

# Creativity in Acting: strategies for the separation of the performer's real identity from the construct in Nigeria

Osakue S. Omoera

Ambrose Alli University – Ekpoma, Nigeria  
Email: omoera@yahoo.com, osakueomoera@gmail.com

Emmanuel Ozoemenam

University of Ibadan – Ibadan, Nigeria  
Email: gpsunny2001@yahoo.com

---

## Abstract

This article centres on the art of acting in Nigeria. Its problematic is informed by the behaviour of some actors/actresses/performers who tend to live their 'stage life' or 'screen life' in their normal everyday living. The study adopts the historical-analytic, interview and observation methods to examine this misconception and how they colour the society's appreciation of theatre arts as a discipline. It further argues that although actors/actresses have been seen as entertainers, they should train on how to neatly separate what they construct on stage from their daily living. The paper suggests, among other things, self-discovery and psychological distancing as panaceas to the challenge. It concludes that the actors'/actresses' prime requisites are common sense, acute powers of observation and perception, tolerance and understanding of human behaviour and a general knowledge of society, in order to deepen the professional understanding of theatre arts as a profession in the contemporary Nigerian society.

---

## Keywords

Creativity in acting. Drama. Stage/Screen. Performer/Actor/Actress. Real identity. Construct. Contemporary Nigerian society.

---

## Resumo

Este artigo centra-se na arte da atuação na Nigéria. Sua problemática é informada pelo comportamento de alguns intérpretes que tendem a viver sua "vida nos palcos/ nas telas" em suas vidas cotidianas, o que muitas vezes resulta em conflito entre sua personalidade real e suas construções. O estudo adota métodos histórico-analíticos de entrevista e observação para examinar esse equívoco, e como esses conceitos falsos geram uma falta de apreciação, por parte da sociedade, das artes do teatro como uma disciplina. Além disso, argumenta-se que, embora eles tenham sido vistos ao longo do tempo como artistas, eles devem treinar para separar cuidadosamente o que constroem nos palcos de suas vidas cotidianas. O artigo sugere, entre outras coisas, a autodescoberta, o equilíbrio psicológico/consciência e o distanciamento psicológico como soluções para o desafio. Conclui-se que os principais requisitos dos atores/atrizes são o senso comum, potências aguçadas de observação e percepção, tolerância e compreensão do comportamento humano e um conhecimento geral sólido da sociedade para que, assim, aprofunde o entendimento das artes teatrais como uma profissão na sociedade nigeriana contemporânea.

---

## Palavras-chave

Criatividade em atuação. Drama. Palco/tela. Intérprete/Ator/Atriz, Identidade Real. Construção. Sociedade Nigeriana Contemporânea.

---

## Introduction

Drama begins with a disciplined construction and orderly arrangement of words and actions and these actions are carried out by the actor/actress/performer as performance either on stage or screen. Drama is an action and a purposeful dramatic action is acting and acting cannot be carried out without actors/actresses/characters. Accordingly, there are vital points to note about the actor/actress and acting in relation to actors/actress's personality or person. In order to enhance societal appreciation of the actor/actress, his or her creative genius and work which is critical to humankind's enjoyment of life, a probing of the performer's real identity and the construct nexus is germane. The problematic of this study is informed by the behaviour of some Nigerian actors/performers that tend to live their 'stage life' or 'screen life' in their normal everyday living, which results in conflict between their real personalities and their constructs. This paper adopts the historical-analytic and artistic methods to examine the misconception of some performers/actors/actresses about their creativity on stage or screen, their normal daily living, and how these misconceptions colour society's appreciation of theatre arts as a discipline.

It argues that although actors/actresses have been seen all through the ages as entertainers, but they should train and retrain themselves on how to neatly separate what they construct on stage/screen from their daily living. Towards this end, this paper suggests, among other things, self-discovery, psychological balancing/consciousness, and psychological distancing as panaceas to the challenge. It concludes that the actor's or actress's prime requisites are common sense, acute powers of

observation and perception, tolerance and understanding of human behaviour and a sound general knowledge of society, where performers represent human beings and other phenomena with fidelity. It equally holds that such deliberate effort will help to deepen the professional streak which theatre arts as a profession desperately needs in contemporary Nigeria.

Across the ages, critical materials abound on how philosophers, scholars and critics have viewed the personality of the actor/actress. In the classical age, Plato was the first to write on the person of the actor in his work, *The Republic* (circa 373 BC). It is common knowledge that Plato attacked actors and poets and excluded them from his ideal republic on the ground that their act is on the realm of illusion, which is three times removed from the original. According to him, actors misrepresent the gods and heroes. God is perfectly good and, therefore, is changeless and incapable of deceit, but the actor often shows him as falling short in this respect. Plato believes that the actor's impersonation of another character will cause the guardians to depart from their own character. Plato cited in Bernard Dukore pontificates that "actors are imitators of the imperfect copies of an ideal life; they are third hand and unreal and can teach us nothing of value about life."<sup>1</sup>

For this reason, Plato advocates that actors should be expelled from his ideal republic. He further maintains that actors/actresses have bad moral influence on those who listen and watch them, for they will soon learn to admire them and model themselves on the weaknesses and faults of their acts. After Plato, comes a great theorist of the same age, a student of Plato. This great philosopher is called Aristot-

