



## **Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The appreciative character of any theatre production with theatrical elements is enshrined in its visual symbolism. Experience has shown that no two productions, directed by the same director, performed by the same artistes, given the same venue and even same script, can be the same. This difference is cropped from the director's perception, conception, imaginative and creative impetus. Visual symbolism in the theatre as a medium traverse forms, textures, symbols, lines, lighting, circles and balance in creating an everlasting theatre experience. Visual symbolism is influenced by style, concept, forms, creativity, materials, technological advancement; it is result-oriented, though it must meet certain conventional objectives. Even though in Nigeria its role is in the main, supportive and complementary, its functions are numerous to the point that a production will be void without their application. This is because visual symbols are culturally bound and theatre is culture. This research was adopted in parts, on practical-oriented observations, examining aspects of visual symbols in contemporary stage productions as performed in the Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre in the University of Calabar - Nigeria, was chosen to strengthen this essay. It was equally observed that some directors attached little or no attention to visual symbols. This work, thus recommended a complete overhaul of the mentality of placing visual symbols as an insignificant measure in our theatrical existence.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Entertainment, relaxation and recreation are inescapable aspects of the human existence. The arts and acts in the theatre are diversified and varied. They are flexible in nature. Because of this diversified and yet flexible nature of the theatre, nothing else like the theatre can communicate more effectively and efficiently to mankind. Theatre communication makes use of two of the human senses principally – the visual and the aural. This is a truism if one looks at the theatre in its goals of the auditory which is sound oriented and

### *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

the visual which is sight inclined. Every theatre production is thus either meant to be seen or heard. Enendu (1994:17) states that: Theatre production depends almost entirely on sound and visual components for meaningful entertainment and communication; each one, to an extent, complementing the other. The audience comes into the theatre to see and hear the performance: drawing meaning and beauty from the stage where the events unfold in graphic progression.

The average theatre practitioner is used to speech art as one of his greatest tools for externalising his thought, emotions, desires, skills and experiences. Even though he uses gestures, body movements and other visual aspects of communication, these are mainly the supplement and not equivalent to speech. Yet, these same non-verbal or visual symbols are the onus of the magic of the theatre. They are what create spectacle and leave the audience in a state of disbelief. This business of theatre assemblage is shouldered strictly on the theatre director. Bassey Effiong (1992: iv) records that Wole Soyinka wrote and directed: *A Dance of the Forest*, for Nigeria's independence celebration. This was the very first time in Nigeria that play production provided "...some medium of realism such as flats and levels instead of symbolically painted borders on abaft," were introduced. Effiong reflected that Soyinka, J. P. Clark as well as other prominent Nigerian directors were more inclined to the development and perfection of dramatic literature rather than the experimental dynamics of theatre directing. It was therefore not surprising that "return from abroad of Ola Rotimi as well as Dapo Adelugba in the sixties ushered in the era of the well-made theatre director." Talking about the Rotimis and Adelugbas, Bassey Effiong (1992: v) observed that, "1965 – 1977, these geniuses not only exhibited what theatre directing is all about but also the pains of teaching the techniques of play directing."

#### **SYMBOLIC MODE AND THEATRE THEORIES IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE PRODUCTION**

Theatre audiences for performances are a mixed grill people. Theatre production performances do not usually take into cognisance the physiological disabilities of some audience members. It becomes imperative to create a means of entertainment that is enjoyed by all categories of audiences. Problems always arise when one begins to think of the ways and means of putting up a production with such a mixed audience in mind. It becomes more challenging when the theatre presented to an audience he does not know. This is particularly the problem when transferring a screenplay from one cultural milieu to another. Example is presenting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* into a Nigerian theatre setting without adequate adaptations. The theatre operators must endeavour to cater for specific audience type with a view of communicating and entertaining them effectively. But how effective are such performance approaches?

***Ndoma J. Brown***

Speech and visual symbols are the two principal ways of communicating in theatre. Yet different cultures in the world have different signs for different referents. Ukpong Orok (2002: 9) asserts that:

In the Chinese drama, the conventions of gestures and movement as well as the symbolism of the stage properties are immense in scope and mystifying to those unfamiliar with Chinese traditional forms.

