

COMMUNICATING EMPATHY FOR CHANGE: A KINESICS ASSESMENT OF OJO BAKARE’S “THE VOYAGE”

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Abstract

The primary aim of any theatrical endeavour is to effectively communicate. Kinesics is a non-verbal communication concept which deals with the usage of body movements and gestures for message dissemination. Kinaesthetic empathy is a kinesics theory which explores the uncanny ability of making members of audience experience related feelings, and interpret the message being communicated through movements in a performance. “The Voyage”, created and directed by Ojo Rasaki Bakare is an improvisational total theatre which documents the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, using the tripartite performative mediums of music, dance and drama for communication. This paper interrogates the various levels of the Nigerian socio-political change identified through the modes of kinesic communication within the play. Through unstructured interviews conducted on randomly selected members of the audience, this paper establishes the diverse levels of kinaesthetic empathy registered through the audience response to the performance. The paper also examines the instructional, emotional and aesthetic values of movements employed in “The Voyage” performance, to prescribe effective change management in Nigerian governance. The study identifies the elements of kinesic communication such as dance, mime, gestures and dramatic movements, as extremely useful in disseminating the message of the play and engineering audience empathy towards the management of the change mantra, as regards the Nigerian political scene. The study recommends more concerted efforts at employing kinesics for effective communication in theatrical performances.

Introduction

Communication is both a conscious and unconscious activity which is vital to human existence and survival. It involves a process during which information is shared, received, understood and acted upon. It is also an act or art which depends on a response to stimuli, usually aimed at influencing opinions, decisions, and taste of the recipient(s). The concept of communication is derived from the Greek word ‘*communis*’ or ‘*communicare*’ which literally

connotes 'to make common'. This, perhaps, is why Alexander Gode's definition of communication is that it is "a process that makes common to two or several, what was the monopoly of one or some" (2). Communication as a concept has been in existence since the creation of man. The traditional means of communication which is primal and as old as time, is seemingly indestructible.

The traditional channels of communication are broadly classified into two, namely: the verbal and non-verbal modes. The verbal modes include spoken language, song, storytelling, chant and incantation, and special illusion while Ibagere defines the non-verbal mode of communication as "all such modes which make use of any device other than the spoken word" (1). Ibagere further notes that non-verbal mode consists of, body language, symbology, and dance (2). As a non-verbal communication channel, body language involves gestures and other signs made with any part of the body which are used to disseminate diverse messages. Symbology however, does not make use of any part of the human body in terms of gestures, instead it entails the use of objects which are deliberately placed in certain ways to convey certain meanings. Symbology could also be achieved via costumes, space, make-up, tattoo, extra-mundane communication, and visual signs. Dance on the other hand is the movement of the body to rhythm, making use of space and time in order to communicate.

In every society, communication serves multiple functions such as; information, socialisation, motivation, education, entertainment, cultural promotion, debate, discussion, and integration. As postulated by Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, the three essential properties in communication process are; a speaker, a message, and a listener (qtd. in Ruben 5). It is important to note that a 'speaker' does not necessarily have to 'speak' the message, the 'speaker' is at liberty to communicate through other means, such as the body, or through other non-verbal communication modes. The spoken word is not a necessity in communication, other devices can be used. The most important thing is for the message to be passed across and decoded accordingly. Having established the fact that communication is not restricted to the verbal form alone, the basic elements of communication can be said to be message, source, and receiver. A complete cycle of communication occurs when a message is generated from a source, and transmitted through a medium to a receiver, who in turn interprets the message and gives feedback accordingly. However, the cycle of communication is considered to be completely successful only if the information is received with the intended meanings, or if it is reacted to or acted upon as expected. This insinuates that the cycle of communication is

incomplete if the information shared fails to reach the intended recipient, or if the recipient fails to understand the information.

Research indicates that the preferred communication styles are “visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic” (Cattelan, par. 5). In the visual communication style, message is transmitted by sight and people learn by what they see, while in the auditory style, information is disseminated verbally, and people learn by listening. On the other hand, the kinaesthetic style of communication involves a hands-on experience where people learn through other people’s actions and movements. As a communication style, kinesics is a nonverbal code system which embraces a wide range of bodily language elements. The key submissions from Kinesics theorist, Ray Birdwhistell, are that:

1. All body movements have meaning potential in communicative contexts.
2. Behaviour can be analysed because of patterns and repetitions.
3. Although body action has biological limits, the use of body in motion for interaction is part of the social system.
4. People’s visual bodily actions can influence others.
5. A person’s use of bodily activity will have unique, idiosyncratic aspects while also being part of a larger social system shared with others. (3)

Basically, kinesics is concerned with the way movements communicate emotions and aspirations, and how such communication can influence the receiver of the message.

