the director must be sure of what he is venturing into. He must have focus and total confidence in his ability as a director. According to Cameron & Gillespie (1996), art is seen as:

An activity that makes its product for its own ends: art does not need to have any immediate, practical use in the world....That is, artists know in a general way what they are trying to do, and they possess a preparation and a discipline that allows them within limits to accomplish what they attempt. Artists also intend their art to uplift their audiences rather than to have some immediate practical use in the world (p. 151).



Dean & Carra (1980), in their own response to drama as art, opines:

The purpose of all arts is to arouse emotions... this emotional agitation must not be merely a passing effect; instead the force of the passion on the individual must be so profound that when he leaves the immediate stimulus there will remain a lasting impression conducive to thought. Unless thought and emotion are aroused, the work cannot be classified as a work of art. (p.4)

The director’s art and theatre are the two most important things to him at this early stage. He must know the types of art that he wants and make his own idea of the theatre obvious. Whether he is going to be a mediator, an autocrat, a coach, a teacher, a communicator or executor, Langley (1980), states that certain fundamental decisions must be made before it is put into action. These decisions will be based at least on one of these questions.

- Why? The idea
- What? The artistic form it will make
- Where? The place it will be expressed
- When? The time when it will be expressed
- Who? The people who will express and manage it
- Where with? The cost. (p. 3)

The implication of this is that the director who wants to succeed must know about the idea for the theatre. The preliminary stage of any theatrical production is mainly to gather and collate information through a well-developed intellectual, artistic and creative research. During the period of developing a theoretical framework for a play in the art of directing, the director must be able to find, define, or interpret the play through;

- The genre of the play
- The directorial concept

The directorial images and interpretation, the setting, the local costume, make-up charts, perspective and ground plan, cues and blockings, language, character analysis, plot structure, thematic pre-occupation, synopsis and biography of the playwright. The reason for

all these conceptions is to assist and guide the theatre director. A wrong step at this embryonic stage may be hazardous to the whole process. The stages are: play selection, analysis, audition, casting, rehearsals, performance and evaluation.

### **Bayo Oduneye’s Creative Process**

The main aim of this work is an in-depth study of Oduneye’s creative process. Oduneye, as a forerunner of stage directors in Nigeria, has over hundred plays to his credit but not much has been written about him. Due to this a few of his productions will be examined considering both artistic and sociological influence of his work.

Oduneye has directed several plays at home and abroad on various themes. He is an expert with the total theatre concept. He has also been successful with contemporary plays around the globe. His directing project plays were J.P Clark’s *Song of a goat* at Carnege-Mellon University in 1971 and *Masquerade* at Pittsburgh in 1972. His first play as a director in Nigeria was *Hassan* by Elroy Flecker (1992). Others are as follows: Wale Ogunyemi’s *Langbodo*, *Ijaiye War* (1974) and *Divorce* and (1981), Wole Soyinka’s *Child Internationae* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1973), Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (1980/’81), C.B Akinyemi’s *Skeletons* (1982), an adaptation of Donald Jack’s *Exit Muttering*, *The visit of Bishop Alaba* (1985/87), *Hadrian the 7<sup>th</sup>* by Peter Luke (1987), *A Theme for Linda* by Ron Milner (1971), *Foursome* by Eugene Ionesco (1970/’73), *Orison* by Fernando Arabel (1974), *The Mansion* by Rasheed Gbadamosi (1979), *The Greener Grass* by Rasheed Gbadamosi (1979), *Purse* by Alen Mezegede (1980), *Death and the King’s horseman* by Wole Soyinka (1987), *Antigone* by Jean Anomln (1988), *Trials of Ovonramwen* by Ahmed Yerima (1997), *Kaffirs Last Game* by Ahmed Yerima (1998), and many more.

Each theatre director has his or her own way of working creatively in the theatre but no matter how creative a director may be, he or she cannot work in a vacuum. There are certain elements that he works with which is the reason for his existence. The elements are very important to him because they are his working tools: the script, the stage, the designers, the costumier, the make-up artist, the lighting director, the

actor and the sound man. Without all these tools, there would not be need for the director’s existence.

### **Choice of Play**

Play selection is a very serious decision and care must be taken when it comes to selecting plays. This is the first step and if it is wrongly taken it may prove disastrous. In Bayo Oduneye’s opinion on play selection, he says, "Selecting a play has to do with the kind of audience you have in mind because they have to dictate to you. You know, you have to give them what they want..."(Ofime, 2002, p.30).