Reinhardt G. Pauley (1970: 344) asserts that in Vienna, “a minimum of props and an emphasis on more than life size, massive walls and iron bars characterised a *Fidelio*’s production by Karajan...suggesting the atmosphere of violence and oppression that permeates the opera. Very dim lighting, typical of Karajan’s productions in general, reinforces this, even for the finale, happy and triumphant, the lighting is not brilliant.”

Formulating symbolism on stage design has maintained its importance for quite some time now. New approaches to staging, acting and directing have emerged. In the study of theatre without symbolic communication, there would be no sharing of experience and values of ideas. According to Myers & Myers cited by Emmanuel Akpan (1987: 12):

The ability to communicate to other one’s experiences is essentially what made man became able to transmit his knowledge - the sum of the stored up experience- to his children and so on. Human civilization began.

By understanding of symbolic mode, one can increase his knowledge of communication, develop an understanding of him and others as communicators, and become conscious of the responsibility and potential impact of communication in the society. Symbolic mode provides us with the many forms of communication acts. It introduces the communicator (the director) to appropriate research techniques and methodologies. It heightens his competence in communicating with others and in assisting others to communicate more effectively. It is through symbolic activities that we can increase the understanding of our interdependence through communication.

The theatre is a representation of life. It replicates life not only in action but also in symbols. The idea of using symbols in the film productions is to intensify interpretation in a particular form or idea. It is also used to establish locale, setting and above all, it brings out the central metaphor of a production in picturesque form. These constitute the visual symbols in their physicalness in relation to form and sight. Lights, costumes, make-up and props are also aspects of visual symbols in theatre. Visual symbols play very vital roles in buttressing communication in the theatre study. From the historical perspective, various theories about the origin of theatre are bound. The most widely accepted theory, championed by anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, envisions theatre as emerging out of

### *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

myth and ritual. The process perceived by these anthropologists may be summarised briefly...perceiving an apparent connection between certain actions performed by the group (or the shamans) and the results it desires, the group repeats, refines and formalizes those actions into fixed ceremonies or rituals.

Brockett (1999: 1-2) stipulates that, stories “myths”, which explain, disguise, or idealize, may then grow up around a rituals. Frequently, the myths include representatives of those supernatural forces that rites celebrate or hope to influence. Performers may wear costumes and masks to represent mythical character or supernatural forces in the ritual or in accompanying celebrations. Protagonists of this theory had the following speculations. Firstly, their views were grounded in Cultural Darwinism – that is, they extended Darwin’s theory about the evolution of biological species to include cultural phenomena – and consequently they assumed that human institutions (including theatre) evolved through a process in which there was a steady development from the simple to the complex. Secondly, they assumed that societies that had evolved such autonomous arts as theatre were superior to those in which arts had not been separated from ritual. Therefore, their accounts of primitive culture were written with the unconscious (but nevertheless condescending attitude)... Thirdly, they believed that, since all societies evolved through the same stages, those still – existing primitive or less advanced societies can serve as valid evidence to ascertain this.

At such time when naturalism was getting under way in the nineteenth century, a number of poets (actors) were setting themselves against the scientific rational views. They felt that objective, materialistic art ignored important aspects of the mind and spirit. Such artistes as Author Rinband and Stephen Mallarme rejected both nature and reason; instead, they attempted to evoke the eternal beyond the visible by creating suggestive symbols of man’s alleviation – masks and harlequins, tramps and clowns. They cultivated free association of words and images, including abnormal states of mind – hallucination, and even hysteria madness – through the use of drugs and alcohol and through fantastic sensualities.

Symbolism has had a considerable influence on the theatre. Visual symbolism in particular has had the influence of re-enacting and making the theatre more realistic, understood, interpreted, analyzed and sensitized. From the classical age, through the medieval, Elizabeth, romantic, renaissance, till date, visual symbols have been of immense impetus to the theatre. Apart from sound, nothing else like visual symbols would give the theatre meaning, colour, weight and texture.

