

The logo of the University of Ibadan, featuring a stylized white 'U' and 'I' on an orange background, with four vertical white lines below them.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

THE THEATRE IN AN AFRICAN  
UNIVERSITY APPEARANCE  
AND REALITY

J. ADEYINKA ADEDEJI

INAUGURAL LECTURE 1979 - 80



THE THEATRE IN AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY  
APPEARANCE AND REALITY

An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University of Ibadan  
on Friday, 27 October 1978

by

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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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# THE THEATRE IN AN AFRICAN UNIVERSITY: APPEARANCE AND REALITY

*Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Deans of Faculties, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen*

This is a red letter day, a unique opportunity and, indeed, an appropriate chance for the scholar-artist to present himself before an august audience to deliver an inaugural lecture. This occasion is compounded in many ways because, by the nature of its means, one is bound by a tradition which dates back many, many years and yet with due deference to the nature of my profession it would have been expedient for me to crave your indulgence to break some of the rules of that tradition and present a 'show'. But because I cherish tradition in many ways I shall endeavour to keep the sanctity of the inaugural which in essence is a consecration. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my most profound pleasure to acknowledge this gathering as a living witness of the formal celebration (even though without the ceremonial paraphernalia and fanfare characteristic of my profession) of the first public outing of the chair of the theatre arts in this African university. It is with great humility therefore that I present myself before you as the first African to be thus privileged to give an inaugural on behalf of a discipline which is widely misrepresented and grossly misunderstood.

The question is too often asked, 'Why *have* the theatre as a discipline in a university?' In the context of African development the query is almost always the same, 'What is its justification or relevance in an African University?' It must be admitted that the theatre's history has been the source and cause of the confusion of its meaning and purpose. By its own nature and character and because of its associative connotations it has meant many different things to so many people at so many different times. For the Attic Greek the "theatre" (from the Greek word 'theatron') is a place for viewing a spectacle, a gathering for communal consciousness, a

place of relief; but for the Elizabethan Briton it is a play-house or a building by the South Bank of the Thames for amusements and recreation. In recent applications the classroom teacher has come to see the theatre as a means to enliven the 'playway' method, thanks to the invaluable contribution of Caldwell Cook. For the so called 'educated' African down the line, the word "theatre" conjures up in his mind an association of ideas or concepts based on his schooling experiences some of which are:

- "acting and dancing" (contortions and distortions of the physical body in an obscene manner);
- "drama" (a comic or an 'awada' trifle, a laughable pastime)
- "English Literature" (the study of Shakespeare, Sheridan and Shaw);
- "School drama" (dressing up in funny plumes, exaggerating the body for kicks);

The confusion is even more compounded by the synonymity ascribed to the word "drama" and "theatre" by many who hardly see where the "drama" begins and ends in the "theatre" or where the "theatre" takes over from where the "drama" leaves off. I am therefore very much obliged to use the occasion of this inaugural to clarify *our* concept of the theatre as a discipline, proclaim the basis of its place in the University system and offer a postulate as to its wherewithal.

What is the theatre? Is it a place where plays, operas, ballets, motion pictures or films and so on are presented or exhibited? Is it a performance art that aesthetically expresses any or all of the above arts through the use of design and production techniques? Or both? As a discipline the theatre is a composite art whose resources include the use of the mind, body and voice in expressions that communicate with an audience. While it relates to all the other arts by reaching out to and unifying them dynamically, it serves as the crucible of language, literature, philosophy, sociology, psychology and religion while at the same time, for performance, it presses science and technology into service. When an institution of higher learning like a university has as its component a discipline whose speciality is summed up by the structure of its laboratory and whose manifestation is qualified by the value it places on productivity - because a work of art is invariably the end product of its enterprise - then to all intents and

purposes, the traditional function of the university has to be examined from a different perspective and we are expected to note with due deference the premium which is being placed on it. Ours is a discipline which combines learning with performance or reinforces learning by doing and by its scope and method of evaluation, the university system has been challenged to contain a discipline which is both academic and technical but whose intellectual base is the fountain where knowledge, concept and thought are synthesized for the edification of man and the development of society. The theatre has come a long way - from the shrine of ritual man to the ivory tower of academic man has been a tedious journey. And just how did it happen? This lecture can only scale the surface, albeit tangentially.

