EMERGING PARADIGMS IN NIGERIAN THEATRE ARCHITECTURE

Remi Ademola Adedokun

Introduction

The issue of theatre architecture began to generate serious debate among scholars and theatre practitioners in the 1950s, and subsided in the 1980s without any definite conclusions. In the same way, what constitutes Nigerian literature, dramatic literature in particular, has also been in serious contention among theatre artists, who have been calling for the definition of a true drama and theatre. This paper hopes to address these basic issues, using the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, as the main point of reference.

In his essay, entitled 'Reflections on theatre practice in contemporary Nigeria', Femi Osofisan (1998), a radical dramatist, re-opened the unresolved controversy in the following words, which deserve to be quoted at length:

> Perhaps the time has come, indeed, to re-launch the search for new forms, in quest of a real, revolutionary *transformation* of the medium itself, beyond the renovations we have so far carried out, and which some see as yet reformist. The criticism is growing, that, so far, most of what we have accomplished is a record merely of refurbishment, of innovating changes 'within' the old shrine and its rituals of performance, but without actually exploding it, turning its traditions inside out, to lead the acolytes to fresh explorations. The problem, of course, is that such criticisms usually come unaccompanied by suggestions of what directions this transformation should pursue. Here and there, imitations exist of new possibilities, new strategies – perhaps in violent collations of the serious and the farcical, such as are being attempted by the Laffomania group in the Lagos-Ibadan axis; perhaps, in revivals of the guerrilla street theatres of the Old Ife group under Soyinka; perhaps, in new conceptions of community theatres away from their currently UNESCO-defined agenda. But, largely, no one seems to possess any clear answers.

The above quotation proceeds from the great anguish of a soul that is full of concern and determination. Theatre is an art of inestimable dynamism, changing its shape in response to changes in cosmic

taste, demand, space and speed. The theatre of today has changed its dialectics from the Aristotelian and Brechtian syllogisms to embrace individual creative explosions, and respsonses to general or specific critical issues of performance. Our exploration into new paradigms in this essay is not confined to the art of the playwright, but opens up wide vistas in stagecraft, theatre architecture and technology, for none of these can develop in isolation of the others.

Playwrights and new vision

This clarion call is timely and serves as a decent cue for writers, scholars, and designers of the new millennium to explore creatively along the lines of their individual talents, without being bogged down by laid-down prescriptions in dramatic literature and theatre architecture. Time, of course, changes things, and what is conventional today may become unacceptable tomorrow. Innovation is desirable and defensible as long as it does not contradict the African culture and is prognostic of a better society. So far, our political evolution has been Anglo-American in orientation, while our entire corporate existence has been upset by foreign values. This has had a negative impact on our drama and theatre. Although theatre is, by nature eclectic, playwrights must be circumspect in the process of imitating foreign concepts or committing themselves to specific literary ideologies. John Gassner (1982) comments on the ideological posture of modern dramatists as follows:

> Most of the important modern playwrights, from Ibsen and Strindberg to O'Neil and O'Casey, did not actually make exclusive commitments to any philosophy or style of theatre, although they sometimes wrote as if they were making them (xiii).

This Gassnerian viewpoint confirms that the modern playwright is free to create without necessarily tying himself to the umbilicard cord of any archetypal dramatic theory. It also conforms with Osofisan's refusal to accept any 'labels' for his dramaturgical style. He dismisses the whole idea of labelling playwrights as 'Brechtian' 'socialist', 'Marxist' and so forth, preferring to maintain his individuality. Theorists cut across the artistic landscape, from Aristotle to Bentley; from Soyinka to Senghor; all of whom serve as critical pathfinders in the creative evolution of the theatre. Plays which explore African themes, problems and situations, regardless of

their ideological bases, can be taken in good faith as part of African literature. The relevance of a play to the writer's immediate community is of utmost importance. Discussing the social contents of his writings, Malcolm Slowman comments as follows:

> The only thing you are allowed to put into the system is that which can be assimilated and absorbed by it. This is a society that has 'matured' on descriptions of its inequity and injustice. Poverty is one of its best-favoured spectacles. Bad housing, class-divisive schools, plight of the sick and the aged...Jesus God, Man, we can't get enough of it. It's what makes us so 'humane', seeing all that week in, week out (quoted in Fayden, 1997:11).