### **VISUAL SYMBOLS AS TOOLS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE DIRECTING**

Visual symbols in the communication act play a very vital role in enhancing understanding. This is particularly true when it comes to communicators of

different linguistic cultures interacting. This is because it is a language of signs in their physical form and their referents. The language of which is embedded in seeing and deciphering the meaning. Effective visual representation is a code which when encoded must be decoded by the viewer (recipient) for communication to occur. In theatre, like in real life, it is all that is understood through the sense of sight.

Visual symbolism in the theatre is a product of design or theatre technology. And as Kalu Uka, in *CAJOLIS* (1989:1) puts it, “technology, properly understood, is a product of human creativity.” Theatre technology is exemplified in stage lighting, scene design, properties, theatre architecture, sound and acoustic, and costume and make-up. For the sake of this write-up, sound is treated infinitesimally for the mere fact that it primarily creates mood and atmosphere for the better understanding of the visual symbols. Emphasis will be placed on stage lighting, scene design, properties and costume and make-up. Theatre architecture is left out because of the assumption that architecture is fixed and imputes into the structure varies from occasion to occasion. Notwithstanding, technology is not the only factor of enhancing visualisation. Movement, rhythm, composition, picturization and pantomimic representation are all aspects of visualisation used as tools in contemporary theatre directing in Nigeria and the world.

#### **PURPOSE, FUNCTIONS AND AIMS OF VISUAL SYMBOLISM**

Variety, they say is a spice of life. The eyes, like most of the sensory organs, rely on variety for continuous and exciting moments in its existence. Monotony calls for boredom, dullness and stagnation. The theatre, more than any other human endeavour is built on variety in styles of architectural design, writing styles, acting styles, design, visual symbols and to name a few. The purpose of visual symbols is first and foremost to enhance the communicative value of the play production. The theatre as has been aforementioned is communication. And if communication falls short to use all elements at its disposal to make a statement it may not be adequately understood by the recipient.

In realistic productions visual symbols are in replication of that in real life. In the premier production of Tess Onwueme’s *Then She Said It*, a play based on oppression, exploitation, repression and separation in Niger Delta area, the setting was an exclusive reserve. A resort in an environment besieged by squalor, suffering and total lack by the preliterate. The barricade at the both ends of the set signifies a no go zone for none members. This aspect of seclusion was highlighted by inscription – **OIL CLUB – G.R.A – HIGHLY RESTRICTED**. The height of the set (a formalistic one) from the stage level is highly indicative of status-quo while the bourgeois play at the higher level for as long as they enjoyed autonomy and control, the commoners played on the bare stage floor. Since the theatre is a play of

### *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

levels, and formalistic staging, status-quo is determined by differences in levels, the director's blocking of the two classes of people is an ideal visual symbol of communicating ills of the Niger Delta. No doubt the fuel pump with the inscription – **NO FUEL, NO KEROSENE** is placed on the base of the stage. The commoners need kerosene and fuel for their daily chores. Thus they must get to the filling station, where there's no fuel or kerosene. How do they then survive to see tomorrow? Even when a menial job is to be provided for the commoners a notice comes up as to that effect. This one employment is insignificant percentage vis-à-vis the employment rate. Only a revolution could bring a situation void of class, rancour, cheating and inhuman tendencies. Words alone would not have sufficiently communicated this to the audience. The visual aspects were brought as a means of enhancing the communicative propensities of the production. Thus, the visual and the sound played a great role in communicating the plight of the down-trodden in *Then She Said It*, (See plate 1).