Oduneye’s first consideration is his audience before thinking of his interest in the play which he also believes must be a play of interest. It may be a play that he had no knowledge about or he had not seen before, but he was taken by it. As long as the play is good enough for his taste, perhaps funny or touching or inspiring, he goes for it. Some directors know their limitations when it comes to selecting plays for production. They do not venture into plays they cannot handle; any attempt for them to do it will lead to disaster. Sometimes, he is not the only voice in the script selection. Oduneye goes on to explain further, "...And again, depending on your sponsor. There are times somebody will come and say, listen, I want you to do this and that or this particular play for me" (Ofime, 2002, p.30).

This indicates that Oduneye had in some occasion directed plays which on a good day or normal circumstances he wouldn’t have done. These were chosen for him by some producers. When choosing his own plays, Oduneye is always looking for inspirational theme of interest. According to him, if he is offered a play to direct and he reads it and does not find any inspirational thing in it, he will not force himself to do it; rather, he would simply put aside or find someone else who can do it.

Directors differ on rehearsal time and schedule. Some rehearse at greater length, some likes to get the actors on their feet early. In case of Oduneye, he does not believe in a long term rehearsal perhaps because of his training which he explains as thus as documented by Ofime (2002), "Those of us who were trained in England, trained with short term" (p.40). Though rehearsing for a very short term and coming out with a successful production will depend on the dedication of your

people and if you know this is your profession. Within a few weeks, a play is ready, he concludes. A large number of his plays are avant-gardes. His fascination is based on the fact that it is very challenging. It gives room for director’s creativity. In Ionesco’s *Foursome* (1970/1973), Oduneye feels challenged because it was a creative tasking play that seemed to have no meaning. He had to infuse meaning into it. This play also imposed artistic challenge on the actors because they have to put extra work in order to understand the roles. Oduneye finds the characters in avant-garde plays fascinating. Oduneye is not a writer but he attempted it in adapting Donald Jack’s *Exit Muttering* which he titled *On the visit of Bishop Alaba*. It is an existentialist drama.

In the selection of plays for performance, Oduneye does not believe it should be based on the popularity of the play or the playwright alone but also on the capability of the director. In fact, this is very important. Not many directors have the capability to direct every play that comes their ways. Why most productions fail is not because the actors are not good or the script is that bad but because the director’s sensibility is not in tune with the script. Oduneye believes in directing different plays with variety of themes from domestic to the psychological, most especially playwrights who share a common social rather than ideology concerned. Among his domestic plays of interest are the works of Ahmed Yerima, Wole Soyinka, Wale Ogunyemi, J.P. Clark, Rasheed Gbadosi and other dramatists with the same social concern.

### **Auditions and Casting**

Numerous methods are used to audition actors for a play. Oduneye is very meticulous when it comes to casting for roles in his production. Explaining his style of audition, Oduneye confirms during an interview that:

There are times when I don’t believe in auditioning somebody. May be I have seen you somewhere in something and when the play comes into my hand, I will say, yes, send the script to so and so. There are times when you come to my audition and do not use the script at all. I will just ask you, may be, sing for me

or say a poem or whatever it is and if you fit into what I have, I cast you. (Macaulay, 2005, p.40)

In the professional theatre, he sends the script to actors. He also conducts private and general auditions. Apart from the individual talents, for Oduneye, the actor must be perfect for the role to make the job easier for him. As a University Lecturer, his close proximity with his students gives him the opportunity to know his students acting abilities—so selecting and fitting them into a role is easy. In Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1987) the actor he selected to play Elesin Oba was chosen on the basis of his past work which Oduneye had seen him do.

Oduneye has been known to prefer having a young accomplished actor play an old man than to have an older less accomplished actor, who cannot act, play the role following what Frerer (1975), posits that, "It is better to listen carefully and choose performers who are able to act the character, even if they do not look like the character" (p.8). When casting, Oduneye looks for a blend of voices, carriage, talents and individual technique in exhibiting these talents. Once in a while he goes for a raw talent because of his readiness to help the upcoming actors with captivating and extraordinary acting abilities to develop. This mostly happens in the institution where he teaches. This is what he did for the role of Olohun Iyo in *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1987). The actor that he cast for the role had terrible speech problems that other casts saw him as a minor and suggested that he should be removed, but because the actor has what Oduneye is looking for, he retained him. Instead of yielding to the cold tongues of other casts, he brought in a speech specialist. At the end, the character of Olohun Iyo emerged. The actor came out with a brilliant and scintillating performance.