The aim of this paper therefore, is to study “The Voyage” as performed by the staff and students of the Theatre and Media Arts Department of Federal University Oye-Ekiti, as the departmental production for the 2015/2016 academic session. The paper will analyse the dance, mimetic actions, and dramatic movements which serve as key kinesics communication modes in the production. Using the content and discourse techniques for analysis, the paper also examines the ways in which the identified movements are instrumental in engineering audience empathy to the themes and message of the play. To this effect, this paper applies the qualitative audience research methods, by conducting semi-structured interviews on randomly picked but relatively small number of members of the audience in order to assess their understanding of the theatrical experience and response to the kinaesthetic elements in the performance. The interviews elicit instantaneous verbal responses from the respondents, concerning the meanings and messages they deduced from the mime, dance and other movement components of the performance.

Conceptual Clarifications

“The Voyage” written by Ojo Rasaki Bakare, is an improvisational play which documents the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, using the tripartite performing art mediums of music, dance, and drama for message dissemination. The play which aptly highlights the various milestones in the Nigerian political journey has been hailed by theatre critics as either a dance – theatre, total theatre, or dance-drama. There are several conflicting perceptions as to what a dance - drama, dance theatre or a total theatre performance is or should be. Many belong to the school of thought that the three genres differ from one another, while some opine that the three of them are one and same. A close observation however, reveals that the elements of the play in performance, conforms to the set tenets and structure of total theatre, putting to judicious use dialogue, songs, music, chants, dance, mimes, dramatic movements, and other theatrical embellishments. However, the play relies heavily on kinesics modes of communication, and the use of dialogue in the play is reduced to the barest minimum. This paper focuses on the kinesics modes of communication in the play and their effect on the audience.

Since the inception of man, the human body has always been employed as a unique, expressive, and vital channel of communication. For this reason, gestures, dance, and other body movements are considered to be imbued with values and meanings. So also, movements in theatrical endeavours are expressive of the specific feelings and emotions of the creator, and the mode through which kinesics elements engage the audience is known as kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetics is a coinage of the two Greek words ‘kin’ and ‘esthesia’. The word ‘kin’ means ‘to move’ or, ‘to set in motion’, while ‘esthesia’ refers to ‘perception’, ‘sensitivity’, or ‘feeling’. Also, the word ‘empathy’ is an Anglophone version of the Greek word ‘empathia’ which means ‘physical affection’ or ‘passion’. Empathy basically refers to the capacity to share and understand the feelings of another, or the ability to mentally place oneself in the other’s position. Therefore, it is within reason to project that kinaesthetic empathy is the receptiveness of the audience while watching kinesics elements in a performance, or the way viewers respond directly to the art of movements.

Kinaesthetic empathy is the ability of the viewers of a performance to feel psychologically connected to the movements being exhibited by the performer(s). There are several arguments to buttress the fact that “kinaesthesia (sensation of movement and position) is central to audience consciousness or spectator response”, and that “audiences can experience

physical and imaginative effects of movements” in performance (watchingdance.org). John Hartley opines that “the semiotics of movement, especially human movement and gesture, (either) movement both of the body and by locomotion, is not merely functional of but is also coded, meaningful and communicative”. He also states that “walking is highly communicative, bringing posture, speed, directions etc. to bear meaning” (152). Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) who is very articulate in his shift from sympathy to empathy which is captured in the *Einfühlung* theory asserts thus:

There are three areas of knowledge. I know of things, of myself, and of other egos. The sources of these three are: 1) of things: perception, 2) of myself: Inner perception, 3) of others: empathy (*Einfühlung*)... empathy, as the knowledge of other selves, is the result/combination of two tendencies. One is the instinct, or instinctive impulse, of the expression of life. The other is the instinct of imitation... I imitate others' expression which arouses a similar experience in me, resulting in an understanding, which I project back into the other...Imitation of expression plus projection into the other results in to the identification with the other. (qtd. in Burns 3)

Lipps' theory extends art from mere visual illusions to interpersonal understanding. He argues that when observing a body in motion, such as an acrobat, spectators could experience an 'inner mimesis', where they feel as if they were enacting the actions they were observing (qtd. in Burns 4). Kinaesthetic empathy ignites audience consciousness and response to movements in performance. It also makes audience to imagine and even experience physical effects of movement being watched.