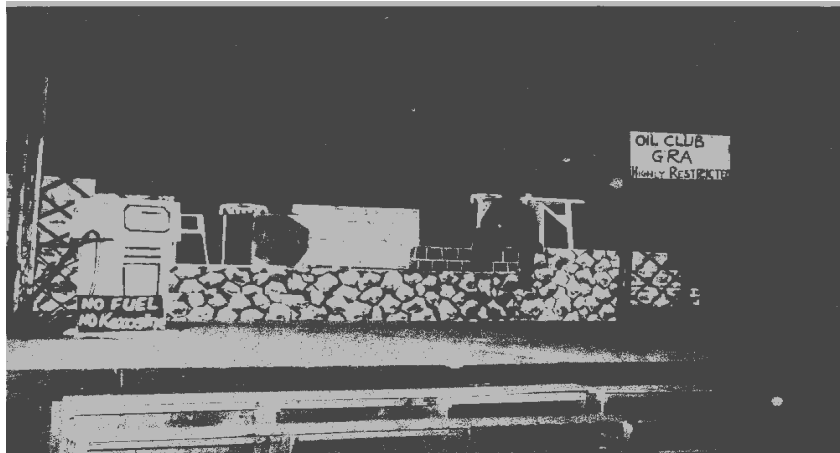


PLATE 1: A CLASS DIFFERENTIAL, THE BOURGEOISIES AND COMMON MEN (*THEN SHE SAID IT*)

It gets to a point where the technical director through the director may use puppets and profiles. This is exemplified in the technical directing of James Weldon John's poem Noah Built the Ark as adapted and interpreted for stage by Molinta Enendu, (2000: 200), writing about the "snake" that tempted Eve says:

The "snake" and 'the tree of knowledge' were positioned quite close to the proscenium wall... The 'snake' had an operator (a puppeteer) who was positioned behind the proscenium wall to reach and operate the mobile, "speaking" head of the 'snake.' With his whole arm into the 'snake's' head and neck area he was able to synchronize the movement of the 'snake' with the words

*Ndoma J. Brown*

of the narrator. The snake was able to mime her speeches to Eve... The snake was able to move, pluck the fruit, eat and give to Eve. Without the provision of this visual snake, the tree of knowledge with fruits on it (see plate 2).

The communicative value of the idea of the snake tempting Eve would only have played in the audience's imagination, thereby depriving them of one of the greatest elements that create the magic of the theatre – visual symbols. The audience surely left the theatre, thinking the whole thing a mystery. A member of the audience was overheard shouting “this is unbelievable.” The visual symbol of the ‘snake’ and its activities created an element of disbelief as a result of the plausibility, thereby leading to a situation of verisimilitude.



PLATE 2: EVE BY THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SNAKE ON THE TREE (*NOAH BUILT THE ARK*).

The “animal profiles” manipulated by “animal carriers” was also another “wonder” to the audience. The illusion was created that animals really moved into the ark and the audience believed that the animal carriers had entered the make believe ark, that covered the whole upstage when it was flown on stage, and quickly moved away into the wings. The whole idea of the ‘snake,’ the animal profiles and the ark was made possible because of the architectural propensities of the New Arts Theatre (Chinua Achebe’s Arts Theatre) of the University of Calabar. The theatre in question is a proscenium theatre, having a fly tower and a counter – weight fly system that creates ample openings for effective technical directing. No wonder, till date, theatre lovers and pundits of the University of Calabar rates Enendu’s dramatization of James Weldon’s Noah Built the Ark as one of the greatest performances that has been

## *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

mounted in the theatre in question. This is because of the near impossibilities that were made possible through the use of visual effects.

Visual symbols are either two dimensional, three dimensional or projected through the use of light. Two dimensional visual symbols are non-weight bearing symbols. They are represented in terms of painted scenery, draperies, wall pictures, drops, back drops, boarders, calendars, door and window blinds and everything that will sag without a support. They are either placed on the staged floor, attached to the wall, hung on strings or allowed to drop from a batten.

### **STAGE LIGHTING: THE AESTHETIC FUNCTION**

Even though light in its creative use can create mood and intensity in the theatre, or stage, it is not just in void. It's planning and execution varies from production to production depending on the demands of that particular stage production, the architectural limitations of lighting positions in the theatre and the design propensities of the lighting designer as to his understanding of the general and detail concepts of the play. Emphasizing this idea, Molinta Enendu (1989: 136) opines; "the lighting design should be based on details and particular consideration of the technical means by which the design effects are to be achieved. Basics are the energy source, the number of circuits and the dimmers, the types and the characteristic of lanterns both of ordinary instrumentation and for special effects."