In the beginning was the theatre; it was the 'hollow ground' where man in reflection or in ecstasy stepped out of himself and sang and danced, gestured and mimicked, in intuitive acknowledgement of certain external signals or stimuli that impinged on him; in apprehensive response to his perception of reality he produced a work of art; delimited by form and content and designed for the delectation of a spectator. It became a means of communication of vital significance. The theatre was highly developed by the ancient Greeks for whom it became a factor for inculcating the spirit of communalism and the means of ensuring the renewal of life through affirmation of faith in the Gods. In the hands of the ancient Romans, however, it became a luxurious commodity, a pagan rite, a potent source of diversion and a necessary evil. In spite of their earlier scepticism, the Christian Fathers of medieval Europe embraced the theatre and exploited its means in propagating the word of God and showing the path to salvation. The theatre has since the renaissance become a toss up and its growth has been tied up with cultural development and general enlightenment. Its emergence as a curricular subject in the university has also been a tardy but eventful process. It is only regrettable that we cannot afford the time to take in even a catalogue of the events.

The philosophy of education in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which introduced realism as a new conception of education was expected to serve as an index for the education of the drama as a curricular subject. But the new view of education had started from the premise that "the raw material of

knowledge comes from sense perception and experience" and that the chief function of education was "the formation of habits of mind in order to deal with these sense experiences and arrive at truth".<sup>1</sup> It was, however, inconceivable that the advocates of change in the school curriculum of the period could still not give sanction to the drama which as a humanistic study had contributed to the growth of national literatures, developed languages and linguistic studies and sharpened aesthetic appreciation. The Schools of Hellas in ancient Greece where the Western theatre movement began as a cultural and creative force had taken the theatre as a discipline quite seriously and had regarded it as an education which the select Athenian youths must have. The monastery schools and divine institutions of medieval Europe, regarded as the progenitor of the university on the other hand, could not identify with the theatre because its form and attributes had blossomed from heathen festivals. The period of enlightenment that came in the wake of the renaissance gave a new twist to the theatre, especially with the concern of the humanists for liberal studies which included the drama. Performances of tragedies and comedies were indulged in as an extension of humanistic studies at the university and the theatre became a source of diversion and delight to all and sundry.

The theatre as a curricular discipline in the university received its first boost in the United States of America. What was probably "the first drama course leading to a degree in the world" was established at Carnegie Institute of Technology at Pittsburgh Pennsylvania in 1914 by Thomas Wood Stevens. The situation at Harvard University was, however, different. In 1906 George Pierce Baker, an advocate of educational drama had been quite successful with his "47 Workshop" (English 47 class). He ventured to make a case for recognition but the University authorities were uneasy about it and could not approve what they had seen as an experiment which seemed too severely practical and vocational to be termed a "liberal study".<sup>2</sup> Baker migrated to Yale in 1925 to become the first head of its Drama Department which had been established a year before in the School of the Fine Arts under an

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1. Philip A. Coggin, *Drama and Education*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1956, p. 147.

2. Coggin, p. 248

endowment by Edward S. Harkness, an alumnus of the University.

Development at Oxford and Cambridge in England were from quite different premises. Dramatic developments were part of undergraduate student activities. The formation of dramatic societies was encouraged and later given active support or collaboration by the university authorities. Permission for the formation of the Oxford University Dramatic Society (O.U.D.S.) was granted in 1885. In spite of a chequered career, the society managed to survive constraints both physical and financial. The Amateur Dramatic Company (A.D.C.) at Cambridge was founded by an undergraduate at Trinity College in 1855 and operated in the Arts Theatre of the University which served "the double functions of repertory for the town and good plays for the schools"<sup>3</sup> The survival of these dramatic societies has been, in a large measure, due to the resources of the members and the successes which have attended their ventures.

By the 1940s the theatre's status as an academic discipline in the American university had become an established fact to such an extent that its impact was felt in Great Britain. This was the basis of the setting up in 1948 of "a committee of dons to visit America and study the place of drama and the film in American Universities". Known as the Oxford Drama Commission, it submitted a report which found little justification for the introduction of a drama school in Oxford.