Dance which is a stylized form of movement which entertains as well as informs. It has proved to be a vital performing art, and a catalyst for social engineering. While John Hartley asserts that “dance is the aestheticisation of kinetic codes” (152), Ufford-Azorbo stresses that “as a vehicle of interaction, dance employs the use of non-verbal bodily language to communicate” (14). The foregoing postulations make us dissent with Nadel's contention that, “dance is not a substance that can be felt, lifted, or weighed” (1). While dance may be incapable of being lifted or weighed as a matter, dance can be perceived, sensed, and felt, and this in fact, is the very essence of the concept of kinaesthetics. Speaking on the kinaesthetic energy in movements, Ufford-Azorbo states that “movements which are abstracted from everyday use and

transformed into an artistic product such as dance, send felt meanings to the audience who join in the day to day experience of movement. As such, the audience identify with messages sent across through movement in the artistic world” (19).

To corroborate Ufford-Azorbo’s statement, Burt explains the relationship between movements and dance thus:

Movement is therefore reiterated as the life force and essence of dance. The spectator empathises with the kinaesthetic response to movement exhibited by the dancers. This is a physical response, which creates images, ideas or feelings in the mind of the spectator to confirm the enactment of communication. To the modernists, dance is an abstract pure form capable of expressing itself. (44)

Dance is a global language with its own valid vocabulary. However, its manifestations may vary according to the dictates of climes and socio-cultural contexts. Metheny expresses that:

The vocabulary of dance includes the simple every day functional movement. Dance language authenticates emotions, aspirations and goals of a people while reconciling man and his society. It functions in religion, politics, occupation, and the entire sociological framework. So dance is a nonverbal symbolic form of communication, a perceptual form which incorporates all the senses while the movement is being performed. (49)

When prodded about thoughts on viewers’ kinaesthetic response to her dance works in, London-based choreographer Adesola Akinleye who is an artist-scholar, explains thus:

The person watching dance does none of the physical work themselves but in perceiving the performance, they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body. When attention is brought to the line and curves of the physical environment through choreography, the audience starts to experience a building with the same sense of movement that they see in dance. I see choreography working in such a way that the audience becomes aware of their own feeling of the aesthetic of the

body in space. I aim for my work to continue to be alive within the space when the dancing bodies have finished; for the dance to have left a trace. (21)

Akinleye's comments demonstrate that the role of kinaesthetic response to dance spectatorship is key because reactions are activated by the movements in performance. Admittedly, these responses enrich the cultural experience and the quality of lives of the viewers. They serve as mirror systems which assess the capacity of emotional perception in audience, exploring the meanings which the spectators attach to specific movements in a performance. However, audience response to performance could vary due to the different social contexts, lived experiences and education of the viewers.

Kinesics has been identified as one of the psychological approaches to non-verbal and interpersonal communication (Birdwhistell 7). Research efforts in the ways which audience appreciate, perceive and experience movements, have linked dance and other form of stylized movements in performance, with the sciences. In fact, recent studies in neuroscience suggest that when watching a dance performance, the members of audience experience the movements neurotically, as they mentally dance along with the performers. Hagendoorn substantiates this with his claim that "when watching dance, the observer is in a sense virtually dancing along...(and) spectators can internally simulate movement sensations of speed, effort, and changing body configuration" (4). Other notable researchers in cognitive science and neuroscience, such as Barbara Montero (2006, 2012, 2013), Carroll and Seely (2013), Franko (2002) and John Martin's 1939 theory of 'metakinetic transfer', have also established that some audience members report feeling certain kinesthetic responses such as a quickening heart rate and certain tensions along with more mysterious feelings in their muscles and nervous systems while watching dance performances. John Martins is known for his argument in favour of 'metakinetic transfer' through an exploration of the connection between movements and neuroscience. He posits that "Kinaesthetic empathy is the spectator's inner mimicry, metakinesis which is a motor experience which left traces 'paths' closely associated with emotions in the neuromuscular system" (19).