---

<sup>1</sup> DUKORE, 1974, p. 21.

le. In the *Poetics* written in (circa 335 BC), Aristotle cited in Dukore asserts that drama is the imitation of men in action not men themselves and these men are necessarily either good or bad depending on the nature of their character, and knowing that men differ in their moral nature according to the degree of their goodness or badness, dramatic character must always fall into one of these categories.<sup>2</sup>

Aristotle claims that drama is concerned with the portrayal of the universal. Therefore, the actor or actress is concerned with teaching the society about life by presenting such truth on stage or screen, which will go a long way in bringing about a change of heart and attitude through catharsis. Coming down to the medieval period, Tertullian, like Plato, writes against the actor in his work, *On the spectacles* (197-202). He sees the activities of the actor as a serious sin against God and states thus:

Ye servants of God, about to draw near to God, that you may make solemn consecration of yourselves to Him, seek well to understand the condition of faith, the reasons of the truth, the laws of Christian discipline, which forbid among other sins of the world, the pleasure of public shows... (DUKORE, 1974, p.85.)

He counselled that every show is an assembly of the wicked, that drama belongs to the devil and that theatrical pleasures are forms of lust. To him, Christians should not use the hands they raise up to God in praise and worship to applaud the actors. He maintains that the actors/actresses in their activities lure people into immoral behaviours.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Giovanni Boccaccio writes in favour of

the actor/actress in his critique, *The Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* (circa 1365). To him poetry offers us many inducements to virtue, and that poetry proceeds from the bosom of God. Poetry is relevant to the society because it stimulates virtual feeling in the member of the society. He argues that actors through poetry veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction with the sole purpose of passing a message across. He also noted that dramatic characters and the actors/actresses are no worse than the characters or people in the holy writ.<sup>4</sup>

In England, the puritans condemned the actor when they took over government for what they called 'immorality of the English stage.' A man named Stephen Gosson, a critic of the Renaissance period, writes strongly against the actor in his work, *School of Abuse* (1579). He contends that the presence of the theatre showed the moral decadence in England, that theatre provided opportunity for immorality for those that watch it. He says that "Romulus built his theatre as a whore's fair to whores."<sup>5</sup> He further advanced that the theatre is a school of abuse, meaning that the actors are teachers of abuse and immoral acts. Theatre of this period was even built outside the city because according to Gosson and those in his school of thought, the actor has an evil influence that could affect the town. Indeed, because of the fear of arrest, actors acted under protection of powerful people and wore the coat of arm of these people for protection. Actors were seen as vagabonds.<sup>6</sup> In the same way, Oscar Brockett asserts that theatre came to the United States of America (USA) from England, after

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 162

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

the end of the revolutionary war.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, in 1782, Thomas Wall, a former member of Douglas troop appeared in Baltimore and in the next year, he joined with Dennis Ryan to form the American Company.<sup>8</sup> Brockett noted further that in Western USA; processional theatre began in 1815 when Samuel Drake took a company down to Kentucky.<sup>9</sup>

By the nineteenth century, although actors and actresses were applauded and were financially successful, they continued to be regarded by many as slightly disrespectable. By the end of the century, however, the situation had so changed that in 1895, the Queen of England; Queen Victoria knighted Henry Irving, the first actor to be so honoured. Such an accolade became almost commonplace in the following years both in Europe and America as actors/actresses were accorded considerable respect. In fact, one of the American's most glamorous presidents, Ronald Reagan was an actor.

In Africa, the acting profession is seen as that of a never-do-well. For the girls, it is regarded as a profession for the wayward who want to expose themselves to men. It is likely because of this reason that J.C. De Graft writes in his play, *Sons and Daughters*, portraying a middle class family, where the father, a rich businessman wants his children to be influential people in the society. For this reason, he chooses and imposes courses on them. According to James Ofose in the play, doctors, accountants, engineers and lawyers are the most respected professionals in society and for this reason, he refuses his last son, Aron and his only daugh-

ter, Mamman to enrol for painting and dance in the university respectively.<sup>10</sup> Specifically adumbrating on the Nigerian case, Joel Adedeji contends that "when the Yoruba travelling theatre emerged out of the Egungun, the actors were called Alarinjo meaning an abuse which labels the actors as rogues, vagabonds, and beggars."<sup>11</sup> Actors/actresses were generally regarded as social inferiors despite their efforts on stage/screen and outside such performative contexts.

Corroborating the foregoing, Sonny Oti states that "the Nigerian society in evaluating the individual in the community sees the actor/actress as a black sheep of the family because he or she is regarded as a poor wage earner."<sup>12</sup> He goes further to intimate us with the reaction of the society towards the actor and his profession as he says, "the community react to the actor as they would to an 'Osu' (out-cast)."<sup>13</sup> In this same vein, rumours about actors and actresses abound in the Nigerian movie industry (Nollywood) – an artistic platform that largely emerged from the Nigerian stage. These stories revolve mostly around imaginary misdemeanours/bad acts. In most soft sell magazines/newspapers, we read about actors and actresses being drug addicts, sex maniacs and lesbians or gays – it is a criminal offence to be a lesbian or gay in Nigeria. Femi Osofisan holds that the negative impression towards theatre artists also emanates from the myth of immorality. He opines that: ...the fear is that the theatre profession is a corrupt institution, a catalyst for a life of infidelity and marital insta-