It explained

The distinctive part in the past of the curricula of our own university has been their insistence on a rigorous intellectual discipline, and we think that this is a tradition which might be endangered if the University were to direct, even in part, its energies toward a different end. There is abundant justification, we believe, for the study of the drama as it is conducted in the American universities, and we think that it has a beneficial influence on the students themselves and ultimately, on American culture and standards. It seems to us that there are universities in our own country (more closely linked than Oxford to the regions to which they belong) which might study, and perhaps in part adopt, the methods

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3. Coggin, p. 211.



of some of the American universities.<sup>4</sup>

The University of Bristol became the first English university to establish and inaugurate a drama department. In 1950 the Rockefeller Foundation of New York, "gave a grant of 20,000 dollars to Bristol for a five-year drama programme".<sup>5</sup> In order to strengthen and prosecute the case of its justification, Professor Glynne Wickham whose brain child the birth of the department was and who has gone down in history as the first professor to give an inaugural lecture for the chair of drama in a British university (and it is not by a mere co-incidence that he was also Ibadan's first External Examiner in Drama, convened a Symposium on university drama. The following points have been extracted from the decisions taken at the significant meeting:

1. That reflection was slowly but steadily proving drama to warrant serious attention from anyone studying the growth of human culture.
2. That drama played too great a part in our national life today for the universities to ignore.

The emergence of the theatre as a discipline in the University of Ibadan has not been in isolation of the history of its own heritage. The purpose of founding the University College, Ibadan was, according to the Ordinance passed by the Nigerian Legislative Council in 1948, "to advance learning and research, and to provide instruction in all branches of a liberal education".<sup>7</sup> By its provision, the University College, Ibadan had to serve a period of apprenticeship under a scheme of "Special Relation" with the University of London. The pattern which academic development followed for many years was as approved under the scheme for what was hoped to be eventually, an "African University."<sup>8</sup> The academic programme of the University of London was such that

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4. Cited in Coggin p. 215

5. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

6. See D.G. Jones, (ed.) *The Universities and the Theatre*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1952, p. 105. Cited in Coggin, p. 217.

7. K. Mellanby, *The Birth of Nigeria's University*, Ibadan University Press, 1974 edition, p. 137.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

only its Department of Extra Mural Studies was allowed to enter into a "special relationship" with approved institutions at which "a course of instruction and training has been approved by the University for the purpose of receiving an award of the Diploma of the University".<sup>9</sup> The specific requirements laid down by the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies to be fulfilled "for entering into a special relationship with the University of London for courses leading to a degree" were such that ruled out the study of the drama as an aspect of "liberal education" in Ibadan. But Kenneth Mellanby, the first Principal of University College, Ibadan must have been given a vision of what we are celebrating today. His first Academic Board of October 1948 included such an exciting amalgam of staff as Tom B. Child, a chemist, an enthusiastic photographer "and an even more enthusiastic amateur dramatic producer; and Randall Hogarth, a Senior Education Officer, another enthusiastic for the theatre".<sup>10</sup> Although it never saw the light of day, a provision was made for the building of an "Open Air Theatre" in the plan of the permanent layout of the University.<sup>11</sup>

The desperate need for better teachers in the Nigerian secondary school had in 1948 prompted the removal of the Teacher Training programme at Yaba Higher College to Ibadan and placed under the charge of Randall Hogarth. The admission of students to the programme was made with some "misgivings" because according to Mellanby, "some of his colleagues had feared that they would in some way lower its academic or intellectual standards". In spite of a seeming academic snobbery, the students were "given all the privileges and responsibilities granted to the undergraduates, and they played a useful part in establishing the college and in developing its various activities... One of the major contributions

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9. See *Regulations for Diploma in Dramatic Art*, University of London, September 1959, p. 173.