A further study of psychoanalytic therapy in neuroscience reveals that the Sigmund Freud's 'Free Association' technique is used to help patients learn more about what they see, think, and feel. The goal of the technique is "to identify genuine thoughts and feelings about life situations that might be problematic yet not be self-evident". Freud reportedly "used Free Association

to help his patients discover unconscious thoughts or feelings, and they were better able to manage them or *change* problematic behaviours” (emphasis mine, qtd. in Gilles, Para. 1, 2 &3.). The Free Association technique is typically performed in a therapy setting by first having the patient get into a relaxed position, usually in dim light, after which the patient is made to reflect on situations or events. In relating this technique to kinaesthetic empathy in theatre parlance, the audience becomes the patient(s), and the theatre becomes the clinic.

While watching a performance replete with stylized movements, audience empathy is inspired by their perception of the movements of the performer(s). This psychological connection between the audience and performer could lead to the influence of change in the viewers’ attitudes and ideologies. An internal simulation of the mind enables the viewer to go beyond just detachment of mere watching a performance, and this makes the viewer to imagine himself as an active participant in the performance experience. The viewers’ perception of the movement actions in a performance could transport them from the physical to the performance world, thereby putting themselves in the shoes of the performer(s). The concept of kinaesthetic empathy is of paramount importance, because, the end goal of any theatre experience is to connect with the audience and influence a change of attitude and without empathy, this cannot be achieved. Thus, kinaesthetic empathy plays a crucial role in the audience’s reception of dance and movements in theatrical performances.

Synopsis of “The Voyage”

“The Voyage” is an improvisational play created and directed by Ojo Rasaki Bakare. The play dramatizes the dream of a drunkard who rejects his wife’s pleas to come to bed. The drunken man claims that whenever he sleeps on the bare floor, he is guaranteed to have wonderful and sweet dreams. Against his wife’s pleas, he proceeds to sleep on the bare floor, and he indeed dreams. In his dream, an elderly man tells to a group of children, a moonlight tale about a land called Alaoma. The tale leads to an enactment of Alaoma’s continual stagger as a nation after being released from the shackles of the slave masters. The play x-rays the challenges of a failed state; a state situated in the ferry (ship of state), heading for the ‘promised land’, but is bedevilled by the trio monster; corruption, ethnicity, and indiscipline. As the master paddle goes from one leader to another, the ship-of-state gets stuck and troubled by the storms from the deep. At last, a Master Paddler emerges with the mantra of change, to deliver Alaoma from the siege. Initially, he tries to revive the ship

of state all by himself, and he fails. Finally, with the support of patriotic and dedicated Alaoma citizens, the ship-of-state is revived, and the people joyfully proceed on the voyage to the promise land (Production Note, par. 1).

Elements of Kinesthetic Communication in “The Voyage”

As already stated, “The Voyage” production conforms to the structure of total theatre by employing a full dose of all theatrical elements in an eclectic manner. In “The Voyage” performance, several kinaesthetic elements such as mime, dance, and dramatic movements were put to use. On the ship which was constructed using human props, the various change of events and upheavals in the ship of state were communicated mostly via rhythm and movements, while the three lead singers assumed the role of narrators. This segment of the paper will highlight and discuss the points where kinaesthetic elements were deployed in the performance in their order of appearance.

The Slave Camp: The slave camp was used to represent the anguish which characterised the advent of the colonial masters. At the slave camp, the Alaoma citizens who had been enslaved by the colonial masters laboured, while the slave masters drove them to work harder by kicking and flogging them with cudgels. This continued until an Alaoma woman could take it no more. She stood up to the Whiteman and all the other Alaoma citizens joined her in the revolution. In the end, the Whiteman gave in to the demands of the Alaoma people, lowered the union jack, and raised the Alaoma flag painted in colours green, white, and green to signify the Nigerian independence.

In this bit, there was no spoken words or dialogue, however, the message of the song was unmistakable.

Song:

Kuyak eyen abiara, kuyak eyen abiara
Nigeria edin dum eyen Abasi eyen amade

Transliteration:

Do not let Nigeria be destroyed
Nigeria belongs to us all

To embellish the song, complementary and contrasting mimes and movements were employed to express the colonial masters’ dictatorship and exploitation of Nigerians. While their facial expressions depicted agony, suffering and regret, the body postures of the slaves signified oppression and despair as they succumbed to downwards gravitational pulls. Their dance motifs depicted

labour actions such as; mining, farming, sweeping, washing, and cooking among others. Using different body parts, the dance motifs were fragmented in order to change the dynamics of the labour actions. Most of these movements were of collapsed quality, and were executed on the low level to evoke the images of extreme hardship, despair, and depression. The movements were choreographed through the loose cannon device, alternating the levels while using different placements and facing. The performers however displayed an awareness of other performers within the performance space through a sensitive timing of their actions. The labour actions and the oppression of the slave masters gradually built towards the climax of an inevitable revolution.