Apart from illuminating the actors, and the setting, light as a means of artistic expression is an important aspect of drama. This is achievable by creating a controllable direction; intensity, colour and mood to create variation and contrast and also convey the atmosphere. But how does the light emanate? Molinta Enendu (2000: 172 – 173) states that:

The architecture of theatre is planned with provisions and considerations for technical and artistic requirements of light. Quite recently, the measure of successes and functionality of a theatre building is based, among other things on the theatre ability to conveniently and comfortably provide for the hanging and operations of the multi-lantern stage system and integrating them to the conception of the production.

Jean Rosenthal, "The Magic of Light" in *Scene Design and Stage Lighting*, by W. Parker et al (2003: 343) predicts, 'the basic concern in theatre lighting is with the dramatic intention of a particular moment. The visibility, or the kind of light, in which you see the actors and the scenery, the place, must have logic. The logic is based on tying all of these in with the idea of being there, in the scene, in the first place.' In pouring more light on it, W. Parker et al (344), considers stage lighting as, 'what is magic of stage lighting? The demands on it are many. The costume designer, while considering period,



silhouette, colour, and character in choosing the fabric for a costume, also wonders how it look like under the lights. The scene designer, in selecting the colours of draperies and upholstery or deciding the scale of detail on the scenery, hopes they will show well under the light. The primary concern of stage lighting is, and will always remain, visibility (a rule that the designer must never forget). .. Contrast has a great influence on visibility: intensity contrast, colour contrast, and contrast in direction. Good lighting ties together the visual aspects of the stage and supports the dramatic intent of the production. The lighting designer is also concerned with the revelation of form, the mood of the scene, and the composition of the stage picture.'

The architectural design of the Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre of the University of Calabar is adequately structured with space provisions for most elaborate and advanced facilities for stage lighting. This, Molinta Enendu depicts in a realistic production like, *Noah Built the Ark*, light is used in its totality – visibility, revelation of form, mode, composition, plausibility and naturalism. This was seen in the creation of the atmosphere befitting the surrealistic environment of the Garden of Eden – a garden with life, serenity, poise and with a touch of superfluity. The creation of such an environment by placing trees would not have been given it the most required mode except if it had been done on canvas. Canvas would have given it an appearance of plastic arts which would not have created the three dimensional environment necessary for the kind of staging. Rather with planted tree, the human controlled – animal profiles, the flown ark, the appearances of God and the flood needed plausibility. Through the use of gobos, gels, special effect lighting instruments and ordinary instrumentation brought together creatively and in their aesthetic functions much was achieved. For the example, when the ark started moving as being flown from the fly, (counter weight system), and the cyclorama by it moved with ripple lights directed at the attached cyclorama, nobody needed to tell another that, that was the ark 'rocking the flood.' Equally, the movement of cloud, the down pour of rain, and other aspects of climatology were effective as a result of the use of both ordinary and special effect lighting which proscenium staging offers best.

According to John Iwuh, (1989: 26 - 30) what is today called Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre (CAAT) of the University of Calabar, is famous and popular in Nigeria because it is "...equipped with some of the most highly complex and sophisticated equipment in terms of lighting and sound." CAAT, because of its well conceived and designed nature in terms of lighting positions and lighting possibilities. The lighting of *Noah Built the Ark* testifies to this. Without good gadgets and the technical know how of the director and technical director – Molinta Enendu, the production might not have been that heralded. The success of the production was in its lighting. Light in its aesthetic and functionality created a mirage of sorts, see plates 3 and 4.



PLATE 3: NOAH BY THE FLOOD, (*NOAH BUILT THE ARK*).

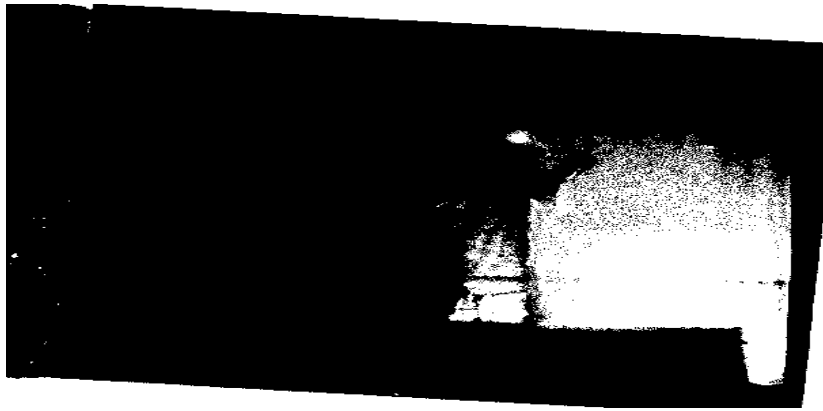


PLATE 4: GOD IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN "...ADAM, WHERE ART THOU?" (*NOAH BUILT THE ARK*).