It is generally believed that it is only the director who has the prerogative to cast but it is not always so in the developed countries. The producer and the playwright or a casting director may be the ones to do the casting while the director is just to take the actors through the rehearsal to the performance. In this case, whether a cast is wrongly cast or not, the director cannot change him or her unless the producer or the

playwright assents to it. Oduneye has never experienced this kind of working environment before.

### **Choice of his working team**

Ideally, Oduneye prefers flexible, cool headed, confident and creative people to work with. They are the ones who make up his working team—those who speak theatre, who understand the rules of the game, those who see theatre as a profession, a profession that worth’s the vigours. Shedding a light on this point, during an interview, with Roger Ofime, he affirms that "My crew members must think along with me. They must be level headed and creative. We must flow in the same creative realm of the production. I get angry if you try to distort my concept" (Ofime, 2002, p.46.). Once Oduneye has established his concept for the play, he liaises with his crewmembers, discusses his concept and after the meeting, he does not change their decision. The only thing that can make him change their decision is when he is not getting what he wants from them, and then he may be forced to change that particular crewmember.

### **Oduneye in the making of a performance**

As it is with every other theatre director, so it is with Oduneye. Rehearsal is a herculean task that needs serious concentration and patience. This is the time the artistry and other arms of the art come jointly with their creative ingenuities to mold up a performance. The making of this performance must be tight and complete to avoid a disgraceful end.

Oduneye is a creator within the interpretative process. The evidence of his creativity is seen in all his productions. In contrast to some directors who rewrite or eliminate test in order to present their own vision of the material, Oduneye is far away from that. In response to Ofime’s question on director’s faithfulness to the script, Oduneye says, "I respect my playwrights very much. All I want to do is to interpret what he has put together with the lines he has given me" (Ofime 2002, p. 47). Oduneye stays within the framework of the playwright even if he doubts the authenticity of the message in the script; he still makes sure he does not distort it. For instance in Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1987) despite his doubt about the reality of what Soyinka is

depicting, he still remained within the confine of Soyinka’s vision. This is not an indication that Oduneye is dogmatic when he handles a play; if he find the lines rigid or anything the actors are having problem with, or irrelevances – things that are not relevant to messages, he chops them off but not to the extent of violating the playwright’s vision. He cuts lines when they are too long and repetitive. Commenting on his faithfulness to the playwright creativity, Joke Silver says, as quoted by Ofime (2002), "The script, he respects as the bible of the world but sometimes, when he sees that the writer is derailing or not being coherent, he will just yank it out that particular scene" (p.40).

Oduneye believes in keeping a production book. It serves as a guide or reminder. He shares the same opinion with Hodge (1971) who says, "theatre director must perceive, he must evaluate, he must make diagnosis and he must devise remedies" (p. 7). On blocking, Oduneye pre-blocks not to the detriment of his actors. According to him,

When I read a play, I see the characters move. I can visualize where they are going. If I am reading a play, I can see the characters move from here to there. I can even see their costume. I think in colour and this is one of the first exercise for a young director. You must think in colours. I block everything because to me, directing is like composing. The whole thing must be there. You must see it.

On whether his blockings are fixed, he responds,

You don’t fix blockings. You see, all you have seen is just ... you know, you have this insight. Okay this is where it is going. You do not know neither it is straight nor ... like say in acting, what you do as an acting teacher is to put manure around the place and allow that thing to germinate. A good and successful director is that one who frees the actor’s imagination. He is that one who allows for creativity of the actor; that one who recognizes their contribution.

Oduneye devotes the first few days’ rehearsals to reading and study of the play. In his respond to the early stage of his rehearsal, he says, "I have a rehearsal pattern. We have to sit, we have to read, we have to

discuss. And I want to hear your views and I will give mine. I want to hear what you think. You are in the play and I will tell you what I feel the character is" (Ofime, 2002, p.50).

Rehearsals are taken seriously because it is where the play takes its form and it also determines the success of the production. Therefore, it must be well planned so that the entire cast and crew will know what they are doing, where they are coming from and where they are going. Oduneye does not work in vacuum; he works with a well-planned rehearsal schedule, which he follows strictly. Alongside this rehearsal schedule is a summary of his plans for the production. In summation of what rehearsal atmosphere should look like Frerer (1975) says, "at rehearsal, the director tries to create a milieu that encourages creativity. The atmosphere should allow the performers to have fun" (p. 191).