The Pre-colonial Era: In the course of the play, there was a brief flashback to enact the various ways through which the Alaoma people sourced for their livelihood before the arrival of the colonial masters. This bit featured occupational dances such as fishing, hunting, and, farming. The dances were accompanied by songs.

Song:

Che minye cheminye nalo
Chemi du kwong diyen dizin ta mini
Che minye cheminye nalo

Transliteration:

My people let us go to the farm
We shall plant, harvest, and feed
My people, off we go to the farm

Song:

Ota me, Ota menemene ta mene

Transliteration:

My friend, rejoice for our net is full of fishes

The occupational dances which culminated into a harvest festival, were executed in circle and mass dance designs to signify communal unity. The townspeople danced in joyful celebration as the Alaoma traditional ruler blessed the farm produce brought as tributes, and prayed for more bountiful in subsequent years. The typical camaraderie which characterises Nigerian cultural festivals was evident in this bit. The dancers were cheered amidst ululations, while some zealous townspeople were seen awkwardly trying to copy the dance movements. After the traditional ruler's solemn speech, a tranquil ambience was created as the people paid homage on their knees in

unison, hitting their palms to the floor and their heads alternatively. Here, the cumulative cannon device for movement creation was employed, as all the performers started and finished the movements at the same time.

The Elections: To parody the first Nigerian election, the political contenders in the play were made to compete in a sprinting event. The referee, through dramatic actions and movements, presented for campaign and election, the three contestants representing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria; Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. Utilising mimetic actions, the referee warned the contestants that whoever is first to touch the Green- White-Green master paddle, automatically becomes the winner and the Master Paddler. The comical but well-choreographed travel movements of the contestants depict the actual running for presidency, during which each contestant tries to outsmart the others. Eventually, the contestant costumed in Northern Nigerian apparels emerged as winner, and the people rejoice. As the play progressed, there was another election dramatizing the electoral process which produced the first democratically elected President after a long tumultuous reign of several military Master Paddlers. In their response to the rousing call to vote, the people adopted various mannerisms which typify the electorate during elections.

Song:

Everybody, yee, e dide edibo
Stand, stand, stand up and vote oh!

Transliteration:

Everybody come on, let us vote
Stand, stand, stand up and vote!

The electoral officer employed various popular Nigerian contemporary dance movements such as Azonto, Etighi, and Shakitibobo among others, to lampoon the rigging, multiple voting, ballot box snatching, and other shady actions which typify elections in Nigeria.

The Civil War Era: Through the orchestrated use of choreographed movements and variation of dance motifs, the various ethnic groups engaged one another in a fight. The organised chaos symbolises the bitter Nigerian civil war which lasted between 1967 and 1970, during which thousands of Nigerians, especially the Igbo people lost their lives. The movements were created through the simultaneous cannon device, with the performers executing the same motifs at the same time but starting at different points.

The Ship of State: There were six dancers permanently on set throughout the play. With their paddles, they symbolize the Nigerian ship of state, and each of them actually represent the six geo-political zones of today's Nigeria. Throughout the performance, their body movements communicate the state of the country thus; agile and lively movements to portray the nation's moments of economic boom, motion to symbolize national growth development, and slow, sluggish movements to demonstrate the deteriorating state of the country. All their movements are executed in unison.

The Military Personnel: The stylized movements of the military men each time any of them took over power, speaks of how well or badly the nation fared under their regimes. The military men's choice of reckless movements and the contrasting freeze executed by the Alaoma citizens in unison, suggests a questionable system of government which brought untold hardship to Nigerians.

The Set Piece Dances: The set piece dances were performed at specific points in the play to emphasise or comment on the actions of the play, and to celebrate the emergence of each Master Paddler. To celebrate their liberation from the slave masters, the *Akoto* dance of the Egun people was performed. The *Akoto* dance is a significant reminder of the slave trade during the colonial era, and the role which the Badagry town played as the departure point. The other dances such as *Jarawa*, *Egwu Odum*, and *Apepe* are pure ethnic dances which identify the geo-political zone from which each Master Paddler emerged. The choice of ethnic dances of each Master Paddler for celebration further comments on the ethnocentrism which plagues the average Nigerian citizen.