10. Mellanby, p. 53.

11. See "Layout Plans of Permanent Buildings" of University College, Ibadan, Nigeria. Legend 20 indicates the site of an Open Air Theatre situated on the Western side of the Stadium.

the teachers in training made was in drama".<sup>12</sup> The credit of this contribution was given to Randall Hogarth whose immense efforts in the development of dramatic activities with his students were such that, compared to those of the undergraduates, "no one could complain that the teachers in training were those who had reduced standards."<sup>13</sup> But in 1950 however, the teachers' course was finally terminated as one of the activities in the University College.<sup>14</sup>

Changes in physical plans and modifications in programme of activities both academic and otherwise had begun to show with the regime of succeeding principals of the College. Notably was the disappearance from the permanent site the building of the Open Air Theatre of Mellanby's vision and the appearance, instead of an Arts Theatre designed as a place for open lectures, concerts and film-shows. The arrival on the scene in 1956 of Mr. Geoffrey Axworthy, a product of Oxford University and an 'ex member' of the Oxford University Dramatic Society (O.U.D.S.) as a lecturer in the English Department changed the course of events. Concerned with what to do with the Arts Theatre with its imposing challenges, a recommendation was submitted to the Senate for the setting up of an Arts Theatre Management Committee (responsible to Senate). This was approved and in January 1957, the Arts Theatre Management Committee (A.T.M.C.) was constituted "to manage the Theatre and plan its further development. In managing the Theatre, the promotion of cultural and academic interests should guide the committee in its work".<sup>15</sup> The function of the A.T.M.C. and their programme of activities encouraged the emergence of two groups of amateur dramatic societies: the University College Dramatic Society (a student group) and the Arts Theatre Production Group (a staff group). The following cultural groups also emerged to use the facilities of the Arts Theatre:

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12. Kenneth Mellanby gives an account of the presentation of Sophocles *Oedipus Rex* by the teachers in training at the end of the 1949/50 session as being of a very high standard. See Mellanby *ibid.*, pp. 156-157.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.* p. 157.

15. Senate Minute 370 of January, 1970.

The Music Circle.  
The Ibadan Operatic Society  
The Film Society

and The Hoi Phrontestai (for classical plays in Greek and Latin)

Theatre workshops were organised through the auspices of the Departments of English, Extra-Mural Studies and the Institute of Education, aimed at training teachers in the arts of the theatre and their relevance to cultural activities in schools. Geoffrey Axworthy to whom our generation of Nigerian theatre artists owe eternal gratitude, whose indefatigable spirit has been and continues to be our source of inspiration and the mainstay of our ventures, discovered in Ibadan, as Arts Theatre - a building which he attributed to the unusual foresight of the Founding Fathers of the University College - "the best theatre in Nigeria." According to him, whatever thought lay behind the building of such a theatre, "already lost in the mists of time", must be seen as a daring one "in the context of British-type universities, whose policy has been until very recently, if not to ignore the arts, at least to do nothing to encourage their practice" <sup>16</sup> By 1960, Nigeria's year of independence, the Arts Theatre Management Committee had not only justified its own existence through its functions but had also prepared a good case for the justification of the existence of a school of drama for "the promotion of cultural and academic interest". The challenges of an independent University of Ibadan had begun to be felt and plans were already afoot as to what changes and modifications would be deemed necessary. A 'visitation' was the natural consequence. Led by Sir Charles R. Morris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leeds, the Visitation to University College, Ibadan was conducted in January 1961. Conspicuous in its report was the focus on and the credit given to "The Arts Theatre" as here fully narrated:

We were much impressed by the part that has been played in recent years in the work of some of the Arts Departments, and in the life of the College generally, by the Arts Theatre. Under any circumstances the work of some Departments is hardly complete without some attention to the arts of the theatre; and this is especially true in universi-

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16. Geoffrey Axworthy, "The Arts Theatre and the School of Drama", *Ibadan*, No. 18, February 1964, p. 62.

ties in countries where there is little or no opportunity of attending the theatre. Nigeria, moreover, is rich in traditional drama, and its traditions can provide a valuable basis for modern Nigerian drama. There could be a danger however that they might be discarded in favour of imported material disseminated by radio, film and television, and there seems to be no institution in the country other than the College which has the necessary facilities for teaching all aspects of the drama. Also we feel - and this seems to us to be important that greater use of the drama would be made in the schools if it were possible for future teachers to have some experience of the drama in the University. We do not know whether it will be consonant with the academic and teaching plans of the College to consider favourably the establishment of a Department or sub-department of Dramatic Studies; but we very much hope that some way will be found of giving official recognition to the activities and education in the drama which are made possible by the existence of the Arts Theatre and which have flourished unofficially to such good effect in the recent years. We do not think that these activities, and especially their quality, should be left at the mercy of those accidents and hazards which are inseparable from a state of total dependence on purely voluntary initiative and support.<sup>17</sup>