7 BROCKETT, 1991, p. 364

8 Ibid.

9 BROCKETT, 1991, p. 367

10 DE GRAFT, 1969

11 ADEDEJI, 1981, p. 228

12 OTI, 1978, p. 126

13 Ibid., 126.

bility... As far as many people in the society are concerned, theatre artists live a most precarious life.<sup>14</sup>

This, perhaps, explains why Victor Dugga argues that “the theatre artist has been viewed in some quarters as a miscreant, clown, pauper, vagabond and a social misfit who has little or nothing good to offer.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the misconceptions of the art of the actor have led to some of the problems the profession and professionals encounter in the Nigerian cultural and entertainment environment. However, a considerable number of people, not minding the erroneous views of other people about the actor’s/actress’ act, still see the actor or actress and his or her act as a means of communication. Brain Bates in Beneditt Robert asserts that:

Almost everything that actors do can be identified with things we do in less dramatic form in everybody’s life. But in order to express the concentrated truths which are the life-stuff of drama, and to project convincing performance before large audience, and the piercing eye of the film and television camera, the actor must develop depths of self-knowledge and powers of expression far beyond those with which most of us are familiar. (ROBERT, 1990)

The above shows that an actor or actress is always doing an intended act. Although what he/she does could be seen in everyday activity, his/hers is purposeful and full of feelings. An actor or actress is under obligation to live his or her part inwardly and then to give to his/her experience an external embodiment. Hence, an actor/actress is like two persons in one. He/

<sup>14</sup> OSOFISAN, 2001, p. 66

<sup>15</sup> Victor S. Dugga, “Rethinking Training Imperative in Nigerian University Theatres,” *Nigerian Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists* 9, no. 1 (2006): 6.

she is an actor/actress as well as a character. Therefore, we have an actor – as – actor and actor – as – character. H.D. Albright, William Halsted and Lee Mitchell opine that “in effect, the actor is asked to be two performers at once: an interpreter as well as instrument of interpretation.”<sup>16</sup> That is, an actor is at once artist and medium. They further state that the point, therefore, is that every successful performer/actor/actress must operate simultaneously on both levels but that his or her focus as an actor/actress must remain in suitable proportion to his or her focus as a character.<sup>17</sup> It is within this context that this study examines the art of acting; actors/actresses and how their resourcefulness can help them make a distinction between stage or screen life and normal daily living, to ensure a better appreciation of the theatre profession and its professionals in society, with particular reference to Nigeria.

---

## Acting

Essentially, acting is the representation of a usually fictional character on stage or in films. At its highest level of accomplishment, acting involves the employment of technique and/or an imaginative identification with the character on the part of the actor/actress. In this way, the full emotional weight of situations on stage/screen could be communicated to the audience for the purpose of edutainment, spiritual edification or diversion. Constantin Stanislavski asserts that:

An actor while acting turns to his spiritual and physical creative instruments.

<sup>16</sup> ALBRIGHT; HALSTED & MITCHELL, 1968, p. 82

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 83

His mind, will and feelings combine to mobilize all his inner elements... out of this fusion of elements arises an important inner state... the inner creative mood. The habit of being daily on the stage and in the right creative state is what produces actors who are masters of their art. (STANISLAVSKI, 1952, p. 81.)

Furthermore, Peter Brook in Theodore W. Hatlen opines that acting should not only mirror reality but transcend the commonplace of everyday life by deliberately exaggerating and distorting reality through stylized acting techniques. He contends that:

Acting is in many ways so unique in its difficulties because the artist has to use the treacherous, changeable and mysterious material of himself as his medium. He is called upon to be completely involved while distanced, detached without detachment. He must be sincere, he must be insincere, and he must practice to be insincere with sincerity and how to lie truthfully... (HATLEN, 1972, p.243.)

This assertion further expounds the interesting dichotomy of the actor or actress who while acting/assuming the role of another character, still remains in complete control of himself or herself. Indeed, Daw Kurt states that acting is creating a sense of life. It is giving an audience an experience so vivid and truthful that they are able to draw their own conclusions about what it all means. Actors/actresses create this sense of life not by manipulating appearances, but by experiencing the action as it occurs.<sup>18</sup> Concerning acting/performing arts in the Nigerian clime, Uche-Chinemere argues that no other profession is so completely misunderstood in Nigeria than the art of acting. The reason for this misunderstanding is obvious. We are con-

<sup>18</sup> KURT, 1997, p. 9

stantly confronted with the glitterati associated with the works and lives of popular actors/actresses. Thus we are constantly exposed to the actor/actress celebrity living out opulent and fun-filled life of fantasy.<sup>19</sup>

---

### Actor/Actress/Performer as a Construct

In order to understand the meaning of the word 'construct,' we would like to conceptualise it. Encarta defines it as "to build or assemble something by putting together separate parts in an ordered way."<sup>20</sup> From the foregoing, one can clearly see that 'construct' involves bringing different tools and resources, whether physical or mental, to form a unified element. So it is in acting. However, we would like to state that another phrase for 'actor as a construct' is 'actor as a creative artist'. Hence, both of them are interchangeably used to mean the same thing in this study.