Solidarity for Change: At a point in the play, the Alaoma citizens got fed up with the laxity and unproductiveness of their Master Paddler, and they unanimously demanded a change. At that point, all the performers on stage formed a big circle to signify strength, unity, communal solidarity and commitment to a common goal. While dancing with a running movement, they clenched their fists and pumped them in the air in a militant style which is the campaign signature of the current Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. As the people continued to rally round, a character slowly emerged from within the circle. The travel movements of the performers were executed in unison to depict the Nigerian people's clamour for political change and

their pledged readiness to support the new political leader's zero tolerance for corruption.

Change for All, and by All: At some point in the course of the play, the ship of State became totally immobile, and the people expressed fear and despair. In their pleas for the ship of State to sail, they sing:

Song:

Se se se se ubele,
Se ubele, se o se ubele

Transliteration:

Sail, oh please sail, dear ship
Do sail we plead with you, dear ship

In spite of the people's pleas, the ship of State failed to budge. When all efforts seemed to fail, the people resorted to prayers in their desperation.

Song:

Wa wa wa, Oluwa wa, Oluwa wa, wa o wa wa wa,
Di di di, Abasi di, Abasi di, di o di di di
Bia bia bia Chineke bia, Chineke bia,
bia o bia bia bia Zo zo zo, Allah zo, Allah
zo, zo oh, zo zo zo Va va va Aondo
va, Aondo va va o va va va

Transliteration:

Come come come, oh Lord come
Dear Lord, please, come quickly to our aid

The upward gesticulations of the performers communicated their aspirations and desire for God's intervention in their time of crisis. Unfortunately, the religious leaders in the ship decided to take advantage of the people's desperation to exploit and extort them. In their movements and actions, the actors utilised the nuances and idiosyncrasies typical of fake and insincere leaders of Islam, Christianity, and Traditional Religions. The lead singers who doubled as narrators in the play, then advised the Master Paddler thus:

Song:

In our land, the task is huge, it is not just a man's show
We all have our roles to play, democracy at its best
After failing with his initial attempt to tackle the hydra-headed monster of ethnicity, indiscipline, and corruption which consistently besieged the ship of state, the last Master Paddler realized that the task was perhaps too huge for him alone. He finally listened to the advice of the lead singers, to solicit the

support of strong capable men and women from the diverse ethnic groups in order to achieve success in his noble quest. With the help of the chosen representatives from all the zones, the Master Paddler was able to conquer the monsters, after which he revived the ship of State. The people rejoiced for their collective victory, they sang and danced as they continued their journey to the promise land with renewed hope.

Changing Faces and the Phases of Change: Kinesthetic Empathy in Response to “The Voyage” Performance

“The Voyage” is a satirical comment on the various detours, signposts, and roadblocks which sufficiently typify the Nigerian socio-political journey. Documenting the socio-political journey of Nigeria as a nation, the play tactically illustrates the concept of change and change management in the Nigerian political history. Lush in the parodies of the play, are the characteristics of the Nigerian state. Marian Van Tuyl illustrates that “Motion arouses emotion, and emotion also brings forth motion, and the moment we speak of emotion, communication is involved. If you get excited about a dancer, even without knowing it, (s)he is communicating to you” (11). Therefore, this section of the paper discusses the different phases of change identified in the play, and the levels of kinaesthetic empathy registered through the audience response to movements in “The Voyage” performance.

Change Within the Play: The play succinctly describes the points of change in the Nigerian socio-political history, and the reaction of Nigerians at every point of change. Creative devices such as flashback and play-within-play were used to capture significant events in the Nigerian history, to which the other actors reacted to accordingly. The fact that the reactions are truly reflective of the Nigerian society heightened the esoteric value of the performance. Ann Daly submits that, “although it has a visual component, (dance) is fundamentally a kinaesthetic art whose appreciation is grounded not just in the eye but in the entire body” (243). The other performers on stage were reactionary to the movements of the dancers by cheering and mimicking the dancers to show how well they enjoyed the performance. For instance, the acrobatic stunts performed in the *Egwu Odum* dance intrigued the other performers so much that some of them jumped and yelled in excitement. Another example is the occupational and harvest dances which elicited a rousing response from the performers and the audience alike. Also at every point of change in political power, the performers would rejoice and celebrate

so much so that the audience could pre-empt their reactions to subsequent change of power, and they joined the performers in mock celebration.