Modern day writers should take the entire world as their stage, drawing relevant material from all sources and adapting them to suit their purposes. Each writer's experience, dreams and observations, all that he or she has heard, seen or read about, are all part of the materials to be harnessed for creativity. Bernard Grebanier (1965:20) exhorts writers to learn from Shakespeare who sourced 'his materials from everywhere and anywhere, as though it hardly mattered to him.' One of the foremost Nigerian playwrights, James Ene Henshaw, similarly gathers his creative materials in response to current issues of the society.

A major aspect of the playwright's new vision is the use of language which distinguishes one writer from the other, and determines the effectiveness of their communication. The first generation of writers, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark and Ola Rotimi, went the classical way, employing the use of verse, and tilting strongly towards the Aristotelian tradition. This, initially, made their message to be inaccessible to the people, a fault which they corrected in their later writings. Second generation writers like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande and Kole Omotoso, turned out to be more radical and iconoclastic in their writings, although more down-to-earth in their choice of language and writing style. This is in line with the development of a true Irish theatre as revealed by W. B. Yeats in the following words:

> We have been the first to create a true "People's Theatre", and we have succeeded because it is not an exploitation of local colour, or of a limited form of drama possessing a temporary novelty, but the first doing of something for which the world is ripe, something that will be done all over the world and done more and more perfectly:

> the making articulate of all the dumb classes with its own dignity, but all objective with the objectivity of the office and the workshop, of the newspaper and the streets of mechanism and of politics (in Eric Bentley, 1968:331).

Thus, under the auspices of Lady Gregory and Miss Horniman, Yeats collaborated with other Irish writers to evolve a true Irish theatrical tradition. It is this type of exemplary collaborative work which Demas Nwoko advocates for us to evolve a true Nigerian drama and theatre architecture.

Theatre designers and the new technology

Although we have many practising writers, actors, producers, directors, choreographers and theatre managers in Nigeria, the country is terribly in short supply of theatre designers and architects. Indeed, the only outstanding example we can mention for now is Demas Nwoko, although there are some up and coming young ones.

From its earliest beginnings in the Greek Dionysiac theatre on the hillslope of the Acropolis, and the Roman indoor prototype, to the modern multiple stage theatre complexes, the theatre (both in its literary content and architectural form) has experienced innumerable transformations. The avant-garde theatre (most notably represented by the theatre of the absurd) initiated the ever-changing literary and production styles which impel spontaneous responses from theatre designers, architects and planners, further stimulating an endless urge for experimentation and diversity in stage forms.

The sophistication of the electromechanical theatre of today, which allows for multiple staging facilities through electrically operated machines, has posed serious challenges to theatre designers and practitioners. Playwrights, actors, directors, managers, dancers and designers make conflicting demands on the theatre architect based on their own specific space needs. This calls for great structural flexibility, which, as John Allen (1983) explains, cannot be satisfactorily achieved in a solid physical theatre. He writes as follows:

> The variety of theatre practice that has emerged over the last hundred years has presented theatre architects with considerable problems...To build a theatre requires a great deal of capital. Logically, therefore, it should be built substantially to last. But a

> solid structure is far too inflexible to adapt to the variety of arrangements that contemporary directors require (280).

The implication of this observation is that no one theatre could be ideal enough to satisfy every need. Indeed, differences in cultures and artistic tastes continue to affect individual artistic situations. Furthermore, artistic theories, such as Expressionism, Symbolism, Naturalism, Realism, and so forth, as well as the concepts of Total Theatre and Environmental Theatre, have significantly influenced the structural development of theatre. The trends in a particular era, as well as the purpose, relevance and functions of a building inform the architect on the nature, shape or structure it should take. Harold Burris-Meyer and Edward C. Cole (1975) rightly observe as follows:

> The plan of any modern building depends on a knowledge of the purposes for which it is to be built. An architect designs a factory only after consulting freely with his client regarding the processes of manufacture to be housed: he does not design a residence without first studying at length the composition, personalities, habits and circumstances of the family, nor does he design a church without knowing thoroughly the services, rites, and ceremonies to be celebrated therein. He cannot succeed in designing a theatre unless he obtains, from some source, information regarding the uses of the building (34).