This is one of the jobs of the theatre director and Oduneye encircles his rehearsal environment with airs and graces. He puts his actors in very good frame of minds. He engages them in a little general conversation, creates ensemble through game and exercises, and makes them laugh together, to lose inhibitions, to learn to accommodate each other’s flaws and stupidity. At the end, the actors are able to demonstrate true professionalism. It is very vital for the director to develop a cohesive group of people working together to create the production. In this postulation concerning this cohesive unity Guthrie (1962), states, "If the thing is going to work well, they should be people who can, to some extent speak one another’s language. Who can exchange ideas, who can admit themselves to be wrong without red faces in the company of others?" (p. 248).

At every rehearsal, Oduneye introduces exercises, which he at times pivots himself. This brings a kind of excitement and joy to the actors. They laugh which helps them to shake off tension and boredom and enliven their spirit. Stating the purpose of exercises in his rehearsals he says, as documented by Ofime (2002), "I believe in actors who are physically and mentally alert. If you are not physically alert, you are useless. You will not perform well" (p.50). He also uses exercise to keep the pace of his plays from dragging.



Oduneye is very much against the ideas of the actors learning their lines ahead without proper understanding of the play. For Oduneye, the study of lines likens to learning a new song, which one must listen to again and again before the lyrics can stick in one’s brain. When the actor understands the play, the demand of the character, the situation at hand, it makes the job easier. Oduneye says,

I don’t believe in prompting. I believe that once the actor has gone through the rehearsal process, even if he forgets his lines, he will find it ... and once an actor is in character, once he remembers his blockings ... he will remember that he is to come here, what to do, when to get there or what he is to say. I think line and movement go together. (Ofime 2002, p.51)

Lines and movement go together during his process of getting a play together. He gives blockings alongside the actors studying the lines. He expects his actors to know what he does at any point in time while on stage even if he does not remember the exact lines. There are different kinds of actors: some hate being criticized openly, some until the director insults them, they don’t get serious. For those who cannot take open insult at rehearsal, Oduneye likes to hold individual rehearsal with them, and for those who he knows they are good but slow to getting to where they are going, they need director’s encouragement. Actors respect directors who understand their problems.

At rehearsal, Oduneye is ruthless; he doesn’t mince words when dealing with actors who think they know too much or more than the director, and the lazy ones. For him, discipline is the first thing in theatre and even in life. Rehearsals are the training ground for actors. Any actor that desires to progress in the theatre profession should be attentive, relaxed, and composed. Oduneye frowns heavily against egoistic actors and he doesn’t hesitate to rain abuses on them. Joke Silver, narrating his working relationship with actors, as documented by Ofime (2002), says, "you know he challenges you and he has a really awful temper but funny enough, he never uses to lose his temper anyhow but always will challenge us to work and he could be sarcastic as well and say some things and you say ‘Oh God have got to go back

and work’ and once you make Uncle B happy, he will offer you tea and groundnut” (p.40). Those were his trademark. She further says,

If you know your onion with Uncle B, then you have a working relationship ... there is no room for indiscipline, he just doesn’t allow it. If you are someone he respects, he will give you a warning ... Now if you repeat the same crime because to Uncle B, it’s a crime to be late or misbehave or think you know more than you do, he will give you your life history and he will not give it to you on a one on one, it’s for general broadcast. (p.40)

To control every activity in his rehearsal and to get what he wants from his actors, he uses a bully, aggressive style. He raves and rants and he threatens which actually works for him. For some directors, if their actors are not doing what they want, they go on stage to demonstrate it for them. This is against Oduneye’s principle as reported in Ofime’s interview with him:

I am not an actor, they are the actors ... it is actors problem to find their characterization. I have seen directors who get on stage and tell the actors “You have to do it this way and they will do it for you. The next thing you will see, the actors trying to copy and they will never get it right. So, it is better for you to make your actors look for whatever it is, he will find it. (Ofime, 2002, p.52)

Attesting to this, Joke proceeds as documented by Ofime (2002), "for me, working with him was a creation together. It was something we did together; it wasn’t something he plastered on” (p.52). To buttress Joke’s point, her husband, Olu Jacobs who is another powerful actor says when explaining Oduneye’s attitude to work states that. “he never claims to know all” (p.52). Also at his rehearsal, Oduneye encourages improvisation to spark and free his actor’s imagination, behavior, mood, and bodies for spontaneous reaction to unrehearsed situation that may come up during performances. As recalled by him, during a rehearsal of *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1987), the person playing Mrs. Pilkings accidentally left a half packet of cigarette in the stool, which was to be used by another actor. When Oduneye saw this situation, the confusion on the actors face, he stopped the rehearsal and told the actor

how such situation could be corrected and make to look like, it is the part of the play. The actor went back on stage, pretended and promptly stole the cigarette. On the day of performance, this same act was repeated and applauded by the audience.