The establishment of the School of Drama was a positive step in the implementation of the report. In 1962 a grant of \$200,000 was received from the Rockefeller Foundation of New York towards the setting up of a university school of Drama and the development of its programme for four and a half years. Its function is "to carry out dramatic training designed to develop the use of such media as theatre, film, radio and television in Nigeria and to train Nigerians for positions of responsibility in these fields."<sup>18</sup> The School of Drama was formally opened in October 1963. This was a feat which coincided with the inauguration of the University of Ibadan as an independent and autonomous institution of higher learning.

The emergence of the School of Drama in an African University

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17. *Report of Visitation to University College, Ibadan*, January 1961, Ibadan University Press, 1961, Paragraph 76, pp. 29-30.

18. See *Commonwealth Universities Year Book*, 1964, p. 848.

system is a unique occurrence. However, by the terms of its scope and its ambiguous position in the Faculty of Arts as a "School", it soon became clear that the pioneering institution that has been established must, to all intents and purposes, struggle for existence and find ways and means for survival. This curious position was apparent from the fact that the School although tethered to a foreign grant which was in any case without strings but which financially set a ceiling to its life-span, was in academic terms, consciously tied to the apron strings of the Dean of Arts with its main bearings left in the Department of English. The School was consigned to offering ancillary courses to a few named degree courses in the Faculty and approved to award diploma certificates to its own sub-degree programme in Educational Drama and a post-graduate programme in Drama. In all appearance, the School was thrown between Scylla and Charybdis: left with only the immortal words of Shakespeare's Hamlet for contemplation:

*To be, or not to be-  
That's the question;  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune  
Or take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them?*

The situation was complicated by a coterie of academics who had maintained a stance of snobbery and hidebound intellectualism in their defence of a status quo that relegated the School to a mere frill on the fringe which should content itself with keeping up appearances instead of barking for reality - a meaningful existence and a show of relevance.

*Whither appearance?*

The curriculum and programme of activity of the School of Drama smacked of a colonial heritage - an illusion of reality which seemed anxious to win recognition through lip-service and had proceeded with an ad hoc programme which aimed at offering entertainment to the public and aiding the appreciation of literature through the exploitation of the by-products of the theatre. To play an avoidance role was seen as a welcome strategy but unfortunately it strengthened the case of the sceptic who continued to relish in his ignorance of the theatre as a discipline. To

play an alienative role was equally unfortunate since it only created the impression that the theatre is entertainment par excellence - the pastime of the elite - an expediency which reproduces the gains or products of Western civilization.

The School of Drama needed to free itself from its colonial heritage, demystify the processes of alienation and justify its own place in an African university. But as it turned out the operation took an uncomfortable tutelage period of seven years (1963-1970) - a probation period to win the battle of acceptability. On the fateful day of 1st October, 1970 the School of Drama was transformed into the full-fledged Department of Theatre Arts.

The emergence of the Department was more than the coming of age of the School of Drama. It provided a situation that recalled the fulfilment of the golden lines of Forest Father in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*:

*"to pierce the encrustations of  
soul-deadening habit, and  
bare the mirror of original nakedness-  
....that perhaps, only perhaps,  
in new beginnings...."*<sup>19</sup>

The "new beginnings" presupposed the demolition of the platonic view of the arts and its romantic pre-occupations and an assumption of the role of the radical empiricist whose concern with the theatre discipline is the design that integrates certain artistic modes and media in a dynamic and functional way.