Change through Audience Recollection: John Martins' position that "Sensory experience could have the effect of reviving memories of previous experiences over the same neuromuscular paths" bears on audience recollection during "The Voyage" performance. The play through dance, music, songs, dramatic movements and other semiotic mediums, highlighted the various points of political crises and change in political power in the history of Nigeria, which the members of audience, especially the older generation, were able to identify with. In an attempt to demonstrate the Nigerian civil war in the play, the performers broke into three factions chanting war songs in the three major Nigerian indigenous languages; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

Song:

A yanka a raba, kowa ya dauka nashi

Transliteration:

We shall butcher and share all

Let everyman pick his share

Song: Nzogbu nzogbu, enyimba enyi

Transliteration:

Let's match the strange elephant to death

Song: Ile won naa nu ni, odede won naa nu ni,

ile abere wo bi ile ekute, ile won naa nu ni

Transliteration:

Check out their horrible-looking abode

Their horrible rat-like abode

These war songs were embellished with vigorous dance movements depicting hostility. It is suggested that "spectators of dance experience kinaesthetic empathy when, even while sitting still, they feel they are participating in the movements they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas" (Daly, para. 1). Therefore, the war chants and dances in this bit, brought for the audience members, nostalgic feelings of the civil war. One of my respondents, Chinedu Iheanacho recounted with melancholy, how his father hurriedly packed himself and his siblings out of Lagos to their village in Umuahia when the civil war broke out in 1967. He confessed that the movements and actions in the play triggered a lot of memories of the civil war for him.

Also, during one of the military takeovers in the play, the townspeople froze in unison to depict fright, while General 'Kill and Go' effected a comic version of the stylized and regimented march past associated with military men. He rendered the following lines with an ominous mien:

Fellow citizens of Alaoma, this is to announce to you that I General 'Kill and Go', FSS, NTA, ANP, EKTU, HIV Esquire, has taken over the leadership of this ship of State from the former Master Paddler due to his inefficiency. So therefore, all airports, seaports, road ports, and even soup pots kpa kpa, are hereby closed down indefinitely. Citizens are advised to go about their normal businesses without any noisemaking as the journey continues. Long live the Republic of Alaoma.

Olori Remi Adejugbe, another of my respondents, recalled that the General 'Kill and Go's' movements and coup broadcast in addition to the varied degrees of the freeze positions of the performers reminded her of how much coup de tats were dreaded in Nigeria. She also narrated how everyone in their neighbourhood danced with joy to celebrate the demise of the particular tyrant military head of State being parodied in the play. This memory, she claimed, was triggered by the actions in the performance. The fervour with which the actors prayed, sang, and danced, pleading for God's intervention, reminded another respondent, Kemi Fagite, of the turbulent experience Nigerians had under the military regimes. She recounted how Nigerians were unified in the common goal of reaching God through various ways, in order to rescue Nigeria and Nigerians from the said military tyrant. According to Bakare (6) the circle floor pattern in dance communicates solidarity and communal unification. Fagite also recollected how the rallying movement round the final Master Paddler reminded her of how Nigerians seemingly voted with fervour for Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections. All these recollections professed by members of audience were triggered by the kinaesthetic elements in the play.

Change of Mind-set: As Ufford-Azorbo rightly cautions, in appreciating dance or any other art, one should allow the work to unfold, and not deliberately seek out or impose meanings on the work. She stresses that whatever one feels about an art work is the meaning derived from it, and that the meaning can be aroused kinesthetically and produce some correlative of the original experience (40). We observed that the members of audience

visibly and audibly went through a series of emotions in the course of the performance, ranging from melancholy to nostalgia, intrigue, excitement, spontaneous laughter, despair, anxiety, and hope among many others. The release and expression of these emotions are proof of the fact that even though the members of audience are aware that “The Voyage” was just a make-believe performance, yet they mentally partook of the experience with their entire beings. The events recorded in the play were imaginary actions which took place inside of them, making them part of the ‘ship of State’. Whether or not they are aware of this, every kinaesthetic element used in the play, such as choreographed movements, and dance actions in the play, built up kinaesthetic empathy in the subconscious of members of audience.