In the light of the foregoing, we shall now take a closer look at the Nigerian experience in the development of theatre architecture.

The architectural heritage of the Nigerian Theatre

Oyin Ogunba and Abiola Irele (1978:9) make it abundantly clear in their jointly edited book, that no building was ever exclusively designed for the performance of plays or served as a 'playhouse' in Africa prior to the advent of the white man. In Nigeria, the history of theatre architecture effectively began with the opening of the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan (then a University College), in 1955, and this makes it the first well-equipped modern theatre in this country. Thus, for more than half a century, it has been the bustling centre of artistic excellence and has nurtured most of Nigeria's frontline dramatists, scholars, directors, administrators and so on. These include Wole Soyinka, Joel Adedeji, Dapo Adelugba, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, and others. It has also been the germ from which theatre education and a formalised theatre professional

training evolved, with the setting up of the School of Drama in 1962/63, transforming into the Department of Theatre Arts in 1970. Several theatre luminaries in Nigeria and even beyond owe their professional training to the Arts Theatre. Moreover, it serves as the prototype on which new theatre buildings in Nigeria depend for ideals and inspiration, with an impact that transcends the African frontiers.

In spite of its great significance, however, Ibadan Arts Theatre has been severely criticised by those it nurtured and grossly neglected by the University whose symbol of authority and dignity it epitomises. In 1998/99, the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) replaced the leaking roof and side louvers, but ended up removing the acoustic ceiling as well, to the detriment of effective communication during productions. The grounds on which the Arts Theatre has been severely criticised include the motive for the building, the inadequacy of its physical facilities, the nature of earlier productions suggestive of colonial orientation, incommodious auditorium, which barely seats three hundred people, and a Western proscenium structure inadaptable to African plays.

Staging and stage forms

The focus of discussion on the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, is the physical structure of its stage. The centrality of stage form in promoting concept, philosophy, world-view and cultural identity cannot be overemphasised. The two fundamental components of a theatre plant are the stage and the auditorium, which constitute the performance area and the audience area, respectively. However, the structure or shape of the stage, rather than the nature of the auditorium, has been the basis for theatre classification over the ages. Thus, we have the proscenium theatre (if the stage is proscenium), the arena theatre (with an arena stage), sometimes also referred to as theatre in the round. The nature of the stage often influences the playwright in writing his plays, limits or broadens the director's artistic vision, hinders or enhances production styles, encourages or discourages actor's creativity, ignites or frustrates the dancer's ingenuity and, in the final analysis, hampers or promotes audience-actor relationship in the realisation of the ultimate artistic objectives. Thus it is the nature of the physical stage of the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, which has been the subject of much

criticism over the years. The views of three of the most outstanding critics – Geoffrey Axworthy, Wole Soyinka and Joel Adeyinka Adedeji – who, incidentally, were respective directors of the Arts Theatre between 1956 and 1985, will now be highlighted.

Geoffrey Axworthy was the founding Director of the School of Drama when it was established in 1962, seven years after the opening of the Arts Theatre. He was of the view that the Arts Theatre was inadequate for professional productions, and went ahead to make some physical amendments. In a paper published in 1964, he expressed his disdain for the Arts Theatre in the following words:

> The planning of the theatre was uninspired; perhaps the architect's brief was at fault, but the general conception is of a lecture hall-cum-cinema, in which, perhaps, an occasional play might be run up by staff or students. No backstage working space was provided (Axworthy, 1964:62).

This raises the question as to who the original planners were, and what was their specific objective. Was the theatre built for professional productions or simply for academic drama workshops?