#### *Wherefore Reality?*

Reality is the quality of being true to life, the life suffused by the culture of the people. For our claim that the theatre is a cultural product to make sense, it is only logical that we bridge the gap - fill the aesthetic vacuum that has been created by the postulate that our theatrical education and orientation must be such that continue the aesthetic conceptualization of the art that was begun in ancient Greece, regarded as the cradle of Western civilization. Reality is a state which comes to maturation through a process of self-realization. The essence of "new beginnings" demanded that we designed a new model with its own appurtenant structure, a

new department with a new form and its own identity. Our recourse was to our own traditional theatrical art - its form and significance. We had undertaken a research and produced a thesis - The "Alarinjo Theatre"<sup>20</sup> - which we believe, can stand the test of any enquiry into our own authority. The thesis has provided us with basic knowledge for our choice. Through its parameter our goals have become vivid and our paths are certain. It has given us an insight into the Philosophy of the performing art, its design, its practice and significance for the African society. It has given us the confidence to believe that the theatre is a universal phenomenon which subsumes a cultural base and succeeds only when it reflects the reality of the people with whom it directly communicates. Armed with this background, we have set out to set up here in Ibadan 'a piece that we may fairly call our own'. We are quite aware, of course, that the reality of the African world is made more significant in the belief in synergism; it is this that makes such a generalization as 'unity in diversity' a valid statement without any attempt at ratiocination. In this regard, our curriculum admits of other entities either by derivation or dependence. Significantly we have found ourselves in a position where we cannot but relate to the historical process that has shaped our existence. This recognition requires that "appearance" and "reality" must be in constant dialogue. It is through this process that African culture and other world cultures have been in a dialectical engagement. But modernization is our watchword. It is through it that the purification process succeeds to bring forth the new man - the new African. The new African must operate under a new sense of realism- a process of evolutionary change where the old order is confronted by the new. The result is a conflict, no doubt. But the conflict must be seen and resolved in Hegelian terms - a new "synthesis" which forms the basis of the "thesis" of a new process. This will yield new combinations affecting the development of mind and thought processes which ultimately lead to progress.

The theatre has provided a new dimension to university education. A discipline that provides a meeting point for the critical and artistic approaches to the study of art within the womb of

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<sup>20</sup> See J.A. Adedeji, *The Alarinjo Theatre. The Study of a Yoruba Theatrical Art from its earliest beginnings to the present times*, Ph.D. University of Ibadan, 1969.



social consciousness that emphasizes the importance of life and the study of the concrete objects of life demands a new methodology of approach. What is important is not what is taught but how it is taught. Following the realist conception of education, therefore, we have provided a new curriculum designed to cultivate a new aesthetic concept and provide a new orientation to the acquisition of knowledge and skill. It stands on a base that is academic embracing the history, literature and sociology of the discipline; it then moves on to the technical, for the development of the techniques of the art and finally opens out the professional channels for directional application of form, substance and techniques.

The theatre arts at Ibadan is a complex but a composite discipline which embodies Dramatic Art, Dance Art, Music Art (including the Choric and Symphonic), Visual Art (including Technical, Scenographic, Costume and Theatre Crafts designs) and Media Art (Television, Radio and Film) - A PRISMATIC FRAME with a pentagonal structure pivoted on a wheel of transcendental essence. The philosophy behind the five dynamics is African aesthetics - the dramatization of the concept of wholeness where the human essence is sandwiched between the universes of "appearance" and "reality" but sustained by a transcendental balance and capable of yielding up to a new process. Music provides the source of energy and dance correlates the development of the mind and body. In effect the five units project the principle of complementarity and synthetic cohesiveness. The discipline provides a frame of reference that acknowledges the effectiveness of experience, both a priori and a posteriori, as a design that can meaningfully discover the reality of a common core that binds artistic and intellectual processes for positive action. Ours is the assertion of the integrity of the African experience, but our goal is the creation of a new man - an analytical man, a creative man. It is for this reason that our training programme is based on the synchronization of motor and vocal acts subtended by intellection, exemplified as follows:

1. MIND Thought (new ways of thinking)  
Perception (new insights)  
Cognition (new ways of acquiring knowledge)
2. BODY Expression