The kinesics elements in the play were used as sensory arts to set the mood for each situation in the play, and to evoke kinaesthetic empathy in members of the audience. The mental experience has proved to be capable of influencing them to contribute their individual quota to make Nigeria better, thereby engineering change. Olori Remi Adejugbe confessed that the movements and body language of the performers at each point of election in the play is reminiscent of the manner with which Nigerians create so much fuss about change in political power. She acknowledged that the play made her realise how Nigerians, she inclusive, rejoice at every change in political leadership, and then revert to status quo a few weeks or months after a new government takes over, allowing the usual impatience and discontentment to set in. She resolved to be less critical of the present government, and truly allow the ‘change’ to begin with her. Another respondent, Daniel Wapji, says that the realisation hit him that the monsters depicted in the play are indeed the source of the numerous woes in Nigeria. He said as a result of watching the play, he had decided to become a better citizen and play his own little part in making Nigeria a great nation.

Much Ado About ‘Change’: A Conclusion

The bane of *The Voyage* performance is kinesics communication. All the movements employed in the performance are visual clues to enact the journey of Nigerian nationhood from inception till date. At most points, movements were used for characterization, mood creation, as well as to reveal implications of specific situations. The performance which is replete with kinesics actions attracted varied response from the audience. Kinesics actions in the play took the form of either dance, mime, or dramatic actions, depicting occupation, celebration, solidarity, war, plea, appeal, prayer, and call to action. The kinesics actions evoked varying emotions such as nostalgia,

melancholy, and hope from members of audience. The actions are also instructional in pointing to possible solutions as concerning moving Nigeria forward.

We were able to judge if the members of audience really experienced the intended meanings of the play, through the facial expressions, mood changes, and verbal report from the interviewed members of audience. Several members of the audience were seen to be unconsciously tapping their feet, moving their bodies, and nodding their heads to the rhythm of the music, or just simply grinning. We observed that the audience members were active participants in the performance, actively engaging in and consuming the art forms and cultural contexts, hence, for every action carried out on stage, there was a reaction from the audience. It is important to note that at the point where movements were being used to tell stories on the stage, either as mime, dance, or dramatic actions, no member of the audience was detached from the actions on stage. Some members of audience were so engrossed in the performance with a high level of concentration, trying to uncover and examine details and meaning of the theatrical experience.

Recommendation

We must become concerned about the next thirty, forty years. Think what you can do for your nation, think for your future...think. Others did so much to get us to this stage... Do something to take the next generation forward. For the time has come for us to settle for the change that has come upon us, the change that we have all embraced, and by that change our language, our perception, our respect for law and order must change. No one else will build Nigeria for us, Nigeria will be built by Nigerians. I believe in Nigeria, and I believe in your future (*I Believe in Nigeria*, Chris Oyakhilome).

Change is a gruelling process which requires doggedness and deep commitment. It is not enough to merely make noise about change, if there are no genuine actions to back it up, it will not work. The unfolding events in the performance of “The Voyage” depict that the Nigerian people truly clamour for change, but they are reluctant to condition themselves to undergo the tedious processes of change. This paper fully subscribes to the message of “The Voyage” that a lone tree does not make a forest, and that genuine change can only take place when all hands are on deck for the same goal. As they say,

“to begin the journey of change, one must first of all put on the boots of self-awareness”, therefore, for true change to occur, everyone must do a thorough self-examination, and be prepared to be a part of the change movement.

A popular Chinese adage defines madness as the act of consistently doing things in the same way and expecting change to happen. This paper concurs that in order to effect true and positive change in governance, there is an urgent need for the Nigerian people to change their mind-set. The paper also acknowledges that the onus lies on theatre makers to seek out effective ways of engineering this change. By simulating the audience to witness the actions on stage it is important to give every member of audience something to take home, because it is impossible for them all to experience the same thing. The study recommends the exploration of the relationship between motion, dance and communication, by making more concerted efforts at reaching the subconscious of theatre patrons not only via dialogue, but also through kinaesthetic communication, for as Martha Graham aptly noted, “movement is the one speech that cannot lie” (237).

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INTERVIEWS

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- Chinedu Iheanacho. Personal interview at 6.19 p.m. on 25th January, 2016.
- Daniel Wapji. Personal interview at 6. 22 p.m. on 26th January, 2016.
- Kemi Fagite. Personal interview at 6.31 p.m. on 26th January, 2016.