Wole Soyinka saw the Arts Theatre as being despicable and outrageously colonial in outlook, completely incongruous to African cultural needs. In a 1964 paper (reprinted in 1975/76), he severely criticised the National Theatre in Kampala, which, like the Ibadan Arts Theatre, had been modelled after European concepts. After taking a swipe at the Kampala structure, he concluded on the Arts Theatre as follows:

> We were, however, fairly honest, and we soon fell to minding the beam in our own eyes. There is the Arts Theatre of our University .College, Ibadan, which possesses not even the outward deception of the Kampala structure, and connot boast practicalities such as ventilation or sound-proofing...No, not all these considerations could persuade the controlling committee to spend the grant on erecting a barn somewhere beyond the depredations of college neighbourliness, disembowelling the present hulk entirely and transferring the gadgets to the new, adaptable space where actor and audience may liberate their imagination (Soyinka, 1964, in *Transition*, 1975/76: 63).

This was the earliest attack on the structural defectiveness of the Ibadan Arts Theatre, followed by Axworthy's in the same year.

Soyinka's cynicism was borne of patriotic fervour, and an impelling desire for a true African theatrical identity. In the same article, Soyinka proffered an answer to what he called 'the perpendicularians' (possibly referring to the proponents or perpetuators of the perpendicular structure, which the proscenium theatre represents), calling for the construction of 'an opposition plane' (perhaps an answer to the proscenium effect) in the proposal to establish a national theatre. He condemned attempts to replicate the defective Arts Theatre structure elsewhere in the country:

> ...Since I saw the foundations, I have not dared to move near the completed theatre at Nsukka. Before the 'theatre' of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was built, *the designers pilgrimaged to the then University College, Ibadan, to seek inspiration from the Arts Theatre.* In vain did a few harrowed producers plead with them to avoid repetition of the existing crime – a replica was built and the 'Arts' was superseded in drabness and tawdry (Wole Soyinka, 1964). (Emphasis mine)

Although his views might not have been quite explicit in some parts, Soyinka was obviously calling for fundamental structural reforms in the nation's theatrical concept, to move it away from the imposed Eurocentric model. As the only well-equipped theatre in the country at the time, the Arts Theatre was exercising a negative impact on the development of the Nigerian theatre architecture, through the natural tendency on the part of designers to imitate existing models. Unfortunately, Soyinka missed the opportunity of effecting the desirable change when, in 1971, he suddenly resigned his appointment as Director of the School of Drama, in succession to Geoffrey Axworthy in 1967. Even part of his tenure as Director was spent in political incarceration under the military regime of Yakubu Gowon. Had he stayed on long enough, he would have positively influenced the development of the Arts Theatre as well as the National Theatre, and the effective management of our cultural institutions, eloquently expressed in his critical writings. However, if he had allowed himself to be bogged down by administration, his creative career might have suffered, and he might not have been able to make it to the Nobel Laureateship.

On his part, Joel Adedeji found the Arts Theatre a great challenge, capable of exciting imaginative manipulation in order to tackle the problems confronting the Department of Theatre Arts,

which evolved from the defunct School of Drama in 1970/71. In his Inaugural Lecture delivered in 1978, he identified the inadequacies of the Arts Theatre and boldly called for an ideal theatre centre, in the following words:

> 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...The new Arts Theatre must have all the accoutrements and equipment needed for effective performance of our programme of activities (Adedeji, 1978:19).

Unlike Soyinka, Adedeji approached the issue with care and caution in his observations, demonstrating the delicate sense of history and tolerance of a theatre historian. He is quoted as follows:

> The bewildering state of the theatre in Nigeria is shaped by its history. The characterless projections of the Nigerian theatre are complicated by the historical development of the country as a nation. Artistic and stylistic trends in the development of the theatre forms have revealed an indebtedness to the colonial heritage even to the point of regarding the Nigerian theatre as a product of colonialism and Western education in spite of a flourishsing traditional theatrical culture which pre-existed this onslaught (Adedeji, 1979:27).