In acting, an actor/actress is pretending to be something he or she is not which is what he or she has constructed. To be a good actor/actress, one must pass an idea that one is what one is not. That is, passing what one has constructed to one's audience, thus, playing a role, which one does not actually possess. Edwin Wilson contends that acting is not pretence. An actor does not pretend to be a Mac-

---

<sup>19</sup> Nwaozuzu Uche-Chinemere, "From Stage to Living: A Critical Reflection on the Status of the Modern Nigerian Actor" (A Paper Presented at the African Circle of Artists Conference, Enugu, 2002) 1; Nwaozuzu Uche-Chinemere, "Between Talent and scholarship: A Critical Review of the Art of the Actor in Contemporary Nigeria" (A Lecture Delivered at Alliance Frances, Enugu, April 5th 2007), 6.

<sup>20</sup> Encarta "Construct," Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 [DVD], (Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008).

both as an impostor pretends to be what he is not; instead he *creates* (italics ours) an appearance, which is intended for perception as an illusion.<sup>21</sup> Creating a believable character is an important part of acting where the characters resemble recognizable human beings. However, a realistic approach became more important than ever at the close of the nineteenth century, when drama began to depict characters and situations close to everyday life.<sup>22</sup> Not only has the spirit of the part but also the details had to conform to what people saw of life around them. This placed great demands on actors/actresses to avoid any limit of fakery or superficiality. Hubert Heffner states that an actor must build (construct) in his imagination an image of the kind of individual he is portraying and identify himself with that individual.<sup>23</sup>

However, the creative process is a way of fulfilling that longing or search of an actor or actress to create a new dramatic character that is not easily found or attained. This longing and search is often observed not only during the creative process (characterization) but also in the creative product itself (a dramatic character). Silvano Arieti insists that "...human creativity uses what is already existing and available and changes it in unpredictable ways."<sup>24</sup> It is necessary that the actor/actress strives to transcend those preconceptions and to create the character afresh, transporting the audience to an understanding of – and a compassion for – the character.<sup>25</sup> Creatively, however, it is not an attribute of great men or women exclusively

but of every human being. Creativity does not depend on inherited talent or on environment or upbringing but it depends on one's ego or sense of self. Creativity then occurs when an actor or actress departs a little from himself or herself by modifying his/her personality in order to create a new dramatic character.

Furthermore, for an actor or actress to construct a believable character on stage or screen, Hatlen says that he or she "...must serve a dual function; he/she creates and interprets. He/she does not simply reproduce a faithful copy from life. He/she selects, heightens, expands ..."<sup>26</sup> This implies that even though 'drama is a slice of life', an actor or actress should try all he or she could not to duplicate life on stage or screen. He or she must create a character capable of convincing his/her audience and conveying his/her intended message without alteration. It is the duty of an actor/actress to look within himself or herself and around his or her environment in order to discover those materials/resources that will enable him or her create a character effectively. In this regard, Eva Miller states that "I believe in working from the outside in and as an actor, I tend to start from how a character looks, using what it says about himself in the play. I may not be at all like that person but I have to get as near as I can to him."<sup>27</sup>

This observation makes us to believe that for an actor or actress to construct a real dramatic character he or she must analyze the play text or film script. In doing this, the actor/actress is required to find out the physiology and temperaments of the character and begin to work on himself or herself in order to look like

21 WILSON, 1998, p. 244

22 Ibid.

23 HEFFNER, 1959, p. 236

24 ARIETI, 1976, p. 4

25 RUNCAN, 2015, p. 9 – 29

26 HATLEN, 1972, p. 232

27 MILLER, 1989, p. 12

the intended character. Louis Styan states that Brecht and Genet required the actor to play freely in and out of character.<sup>28</sup> This illustrates that an actor/actress has a double advantage of being human like his or her percipients and at the same time capable of impersonating the creatures of an unreal fiction. But the foregoing cannot be possible unless the actor/actress constructs the character he or she is playing adroitly well. We are accustomed to seeing actors or actresses impersonating characters as realistically as possible, trying to convince us of the living actuality of the figures they represent. This is only possible if the actor or actress does his or her 'creative' work effectively. Perhaps, this explains why Styan further asserts that "the work of the actor is therefore uniquely creative."<sup>29</sup> In view of this, one could say that there is no actor or actress if there is no creativity in the life of such an actor or actress. In other words, an actor's or actress's life consists of what he or she can create.

### — Conflict between an Actor's/Actress's Real Personality and Construct

Over the years, there has been a conflict in an actor's or actress' behaviour between what he or she had already constructed and his or her real personality. Many actors/actresses have been influenced immensely by what they had played on stage or screen. For instance, one of the principal actors in the popular *New Masquerade*, Chief Zebrudaya's (real name is Chika Okpala) daily living is said to have been huge-

ly affected by his roles on stage and screen.<sup>30</sup> We have seen similar challenges in the lives of Nkem Owoh of the 'Osuofia in London' fame, Hafix Oyetoro of the 'Saka' fame, Funke Akin-dale of the 'Jenifa' fame, John Okafor of the 'Mr Ibu' fame, among many others in the Nigerian acting environment. At this juncture it may not be out of place if we further examine the various ways one could see conflicts in an actor's or actress' life both on stage/screen and in real life.