#### **COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP AS CONTRIBUTORY ELEMENTS OF VISUAL SYMBOLS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE**

Costumes in the theatre are carefully planned and integrated with the actors and the action as to create imagining in the eyes of the audience. Costumes are selected, or created, with design notions of line, shape, texture and colour that make an impact on an audience at a distance. This means giving them what George Kernodle (1967: 428) calls "a theatrical flair, a boldness, simplicity and brightness." He goes on to say that, "costumes are usually made of special theatrical materials, painted or dyed and put together in ways quite different from everyday clothes." Thus, a play that is costumed shows

Careful selection of the clothes to project the characters to the audience. Clothes tell the audience the age, occupation and social status of the wearer. A well-selected costume should tell the audience many things about the character even before he speaks.

In Tess Onwueme's *Then She Said It*, a play based on the revolt of women against the prevailing statuesque characteristic of the Niger-Delta area, as directed by Chris Nwamuo with Molinta Enendu, the technical director, the reverend is immediately recognized as one not because of what he said but the costume – a priestly cassock. Equally same in costuming the policeman in the production created the instant impression of the audience's mind as to what he represents. The costume of Oshun when she finally rebels against white exploitation and pitches the camp of the common down trodden is a reflection of squalor, oppression and suppression which the Niger-Delta people had been subjected to.

Costume and makeup are synonymous to masking and an entire performance or part of a production can be wrapped in a mask metaphor, like the case of *Evil Forest* in Bassey Effiong's adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Thus costume and makeup at extreme levels can be classified as masking, and as masks the characters become liberated from ordinary human, inhibitions. J. N. Amankulor, in Singa Asanga ed. (1986: 54) looks at costume and makeup as one of the greatest ways of achieving characterization. He states: "in purely aesthetic terms, masking, disguise, and acting are synonymous. In each of them the actor is made to assume the role of somebody else outside himself." This point is reiterated by Walter Sorrel, a mask and dance aesthetician and critic when he says:

There was no disguise without a mask, which, always played the most important role as the counterpart of man's face, mirroring man's soul.

### **SCENERY AND PROPERTY AS VISUAL SYMBOLS**

A stage in its architectural structure is likened to a void and can only become meaningful if demarcated to suit the demands of a particular production. This is scene design. It is the stage setting. Roderick Ham AADIPL Riba (1974: 92) notes that stage setting in modern theatre:

Assist visual expression of the dramatic performance by providing a geography for the actor within the stage space, assisting the action and contributing to the atmosphere of the action. It also serves to screen other visual distractions from the audience.

In the proscenium staging, what is obtainable in the main bowl of the Chinua Achebe Arts Theatre of the University of Calabar, the house curtains are used to close off from the view of the audience the whole of the acting area except

### *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

the forestage or the apron which is designed to project beyond the house curtain. The house curtains or house tabs are placed behind the proscenium wall.

Another type of setting is the wing and cyc setting. This depends upon the use of the cyclorama and the legs to create the performance area. This is most effective in productions utilizing lights to create atmospheric climatic conditions are their visual symbols. As in *Noah Built the Ark* which has been aforementioned, lights were used in creating outstanding illusions that left the audience in total disbelief.

Permanently, masking is another way of achieving visual element in the theatre. This is done in a bid to mask the offstage edges of pieces of scenery set further away from the audience. It comprises the tormentor, and the teaser and other permanent masking at intervals between the false proscenium and the cyclorama. These are otherwise known as portals and aid to provide permanent masking from any seating position in the auditorium. The tree of knowledge in *Noah Built the Ark* was visualized as coming from the offstage. Even the snake (a puppet) was being manipulated from behind the tormentor (see plate 2).