In an effort to actualise his dream, Adedeji evolved an architectural design for a new Arts Theatre Complex with a thrust stage, in 1977, which ultimately failed to see the light of day up till the present time. The beautiful Complex, which remained on the drawing board for a long time, is now tucked away somewhere in the store of the University tower.

In spite of its inadequacy and the heavy criticism which the Ibadan Arts Theatre has suffered as a colonial creation, it must be admitted that it has served the nation creditably well in nurturing the first generation of Nigerian playwrights, under the tutelage of Geoffrey Axworthy. For instance, the earliest plays of Wole Soyinka and J. P. Clark were premiered at the Arts Theatre, and this inspired the many other talents that came after them. Kola Ogunmola's stint as the first Artist-in-Residence of the School of Drama in 1962 also advanced the growth of the professional theatre in Nigeria. Thus,

overall, the Arts Theatre has had a salutary effect on the development of the theatre in Nigeria.

Emerging paradigms for the Nigerian stage

According to an undated document by Bugard (p.33), an Arts Centre (a) stimulates creative interaction among the professional personnel of the participating arts organization; (b) creates new interest in the organizations occupying the centre and, by this new interest, it generates increased financial support for them and eventually makes programme improvement possible; (c) develops new and larger audience for the arts; (d) forces community leaders to undertake comprehensive long range planning for the arts in relation to the entire community. The Arts Theatre would seem to have achieved all these, in addition to serving as a model for the physical structure of theatre plants all over the country. Its major physical drawback was its inflexibility as a proscenium theatre. The only realistic option is not to discard it altogether, but to modify it and make it more adaptable. To this end, certain practical steps need to be taken, beyond mere theorising and criticising. Enem Uche (1979) observes as follows:

> Everyone agrees that the freedom and variety of traditional staging conditions are far superior to the restrictive conventions of the proscenium, but scarcely can any actually claim to have seen in clear, physical terms, this special theatre keenly advanced by theatre artists and scholars... In spite of these uncertainties, the continuous opposition of the proscenium model is perpetuated with varying modifications, even in the latest theatre buildings in the country, notably, the National Theatre and the Lagos University auditorium. The theoretical search for the non-perpendicular stage will eventually require substantiation in reality to reduce the controversy (45-46).

The theoretical search for this alternative to the proscenium is the function of designers, playwrights and critics, whose negligence has led to its perpetuation.

One critic who combines precepts with examples is Demas Nwoko. Rather than a futile criticism of the Arts Theatre, he went ahead to create a theatre of his dream within the context of African aesthetics and theatre practice. During the production of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, co-directed with Kola

Ogunmola in 1962/63, Nwoko adapted the limiting proscenium stage of the Arts Theatre to suit the production. He adopted a realistic approach to the structural problems of the Nigerian theatre. In what amounted to a rejoinder to Soyinka's criticism in 'Towards a True Theatre', he called for a concerted effort on the part of writers and theatre designers towards finding an acceptable solution. His views run as follows:

> The only solution to the problems will be to have the writers and poets directly involved in the creation of a living theatre, creating and developing forms and structures with other theatrical artists. In this manner, the structure of the play will fit the poetry, which will fit the music and dance, and all these will come to fit the stage architecture. In this manner, a style will emerge. This was, to a great extent, how the play *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was created in 1962-63 (Nwoko, in Ogunbiyi, 1981:471).

Demas Nwoko, the first African on the staff of the School of Drama, is Nigeria's foremost theatre designer and architect. In an interview with the present writer on March 24, 1987, he disclosed that he was responsible for the design and partial building of the Thrust Stage Theatre at the Oyo State Cultural Centre, Mokola, Ibadan, and was fully responsible for the design and construction of the Edo State Cultural Centre with Thrust Stage Theatre in Benin City. He has gone further to build for himself a highly experimental theatre studio, called "New Culture Studio" with a flexible stage at Ore Meji (Premier Hotel Junction), along Mokola road, Ibadan, as a practical demonstration of his pet theories and artistic vision. This is in fulfilment of his stated commitment towards the search for a new African theatre, which he expresses in the following frank and lucid manner:

> I do not believe in learned talks; I am an artist and believe in achieving results. For me, the search for a new African culture is a crusade and I wish that all talented African artists would join hands and work together. In Ibadan, I have started building the nucleus of the type of studio I am advocating. I will name the centre "The New Culture Studio", where I will try to develop my ideas on African art with any African artist who has a philosophy identical with mine. With a will and hard work, I am confident we will succeed. We have to (Nwoko, in Ogunbiyi, 1981:478).