Normally, two week before performance, actors are supposed to be using the stage alongside with their props, costumes and so on. At rehearsals, Oduneye makes sure all these are available for use and if they are not there, something near will be improvised.

Music is another integral part of Oduneye’s production. The lyrics must tally with the play. Days are devoted for the songs to be learnt and worked into tune for a perfect blending. He likes using younger actors to play old man. The make-up artist is always on his or her feet. Oduneye’s plays vary from one ethnic group to another; for this reason, to distinguish his plays background, he makes sure that the right and appropriate costumes and music are used.

Normally, in the professional theatre, the job of the director finishes the night the show opens but it is not so with Oduneye. Before the production opens, in the darkness, Oduneye will hold hand with his actors and ask them to imagine the play on stage from the first scene to the last. He would ask them to imagine themselves in their roles, moving on stage, doing what they should do. This exercise helps the actors to remember all that have been done on rehearsals. Up to the stage of performance the actors have depended on the director for many weeks, and they will continue to depend on him during the performance. The director has been the eyes of the audience for them all the way through rehearsals. They depend on the director to make sure they are doing a good job out there and to tell them so. They will want to know how well the show went on a particular night and whether it was as good as the performance of the previous night. The actors expect the director to be there because of the emotional relationship which has been created between them throughout the rehearsals. For Oduneye, that is the business of the stage manager. He does not stay to watch his plays because of fear of disappointment. He says,

I don’t watch my plays because if I sit in the auditorium and an actor is doing something which is totally out of what we have

rehearsed... and I cannot stay there and throw stone at your head or shout at you to stop that nonsense, why should I just go and kill myself sitting down and take all that kind of rubbish? (Ofime, 2002)

## **Conclusion**

On Oduneye’s appointment as the new Artistic Director for the National Troupe of Nigeria, he was charged with the responsibility of changing the idea and concept of the troupe and to improve on what Hubert Ogunde had done. Following George Bernard Shaw’s firm defense of the theatrical taboo against observers that, "...no stranger should be present at rehearsal...Rehearsals are absolutely and sacredly confidential. No direction should ever be given to an actor in the presence of a stranger" (cited in Cole1992, p.8). Oduneye barred non-troupe members from watching a production in the making.

Having worked with the PEC Theatre as the artistic director and staged plays of high standard with consciousness, he aims at continuing and maintaining this same high artistic quality standard with the troupe. During his tenure both at the PEC and at National Troupe, he directed plays of various themes: love, unity, oppression, liberation, and so on, laden with songs and dance. Olu Jacob, who played a prominent role in one of his plays, recounts his experience with him and says;

He is an actor’s director. He prepares every part of an actor so that such actor can give him what he wants. He feels very deeply about a play and he does his homework. This then is why he hardly refers to the script once he starts rehearsal and once you open your mouth to speak a line, he knows exactly what is coming from you. (Ofime, 2002, p.51)

Oduneye’s philosophy in life is discipline and hard work. This is his motto. He has no affinity for lackadaisical attitude and ego. This is the reason why some of those who had worked with him refer to him as an autocratic director. This philosophy reflects in his work and every other aspect of his life. In the light of this Olu Jacob says, as quoted by Ofime (2002),

For people who cannot think, Yes; for people who are lazy; Yes; for people who are not talented, who have theatre on the pages of the text book and they mechanically try to act; Yes, he is autocratic but to people who are talented and hardworking and understand why a director is in a theatre, it is a joy because he himself understands the actor, he understands his problems. The only time you see him angry is when somebody behaves stupidly; he can’t stand stupidity. (p.52)

For Oduneye, talent is not enough in the theatre; as a performer, one must have technique. The technique plus talent is the key to stardom.

In the field of directing, Bayo Oduneye has been used as a mirror to the upcoming directors just like Dapo Adelugba. He will be remembered for his artistic excellence in every facet of the theatre, his strong sense of discipline, precision and variety in the field of directing. His artistic prowess will linger in the minds of those who had benefited through his brilliant, adventurous, frenetic, eccentricity, creative and protean directing skill. He is worth being studied as an institution. As a technical man and stage manager before becoming a director, Oduneye is particular about stage movement and picturization. According to Frerer (1975), "as artist, we must have a passion for what we are doing in a deep, emotional involvement with art. Oduneye’s passion for directing is his key to his success as a stage director" (p. 142).

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