### **IMPLICATIONS**

The task of the director is to interpret the play through coordinating the actors and other production elements. For a production, the director performs the triple artistic role of evaluation, interpretation and creation or re-creation. As evaluation, he prefers and chooses a particular play to study for the purpose of staging it. This is a very important step in the production process. He must be “powerfully attracted” to the script to be able to interpret it well for the stage.

Directorially, a play script is analyzed with an “aesthetic attitude.” This means that the theatre director studies the play with “disinterested and sympathetic attention “so as to arrive at an aesthetic value.” John Hospers (1946: 27): so to speak, for a planned production. Thus, if a theatre director approaches a play “in a non- aesthetic mode,” according to Elise Viva (1937) it may function as history, as social criticism, as diagnostic evidence of the author’s neurosis, and in any other indefinite number ways. Viva concludes that the difference between reading a literary work (a play in this instance) as history or whatever (reading it non-aesthetically) and reading it aesthetically depends, on how we approach or read it. Viva submits that “being an aesthetic object means being the object of aesthetic attitude.” Hence, his definition of aesthetic experience is “an experience of rapt attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object immanent meanings and values in their full presentational immediacy.

In contemporary theatre productions in Nigeria, many directors avoid the visual symbols or make very little use of it. They feel words alone could pass the message. Even where an effort is made at bringing out the visual

symbols, it is either not well achieved or at times done shabbily. This crops a result of lack of a trained technical theatre personnel, creativity and at times failure to plan. It may also be lack of sufficient background information concerning the cultural setting. In the theatre, every production has a specific setting. Every setting is linked to an environment, and every environment has a set of conventions adherent to the people's style. This builds up the expressiveness of the interpretative of the ideas there in proffered.

To achieve this on stage productions, the context of an aesthetic object in its entire ramification must be considered in its appreciation. That is to say all qualities are fused in a whole to that to be apprehended. This is contextualism and naturalism.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The theatre is constant flux. New ideas, concepts, forms keep on emanating everyday to improve or add to what has been. This is particularly true with technical theatre practices. New materials for the scene construction and the techniques for scene shifting abound. In the Nigerian theatre practice, scene shifting is mainly manual and except in few theatres in the country. This researcher is of the opinion to ease scene shifting and meet up with modern day technological advancement in theatre practice, theatre planning, design, and conception should be made in such a way to meet up with fast scene changes – using the fastest possible way.

Visual symbolism is a prizeless aspect in theatre communication. It's placement in theatre production cannot be overemphasized. But incidentally most theatre directors in Nigeria do not give it what it deserves. This is probably is because of budgetary constraints and also the over emphasis on the spoken word as the principal medium of imparting the message. As it has been afore-mentioned, theatre is an expression in sound and visual symbolism. Be that as it may, enough emphasis should be attributed to both. Thus, during the planning stage, the visual as well as the acting and directing should be given equal opportunities in the budgetary phase.

Research is the watch-word for excellence. Thus the director and the others involved in play productions must research into the background, the philosophy, psychology, historicity, and also sociological undertones of the production to give it an acceptable inclination.

### **CONCLUSION**

Visual symbolism in contemporary theatre practice in Nigeria is a remarkable endeavour and tool that enhances the communicativeness of a theatre

## *Visual Symbolism in Contemporary Theatre Directing in Nigeria*

production. It involves the collaboration of diverse professionals and craft men with diverse techniques, technologies, crafts, creative spirits and experience to achieve desired results. These results in their visualization play supportive and complementary roles in the theatre practice that can not be ignored.

This research is of the view that visual symbols in contemporary theatre production in Nigeria have come a long way in its functionality and creativity. Despite that, a lot still has to be done to enhance visual symbols as tools of contemporary theatre directing in Nigeria. As tools for the contemporary theatre director in Nigeria, visual symbols must be aesthetically, and functionally meaningful; they should be supporting and complimentary to the action and verbal symbols of stage productions.

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***Ndoma J. Brown***

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