This declaration of intention also inspired the present writer to establish the Osogbo City Theatre Centre at 21 Egbatedo Street, Oshogbo in 1974, suggesting that Nwoko's clarion call was beginning to yield some fruit. For fourteen years afterwards, the Centre embarked on experiments in Community Theatre, building on the gains of past efforts such as the Mbari Mbayo, Ori-Olokun and, of course, the New Culture Studio. The project succeeded very well until it folded up in 1988 when the founder, a Theatre Manager who also lectures in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, was involved in a ghastly motor accident, which hospitalised him for a couple of years.

The more vibrant Yoruba travelling theatre of the 1960s and 1970s had little access to Western technology, and no room for academic debates on forms and styles. Rather, it concentrated on the four basic requirements of the theatre as outlined by Stephen Langley (1980) in the following words:

1. Creative raw materials (an idea, a scenario or a script);
2. A person to refine the material (an actor, a dancer, a singer, a priest, a witchdoctor, etc.);
3. A place to present the material (a theatre, a barn, a street, a clearing in the woods);
4. An audience to witness the presentation (27).

For a successful search into the true African theatre aesthetics, scholars and cultural leaders must critically examine their postulations and balance theory with practice, making feasibility the goal of their proposals. The building of a true Nigerian theatre is not the exclusive responsibility of the intellectuals. Enlightened traditional and commercial theatre practitioners must be consulted before arriving at an acceptable form, because they have equal stake in it. This spirit informed the founding of the Osogbo City Centre project earlier discussed.

The new paradigms in theatre architecture that began to emerge on the Nigerian scene suggested a thrust stage model for the theatre, in replacement of the long criticised proscenium stage. The proposed new Arts Theatre Complex designed by Joel Adedeji for the University of Ibadan, in 1977, has a thrust stage. Similarly, the Edo State Cultural Centre in Benin City, designed by Demas Nwoko has a thrust stage. Although the project initiated by Adedeji seems to

have fizzled out, there are indications of new initiatives by the university authorities to refurbish the Arts Theatre or build a new Arts Theatre Complex.

Some of the frontline dramatists have, through their works, indicated preference for other models apart from the thrust stage. For instance, Femi Osofisan and Ola Rotimi would seem to prefer the arena stage or theatre-in-the-round. Indeed, Ola Rotimi had proposed this model since 1974 before the National Theatre, Lagos, was built. In the minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the Association of Nigerian Theatre Artists held at the University of Ibadan on May 4, 1974, the following information appeared on pages 4 and 5:

> Mr Ola Rotimi opened the discussion by asking from the Chief Cultural Officer, how much of the recommendation of an Advisory Committee consisting of theatre practitioners (which met last August in Lagos) were accepted with respect to the architectural structure and the personnel of the National Theatre...He then pointed out that the traditional form of any type of presentation within our land is the "theatre-in-the-round". He continued, "if we are to discover our own form of theatre, the arena formation is very vital, rather than the carbon-copy that was given to us..."

Femi Osofisan similarly writes for the arena stage. However, in the absence of that, he has perfected the craft of adapting his plays to suit any stage form that is available, most especially, the Arts Theatre Stage, his main laboratory. In an interview with the present writer, he bared his mind thus:

> Yes, the Arts Theatre is there, but so you can think of what you don't want. You know that an influence can be two-way, either you write consciously knowing the limitations of the Arts Theatre and write against those limitations. But, ideologically, the Arts Theatre doesn't provide the kind of things I want. I do not want a kind of "fourth wall" mentality which the proscenium provides. I want a theatre-in-the-round, where the audience can participate...That is when we achieve our best effect (see Adedokun, 1993:275).