Sensation

Mobility

3. VOICE Responsiveness  
Expressiveness  
Dynamism

We see the theatre as an evolutionary discipline that creates new literatures, new language dynamics and new sensibilities. Creation is not simply a reflection of what is conditioned by 'time past and time present'; it includes the power to perceive reality through a historic vision - to see the future through the transcendence of the past; to form linkages to bridge the gap created by the forces of colonialism. In effect we do not teach the theatre as a subject. What we teach is the essence of creativity. It means conditioning the learner through a process which makes him to appreciate "change" as a phenomenon of progress. The theatre art is an evolutionary art (it can also bring about a revolution). In the learning process the student is exposed to being - that which exists or is possible or can be logically conceived to exist. (This can be described as the *creative act*). He is then conditioned towards the realm of *becoming* - that is, change occasioned by the evolution of new material or the emergence of a thesis of a new process. (This can be described as the *re-creative act*). It is this highest form of art - an art that fertilises the spirit of man - that we teach. It is this quintessence of education that we develop. For artists.....of people efficient in the various modes of expression". He defines education as "the cultivation of modes of expression.....it is teaching children and adults to make sounds, images, movements, tools and utensils. A man who can make these things well is an educated man".<sup>21</sup>

*What Relevance?*

Our discipline is not aimed at a sterile repetition of the status quo. It provides for the continual enrichment of the mind, the perpetual growth of the spirit and a progressive understanding of reality. The African society is in a period of crisis - the changing social order, the pressures of neo-colonialism and its inherent divisions, the emerging dichotomy of roles and resultant neurotic

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21. Herbert Read, *Education Through Art*, Faber, 1943, p. 190.

performances. These demand a strategy of approach for concerted action. Reality enjoins the moving away from imitation or adulteration through a cognitive process to authenticity and development. As we perceive reality we see that the African society has to go through a crucible in order to achieve reliability. A discipline which matches cognition with inquisitiveness and intelligence with discernment is Africa's best weapon. For creativity is a conscious and organised design which results in change in the way of doing things - an innovation which results from an intelligent and intelligible relationship with one's environment.

Our curriculum is designed to give the student a creative perspective on the nature of the formal role of the theatre in society with Africa as our main concern. In our methodology we lay down general principles of aesthetic conceptualization as the basis of approach to the theatre as an art; we attempt an examination of the specific components of the art in terms of their extension or conceptualization of reality; we then set out to relate the art to attitudinal changes in society. It is our hope that our grand design of the theatre arts discipline at Ibadan will conduce to the cultural development of Nigeria and become a shining example to Africa.

The theatre in an African university is an investment par excellence. It exists as a centre for change and modernity, for resources and experimentation in artistic concepts, for cultural development. The African university must be more than an academic citadel for learning. It must have a clearly defined purpose and commitment to cultural development. It is incredible how in recent times some of our political leaders and leaders of thought have used culture as a reference point, usually in facetious terms. For some inscrutable reasons they see any reference to a cultural programme as a deterrent to the acquisition of economic power; and without a twinge of conscience make glib reference to our cultural heritage as a factor that can sustain our well being without at the same time seeing the need to use the essence of culture in determining objectives and mapping out strategies of development. In our naivety we indiscriminately embrace the products of foreign cultures and allow genocidal acts to be perpetrated on our own. It is high time we began to plan for modernization using our culture as the basis of orientation. A realistic approach to the development of culture as a dynamic

phenomenon will eliminate the basis of our current societal problems.

The theatre discipline should be designed from the stand point of its contribution to the several attributes of cultural education. Beginning from the creative aspect of culture - the literary, the visual and the performing arts which when materialised express the essence of culture, this is the basis of progressive living. There is the philosophical aspect of culture which embraces the realm of ideas, beliefs, concepts and values of a people which come into full view either for reflection or provocation or both. Then lastly there is the institutional aspect of culture the value of which is usually disregarded or ignored. It exists when the theatre is used for social and political action; when it is used as a weapon of change - in human happiness, for ideological orientation, for meaningful existence - to build bridges between the past and the present and open up channels which reveal the capacities of the human essence. The theatre discipline helps the development of "aesthetic culture" which Herbert Spencer in his essay on Education (1861) claims to be a fundamental requisite to human happiness. The historic experience of the African demands that he develop the power of making images as a pre-requisite for progress; indulge in the ecstatic contemplation of life in order to feed the imagination, prepare the ground for and arouse the inventive spirit that colonial tutelage had suppressed or allowed to atrophy; acquire the "totality of experience" for the development of innovative ideas. The African still suffers from the syndrome of 'colonial mentality'. In order to lay claim to a meaningful existence must we content ourselves to being only consumers of the products of western culture? Must we remain satisfied with merely keeping abreast of life created for us by others? The theatre brings us to the threshold described by Julian Huxley as "the realization of new possibilities"<sup>22</sup> and for nothing else, except its functionality, its place must be sanctified within the university system where its ways and means can be studied, its techniques learnt and its paraphernalia re-inforced at all times.