It is sad to state that some actors' or actresses' behaviour out-of-stage/screen is about 80% of what they had played (constructed). Many a time, one sees an actor/actress behaving in accordance with what he or she had played on stage/screen, which makes many people (including film or stage play enthusiasts) to believe that an actor or actress lives a fake life. Robert Cohen states that:

Some have argued that actors should live out their parts in real life. French Theatre Critic Sainte Albine (1747) proposed that only actors who were truly in love could effectively play lovers on stage, unless they could develop a 'happy insanity' that could persuade them that they were experiencing exactly what their characters seemed to experience; and for the next two centuries great actors were thought to be either promiscuous or insane. (COHEN, 2007, p. 65.)

The above demonstrates that actors or actresses living out their stage or screen lives in their real life did not start today. Many actors/actresses/artistes in their quest to live up to their screen or stage life have made series of mistakes ranging from being drug addicts to being promiscuous or being spendthrifts – the

28 STYAN, 1975

29 Ibid., 143

30 Practitioner's interview with Kenneth Eni, conducted by Osakue S. Omoera, August 27, 2014, Lagos, Nigeria.

lives and careers of Marilyn Monroe, Michael Jackson, Bobbi Kristina Brown, Majek Fashek, Whitney Houston, among others, illustrate this point. Besides, some actors/actresses are not naturally rich but due to the fact that they have played many roles as rich men or women, they tend to behave or live like rich men or women. Dafoe in Cohen says that:

I think all the characters I played are basically me. I believe that under that right set of circumstance we are all capable of anything, and that acting allows the deepest part of your nature to surface. The theatre, therefore, has provided the stage not only for characters and dramaturgic development, but for actor embodiment and self-expression as well and has done so since the earliest of time. (COHEN, 2007, p. 41.)

In the forgoing Dafoe appears to propose that an actor or actress should live out his or her stage or screen life and his or her real life as if they are the same. But how plausible or good is it? What Dafoe is suggesting is that if he impersonates an armed robber on stage or screen that should be what he is playing his real life. If we believe that drama is ‘make believe,’ we see no reason why a professional actor or actress should go on living his or her stage/screen life in his or her real life. Perhaps, it is this kind of thinking that has made many people to lose interest in actors or the acting profession.

Thus, we would say that the whole basis of an actor’s or actress’ life and work consist of the impossibility of separating his or her worldly ‘I’ from the stage’s or screen’s ‘I’. Bernard Shaw’s maxim according to Charles McGaw is that “the only thing not forgivable in an actor is

being the part instead of playing it.”<sup>31</sup> An actor, according to him, should play a part and not being that part.<sup>32</sup> That is, an actor or actress not minding how natural he or she is in playing any part should come out of that part as soon as he or she has finished playing that part. Bowskill agrees with this position as he argues that “self awareness is the cornerstone of the art and craft of acting.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, for an actor or actress to do well or lead a better professional life side by side with his or her truly lived experiences, he or she must have self-awareness knowing that he or she is only acting not being the part.

### ————— Conflict between the Constructs

Acting can be seen as the art of (re)presenting a character through vocal and visual means on stage or screen in a way to convince and stir or move audience(s) into certain realities.<sup>34</sup> It appears that most Nigerian actors/actresses do not see acting in this sense; they tend to see acting as a way of doing things as usual. In acting a particular role, the actor or actress looks for a way to render the character he or she is impersonating truthfully in vocal rendition, mannerism and psychological terms. The common tendency by most actors/actress (even directors) in Nigeria to typecast themselves in such a way that they cannot play other roles effectively is unwise and unethical.

<sup>31</sup> McGAW, 2004, p. III

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> BOWSKILL, 1979, p. 1

<sup>34</sup> Osakue S. Omoera, “Actors/Actresses and their Responsibilities in Society” (A Paper Presented in a Workshop by the Benin Chapter of the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) at Broderick’s Inn, Benin City, March 12, 2005).

Most actors or actresses tend to run into trouble in interpreting a particular role simply because what they had constructed is in conflict with what they are constructing. For instance, many actors/actresses, having played many roles as rich men or women, find it difficult to play a poor man's role. Even when some do, you will be seeing the 'ghost' of their past role in their present construct – some professional activities of Jide Kosoko, a popular Nigerian actor largely illustrates the point being made. This is what we have termed the conflict of the constructs in the context of our discussion. Dorothy Birch contends that:

Acting is impersonating a character so that you behave as you would but this is important – you must impersonate according to theatrical techniques, so that although you do not behave exactly in real life, you appear to do so... To suit stage pattern designed to give the illusion of real. To suit stage conditions, you must modify your appearance... (BIRCH, 1952, p. 1)

But is the above the case in contemporary Nigerian acting? The answer is no! Most so-called professional actors/actresses have typecast themselves to the extent that they tend to live out their screen or stage roles in their day-to-day living – Chief Zebrudaya, Ime Bishop Umoh (Okon Calabar) and their ilk emblematised this tendency among Nigerian actors/actresses. This is likely why they find it difficult to adhere to the advice of Birch when she noted that “to suit stage condition, you must modify your appearance.”<sup>35</sup> Most actors/actresses who have taken their constructs as their way of living find it impossible to modify in order to fit into their new role, which leads to bad acting. However, acting involves the human person in

its entirety; the actor or actress uses his or her body, mind, voice and even his or her will to create what audiences discover is a character that lives within the structural framework of a play or a film. When one builds a character, one's creation could take four (4) forms: physical traits; social traits; psychological traits; and, moral traits. It might be profitable that we examine these traits, however briefly:

1. **Physical Traits:** This involves analyzing a character in terms of physiognomic attributes. In this regard, one finds out how the character looks; is he/she a fat, slim or stout. Some of these traits can be seen in the screen or stage directions where the screenwriter/playwright describes the character in screen or play text or by other characters. For instance, Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman* says of Willy Loman, “He is past sixty years of age; dressed quietly... his exhaustion is apparent.”<sup>36</sup>

2. **Social Traits:** This relates to the environment and to the people surrounding the character in the screen or play text. The character's educational and social background, status and the type of work he or she does are the social traits, which the screenwriter/playwright provides in the script. Robert states that:

The most important social traits are the general and specific relationship your character has with the other characters in the play... dramatic characters can be understood only in relationship to the other characters in their world. (ROBERT, 1990, p. 98)

Therefore, for an actor/actress to understand his or her role, he or she must look out for the social traits of the character. Ubong Nda asserts, though in a slightly different context, that “it involves a performer creating his or her

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> MILLER, 1985, p. 2

lines and actions, in accordance with his/her understanding of the assigned role in a play production.”<sup>37</sup>

3. Psychological Traits: This is a very important level of characterization because it justifies and motivates all the other traits. Any actor or actress who fails to discover the psychological traits of the character he or she is to play can never interpret that character effectively. Psychological traits help to make the actions of that character believable.

4. Morality Traits: Morality traits refer to the character or actor’s/actress’ values. They are results of the thoughts of the character and the feelings consciously or unconsciously expressed.

Essentially, these different levels of characterization we have X-rayed contribute to the dramatic actions that are performed in terms of the objective revealed by the character and the goals that are achieved. Each character responds to a given action according to the physical, social, psychological and moral orientations of his or her personality. But do many Nigerian actors/actresses painstakingly undergo such characterization processes? The answer is no! Because if they do, there would not have been the issues of conflict between constructs in many Nigerian stage and screen productions as we have historically observed. Robert theoretically underscores the issue thus: “we may even experience situations in which two or more of our ‘mes’ come into conflict with one another.”<sup>38</sup> From the foregoing, we see that Robert believes that constructs tend to conflict with one another and it is the actor’s or actress’s responsibility to conscientiously guard against such conflicts.

tiously guard against such conflicts.

### ————— Separating Actor’s/Actress’s Real Identity from the Construct

Here, we propose some strategies through which Nigerian actors/actresses could use to separate their real identities from their constructs. This is in view of the observation that we have earlier made that many of the characters, which many Nigerian actors and actress had constructed, are in conflict with their real identities. It must be noted too that in a number of cases some of the actor’s or actress’s constructs have been conflictual or been in conflict with one another. Thus, strategies which hopefully would help to put issues in better perspective for the Nigerian actor/actress are worth examining.

Furthermore, most authorities in the Nigerian theatre arts profession, especially in acting tend to be more concerned about the ways through which one could be a good actor or actress. A majority of them do not realize or seem not to have taken into cognizance that actors or actresses are human beings. Everyone aims at propounding theories of acting but none has seen this ‘tool’ (actor/actress) as a being that needs to shed off those roles after playing them. A careful observation indicates that many of these theorists of realism and realistic acting do not think about the aftermath of acting in the life of an actor/actress.

We have observed that most actors/actresses have been affected seriously by the roles they had played. Some are now drug addicts while some are harlots and womanizers all because of the roles they had played at one time on the other on stage or screen. These people

<sup>37</sup> NDA, 2013, p. 48

<sup>38</sup> ROBERT, 1990, p. 21

may have read about Aristotle's definition of drama as "an imitation of action"<sup>39</sup> as previously noted. However, actors/actresses should see drama as a deliberate act and should follow it that way. In this regard, Emeka Nwabueze asserts that:

Drama involves imitation, impersonation and a deliberate interest in costume, modulation of voice, gestulation, and movement in rhythm with the idiosyncrasies of the character being imitated. It is not reality but an illusion of it. (Nwabueze, 2005, p. 9.)

But those who do not see drama as an illusion of reality see it as reality. They equally do not see it as an imitation or impersonation but as a way of life. Domba Asomba states that "...theatre in its nature is illusionistic, temporal and dependent existence."<sup>40</sup> This means that theatre is time bound and lasts as long as the actions endure. Having seen this, one will begin to wonder why many Nigerian actors/actresses who participate in an activity (that is, acting on stage or screen) that is temporal carry their part permanently. Here, we want to look at the actors/actresses as beings who only become actors/actresses when they begin to impersonate and stop acting as soon as the play ends. However, there are cases where an actor divorced his wife and married an actress who played with him in a love scene and it happens vice versa. Such actors fail to follow the prescriptive paths of Asomba who said that drama is a temporal act or Nwabueze, who said that drama is a purposeful art, which is not real, but deliberate illusion.

In acting, an actor/actress is pretending to be something he or she is not. He or she is

playing a role, which of course, he or she does not own/possess. Styan opines that "we are accustomed to seeing actors impersonating characters as realistically as possible, trying to the utmost of their bent to convince us of the living actuality of the figure they represent."<sup>41</sup> But the above is not enough reason why an actor/actress will try to replicate same in real life. Having observed that what we do (that is, not separating real identity from the construct as an actor or actress) affects us more negatively than positively, we propose the following strategies to remediate the situation.