Other writers, such as Bode Sowande and Bode Osanyin, similarly prefer the arena formation. Since designers, like Demas Nwoko, cherish the thrust stage, a compromise position between the two types has to be found to prevent artists from going their individual ways, out of frustration. The traditional masquerade theatre presentation, which has been with us for ages is, invariably, in the

round, suggesting that this might be incorporated into our literary theatre. However, the problems of obstructed views, impeded scenic perspective, and disturbed entries and exits of actors, tend to overshadow the advantage of audience-actor intimacy, which the arena stage promotes. To define the appropriate stage form, the entire cultural horizon of the people must be thoroughly considered, along with their peculiarities. In order to satisfy the multiplicity of ethnic needs, a national theatre requires a multiplé stage form, or a free form flexible stage, capable of being adjusted to suit desired purposes. However, this is dependent on effective electro-mechanical manipulation, which is not sustainable in the Third World because of lack of regular supply of electricity. For the existing proscenium stage, such as that in the Arts Theatre, an immediate solution is to modify it by extending the stage on either side, thus bridging the physical gap between the stage and the auditorium.

The Extended Stage Form as a model

For African plays, a three-level extended stage, such as exists at the John Hopkins Center Theater, University of Oregon Theater and the Colorado State College Theater, is hereby suggested. The sightlines are more satisfactory than those of other stage forms, including the multiform flexible electromechanical stage. [See Burris-Meyer and Cole's (1975) diagram on page 65 of *Theatres and Auditoriums*, showing both the main stage and the extended stage.] It is not dependent on electromagnetic manipulation, and, therefore, quite suitable for the Third World situation. Wole Soyinka has warned, in an article (see Adedokun, 1993:102), against the dependence on electromechanical devices in the theatres of technologically developing countries.

Since 1973 when the Arts Theatre stage was extended on both sides, under the administration of Joel Adedeji, it has satisfactorily accommodated all forms of presentations, the narrowness of the side stages notwithstanding. This has also encouraged various experimental works, thus enhancing the creativity of our prominent playwrights such as Zulu Sofola, Wale Ogunyemi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Bode Osanyin, and so forth. The extended stage form is capable of coping with Nigerian plays, which, by their nature, encourage huge processions,

pronounced interactions, multiple or simultaneous settings and a wide space for ecstatic movements and dances. The stage combines the directional viewing of a proscenium with the wrap-around structure of arena staging, thus accommodating all forms of African performances and experimentation, without recourse to the use of electromagnetic devices. The gaping orchestra pit that separates the stage from the auditorium, one of the main issues in contention, has been substantially diminished. Other advantages of the extended stage form, as listed by Burris-Meyer and Cole (1975), are as follows:

1. Small scenes played on side stages while scenery is being changed on the main stage;
2. Procession entering from the side stages and moving into the main stage;
3. Expansion of acting area for simultaneous showing of several settings of locales;
4. Elimination of changes of scenery by having all scenery set up on the various stages and moving the action and even rotating the audience (120).

In effect, the extended stage (variously called side stages, multi-proscenium, theatre-all-around and theatrama – Burris-Meyer and Cole, 1975:130), is a multi-media stage, which facilitates live and electronic functionality of the theatre. The Arts Theatre has served creditably well in hosting both live performances and film shows.