The relevance of the university in Africa has come under severe attacks recently. If the besetting problem of Africa is that of

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22. J. Huxley, "The Process of Evolution", *The Listener*, 22/11/51.

modernization to what extent has the several departments in the African university been addressing themselves to this? Do not some academic departments still relish in the antiquated belief that the university is a repository of knowledge for its own sake? The theatre in an African university asks a number of questions and questions a number of outmoded ideas on what university education should be used for. Should it be used for the sake of orientation to knowledge through the adoption of a cognitive process which codifies the concepts and precepts of Western civilization? Or it should be used as a means of orientation for the acquisition of knowledge through self-awareness for the sake of productive application to achieve the total transformation of the African society.

We are in the process of trying to make sense with reality and yet the lingering image of appearance haunts us, befogs our view and dwarfs our efforts. We are afraid to make mistakes and yet we must attempt to evolve a standard that will stand the test of time. In our tenacious commitment to maintaining the status quo which to all appearance consists in the way we disguise ourselves by wearing masks that have been whitewashed by our inauthentic system of education we shudder to experiment. We must reject any stance that exacerbates our impotence. We have been too easily trapped by the gap between appearance and reality. The African university cannot afford to be dogged for too long by the bogey which appearance is. Pretence creates its own delusive dreams and we can continue to keep up outward features and expressions which show our superficialities. We cannot afford to go on being what we are not. We need a positive creative assertion to show our own form and feature. To tackle the bogey we must in earnest do a feasibility study of all its vestiges with a view to appreciating its mystifying dimensions and fake glitters. In a dialectical confrontation which proceeds from an act of knowing its limitations we take a conscious step towards confronting it. This succeeds through engagement in an authentic process of abstraction and by a means which is ensured by a cognitive grasp of reality—the naked truth of our real existence. It is incumbent on the African university to seek knowledge of that reality.

In conclusion, if we agree that a case has been made for the place and role of the theatre in an African university; if we admit that this privilege is adequate to communicate its fact and

knowledge as a discipline, reveal truths and disperse ignorance about its ways and means then what we have set out to do and now we are doing it must be given a measure of understanding, time for maturation and adequate financial support for effective accomplishment. We therefore demand the building of a new Arts Theatre, whose stage reflects the aesthetic sensibility of the African, whose edifice serves as a place of artistic inspiration for the generality of our people; in essence, a cultural centre - to serve as the centre of enlightenment, the confluence of streams of consciousness, an assembly of artists and non-artists, a meeting point of 'town and gown' where the creative activities of artists and the ever-widening or expansive aspirations of scholars find common ground for the promotion of community growth and happiness, a place of communication with untrammelled channels which penetrate the walls of ignorance and parochialism. The new Arts Theatre must have all the accoutrements and equipments needed for effective performance of our programme of activities: the children's theatre, the University Theatre Company, the Media Arts Centre, and the Resources Centre for international interactions and experimentation.

The necessity of our time demands that the theatre in an African university must be designed to play a mediating role between appearance (the colonial inheritance) and reality (our authentic self). In this regard we face a challenge both of what appears to us to be the role of a university education and the reality of what our own existence should be in spite of the colonial heritage and the bugbear of a 'theoretical context' in which we have submerged our identity. The theatre has come to stay in the African university let us use its resources to recreate an authentic self for *ourselves*; release our productive energies in creating a life style that has roots in our culture and can therefore germinate eternal seeds for universal consumption.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we need a new spirit, a new belief, a new mode of association based on our own collective will, the will to create a phenomenon which the theatre discipline enshrines.