1. Self-discovery
2. Psychological Balancing/Consciousness
3. Psychological distancing/'distanciación'

---

## 1. Self Discovery

This is the first step an actor or actress must take in separating himself or herself from his or her construct. An actor's or actress's first duty is to discover that he or she is a human being just like every other person. Before one becomes an actor or actress one had been oneself living among others, including the immediate family. Actors/actresses should discover that being an actor/actress is not looking for a role model but using himself or herself as an 'instrument' to pass a theatrical or filmic message to the audience. An actor/actress should discover in his or her sub-conscious that he or she is not an actor/actress from birth but learned or picked acting as a way of living. In so doing, he or she becomes more aware that he/she is himself/herself creating a character. In self-discovery,

<sup>39</sup> DUKORE, 1974 , p. 36

<sup>40</sup> ASOMBA, 2000, p. 7

<sup>41</sup> STYAN, 1975 , p. 141

an actor/actress comes to realize that there is only one 'I' in his or her life, which is the real person and that anything he or she creates, are his or her 'mes.' Self-discovery is the first step in the life of any actor or actress who wants to effectively separate his or her real identity from his or her constructs.

---

## 2. Psychological Balancing/Consciousness

It must be stated here that anything that happens to an actor or actress after stage is purely psychological. An actor should balance his or her psyche, that he or she is just an ordinary person trying to construct a believable character on stage or screen. In constructing a character, an actor or actress should have in his or her sub-conscious that he or she is now a 'two person' living in one person. Louis Styan affirms that the actor or actress has the double advantage of being human like his/her spectators, looking like them, able to represent and demonstrate their feelings, and at the same time capable of impersonating the creature of an unreal fiction giving a kind of life to the figures of pure fantasy.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, Styan believes that an actor/actress has the power to look out of himself or herself while acting and in so doing, he/she is balancing himself/herself.<sup>53</sup> An actor/actress should at all time aim at knowing that what he/she is acting is not his or her real self but a construct. For him or her to effectively do this, he or she should balance in his/her psyche of the two individuals (his or her construct and his or her real identity). Actors/actresses who fail to

do this end up becoming type-cast actors/actresses because they easily take solace in their past roles. For any actor/actress to separate his or her real identity from his or her construct, he/she must be someone who knows how to balance the difference between his/her real self and his/her construct. This will help him or her to become conscious of what he or she is doing, thus, reminding him/her that he/she is not what he or she is creating but a different being. Anybody who wants to be a good actor or actress must learn how to balance himself psychologically so as to become aware of his real identity.

---

## 3. Psychological Distancing

After balancing his or her real identity with the construct, a good actor or actress should aim at distancing both from each other. Many Nigerian actors/actresses have unwittingly aimed at identifying with the roles they have played on stage or screen other than with themselves. Hubert Heffner states that "an actor must build in his imagination an image of the kind of individual he is portraying and identify himself with that individual."<sup>43</sup> No matter how he or she tries to identify himself or herself with the character he or she should psychologically distance himself/herself from the role knowing full well that he or she is just a creative artist – a vessel for another creation. Most actors/actresses run into trouble when some fans call them by their stage or screen names. This makes most Nigerian performers, particularly comedians to begin to behave like the character they had played in order to live up to the expectations

---

42 Ibid.

---

43 Ibid.

of their fans/friends – we have perennially seen this with popular Nigerian comedians, including Francis Agordie, aka, ‘I Go Die’, Imeh Bishop Umoh of the ‘Okon Calabar’ fame, among others. Any actor/actress who knows how to distance himself or herself from his or her role will not do that because he or she knows that drama, whether on stage or screen, exists in time and space and that character lives and dies with the drama – Olu Jacobs, Zack Orji, Genevieve Nnaji, Ramsey Nouah, Richard Mofe-Damijo, Joke Silva, among others, are shining examples in the Nigerian acting scene who have gone ahead to hold prominent positions outside their acting careers. Psychological distancing/‘distanciation’ helps an actor/actress not to remain in his or her character after playing that character on stage or screen. Take for example, one of our male friends who played the role of ‘Akpan’ in one play and after that he began to speak and walk like Akpan in order to make people laugh, he had continued to exhibit Akpan’s mannerisms because Akpan is a comic character. This has taken more than 80% of his real identity and people now see him as a non-serious person and worst, he cannot play any serious role now except comic roles like Akpan – he has become a ‘stock’ character. Had he tried to distance himself from the role psychologically, it would have helped him to avoid becoming a stereotyped. Psychological ‘distanciation’ helps actors or actresses while creating or impersonating a character to know that they are still themselves.

---

### Conclusion

It is widely believed that acting is the world’s most bewildering profession. We understood

that acting is an imitation of action and we all have a history of imitation. However, acting is an art and actors/actresses are privileged people who get to live the lives of some of the world’s greatest and best-known characters thereby bringing history back to us. Actors/actresses represent human beings from all walks of life and to do this effectively, they must know something about humankind generally. Actors/actresses have been seen through the ages as entertainers and they also see themselves the same way. Although such perception is good, they (particularly Nigerian actors and actresses) should learn or be taught how to conscientiously separate themselves from what they construct on stage or screen. As Joan Snyder asserts “...when you portray a character on the stage you are usually quite different from yourself.”<sup>44</sup> Nigerian actors and actresses should learn and relearn that the actors’ or actresses’ prime requisites are common sense, acute powers of observation and perception, tolerance and understanding of human beings and a sound general knowledge of society; they must discern painstakingly that they are ‘two in one’ (the real identity and the construct). A profession is a profession; the only difference is how well one knows one’s profession and how good one is in the profession and what one can make out from what one has constructed and who one is. For any actor or actress to claim that he or she is a professional, he or she should learn to kill stereotype kind of acting in him or her. He or she should not be a stereotyped actor, that is, an actor who knows how to play a particular or similar role always.