Conclusion

After more than six decades of active theatre practice in Nigeria, an acceptable theatre form, rooted in our culture and society, ought to have evolved. A true African dramatic literature or theatre is one that diagnoses African problems and offers solutions to them, regardless of the style of performance employed. Foreign models – Western, Eastern or Oriental – can always be adapted to suit our peculiar needs, in a very selective and critical manner. African theatre practitioners must brace up to the challenges of fast changing technology and theatre architecture, resulting in new experiments with space and sightlines, which are best left to experts in those areas. The best form of theatre architecture is that which does not detract from the pleasure of the audience whose primary demand is for well-written and well-produced plays with relevant messages,

presented under a generally conducive atmosphere. As we await the evolution of the authentic African theatre, solutions must continue to be found to existing problems such as was done to the proscenium stage at the Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, with its physical modification into the extended stage form, which has now become its permanent feature. In the search for the African theatre architecture of our dream, idealism should always be tempered with pragmatism, based on our peculiar historical experience. In the words of John Gloat (1975),

> Buildings cannot lie; they tell the truth directly or by implication about those who made and used them and provide veracious records of the character and quality of the past and present civilization (1).

The same is true of theatre buildings. They tell the truth about plays, playwrights and audiences who designed and used them. Let our playwrights write, and our designers design, to complement the African vision, worldview and personality.

WORKS CITED

Adedeji, J. A. (1979) *Theatre in an African University:Appearance and Reality* Inaugural Lecture, 1978. Ibadan: University Press.

Adedeji, Joel (1979) 'Theatre Forms: The Nigerian Dilemma' *Nigeria Magazine* Nos 128-129. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Adedokun, Remi A. (1993) *The Arts Theatre, University of Ibadan, 1955-1985: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Theatre Centre in an African University.* Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Adedokun, Remi A. (1993) 'Chief Wale Ogunyemi: From the Arts Theatre Playwright to Celebrity in Dapo Adelugba (ed.) *Chief Wale Ogunyemi at Fifty: Essays in Honour of a Nigerian Actor-Dramatist.* Ibadan: End-Time Publishing House Ltd.

Allen, John (1983) *A History of the Theatre in Europe* London: Heinemann.

Aristotle , *The Poetics* Telford, Kenneth A. (1970) (translator), Gateway Edition. Chicago: Henry Regnery.

Axworthy, Geoffrey (1964) *The Arts Theatre and the School of Drama*. Ibadan: University Press.

Axworthy, Geoffrey (1975) 'A Theatre for a University' in John Hodgson & Martin Banham (eds) *Drama in Education 3: The Annual Survey*.

Bugard (n.d.) *Arts in the City: Organizing and Programming Community Arts Council*. New York: Assoc. Council for the Arts (no date).

Burris-Meyer, Harold & Cole, Edward C. (1975) *Theatres and Auditoriums* 2nd Edition. New York: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co.

Fadyen, Edward Mc. (1997) *The British Theatre 1956-1977*. Brighton: National Book League.

Gassner, John (1982) 'Introduction' in Toby Cole (ed.) *Playwrights on Playwriting*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Gbilekaa, Saint E. T. (1989) 'The Emergence of a New Radical Drama in Nigeria (1970-1986), *Nigeria Magazine* Vol. 57 Nos 3 & 4, July-December.

Gloat, John (1975) *The Architectural interpretation of History*. London: Adam and Black.

Grebanier, Bernard (1965), *How to Write for the Theatre*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Kirby, E. T. (1969) (ed) *Total Theatre*. New York: D. P. Dutton.

Langley, Stephen (1980) Theater Management in Anerica: Principles. New York: Drama Books Specialists.

Nwoko, Demas (1981) 'Search for a new African Theatre," in Ogunbiyi, Yemi (ed) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Ogunba, Oyin & Irele, Abiola (1978) (eds) *Theatre in Africa*. Ibadan: University Press.

Ogunbiyi, Yemi (1981) (ed) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Osofisan, Femi (1998) 'Reflections on Theatre Practice in Contemporary Nigeria', in *African Affairs*.

Soyinka, Wole (1964) 'Towards a True Theatre', *Transition/Chindaba Magazine*, October 1975/March 1976. Reprinted in Yemi Ogunbiyi (ed) *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Uche, Enem (1979) 'National Theatre Profile', *Nigeria Magazine* Nos 128-129. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Yeats, W. B. (1968) 'A People's Theatre' in Eric Bentley (ed) *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama.* Hamondsworth: Penguin Books.

****