Nigerian directors and producers, on both stage and screen, should also help actors/ac-

---

<sup>44</sup> SNYDER, 1972

tresses by varying their roles by not always giving them particular or similar roles. The widespread syndrome of calling an actor/actress and casting him or her to play a particular role always makes that actor or actress a stock actor/actress. Apart from being uncreative, this tendency is not healthy for the development of the acting profession in Nigeria. Also, it makes the 'actor' or 'actress' at issue to begin to copy from his or her stage life or screen life to his or her real life – the lives of Jim Iyke, the 'Nollywood's bad boy' and Tonto Dike, the 'Nollywood's bad girl' are arguably distressing instances in this regard. After all, actors or actresses are human beings, they can easily be affected by what they act, see or hear. In as much as we are telling actors or actresses to go-into-their role, we should also ask them to learn how to go-out-of-their role for the purpose of a healthy personality. It is in this respect that we have posited the three (3) steps of self discovery, psychological balancing and psychological distancing to help growing actors and actresses in Nigeria to separate their real identities from their constructs. When an actor or actress discovers himself or herself, balances his or her real identity psychologically and goes further to distance himself or herself from his or her construct, we would have healthier actors or actresses off stage or off screen. Actors/actresses are real individuals, not fake people and they must live like real people.

---

## References

Adedeji, Joel A. "Alarinjo, the Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre." *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, edited YemiOgunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981.

Albright, H.D., Halsted William P and Mitchell, Lee. *Principles of Theatre Art* (second edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968.

Arieti, Silvano. *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*. New York: Basic Books Publishers Inc., 1976.

Asomba, Domba. *Scene Design Art and Craft*. Ibadan: Caltop Publication Ltd., 2000.

Birch, Dorothy. *Training for the Stage: The Technique of Acting*. London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons Ltd., 1952.

Bowskill, Derek. *Acting and Stagecraft made Simple*. London: W.H. Allen and Company, Ltd., 1979.

Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the Theatre* (6thed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.

Cohen, Robert. *Acting One* (fourth edition). New York: McGraw Hill, 2007.

Dugga, Victor S. "Rethinking Training Imperative in Nigerian University Theatres." *Nigerian Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists* 9, no. 1 (2006): 5-15.

Dukore, Bernard F. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974.

De Graft, J.C. Sons and Daughters. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Encarta. "Construct." *Microsoft® Encarta® 2009 [DVD]*. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.

Evwierhoma, Mabel I. E. *Mother is Gold: The Mater, the Matter and Women-Centred Approaches in Nigerian Drama and Theatre*. (18th Inaugural Lecture). Abuja: University of Abuja Press, 2016.

Heffner, Hubert C. *Modern Theatre Practice: A Handbook of Play Production* (fourth edition). New York: Appleton-Century Crofts Inc., 1959.

- Hatlen, Theodore W. *Orientation to the Theatre* (second edition). New York: Meredith Corporation, 1972.
- Kurt, Daw. *Acting Thought into Acting*. Portsmouth: Heinemann Inc., 1997.
- McGaw, Charles C. *Acting is Believing* (8th edition). New York: Wadsworth, 2004.
- Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1985.
- Miller, Eva. *Masters of the State*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989.
- Nda, Ubong "Improvisation in the Theatre for Development Process." *Ganga: Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5 (2013):48-62.
- Nwabueze, Emeka P. *In the Spirit of Thespis: The Theatre Arts and National Integration*. (An Inaugural Lecture). Nsukka: University of Nigeria, 2005.
- Omoera, Osakue S. "Actors/Actresses and their Responsibilities in Society." A Paper Presented in a Workshop by the Benin Chapter of the Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN) at Broderick's Inn, Benin City, March 12, 2005.
- Osofisan, Femi. *Insidious Treasons: Drama in a Postcolonial State*. Ibadan: Oponlfa Publishers, 2001.
- Oti, Sonny. "In Search of Nigerian Actor." *Nigeria Magazine* (1978): 126-127.
- Robert, Beneditt. *The Actor at Work* (fifth edition). New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1990.
- Runcan, Miruna. "Strategies for the Embodiment and Disembodiment of Spectatorship: *Don't Cry Baby* and *Hotel* by Eugen Jebeleanu." *Studia Ubb Dramatica*, LX, no.2 (2015):9-26.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Body of the Empathic Spectator." *Echinox Journal* 29 no.2 (2015): 29-52.
- Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hap Good. New York: Theatre Arts Books Inc., 1952.
- Snyder, Joan. *The Dynamics of Acting*. Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1972.
- Styan, Louis J. *Drama, Stage and Audience*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Uche-Chinemere, Nwaozuzu. "From Stage to Living: A Critical Reflection on the Status of the Modern Nigerian Actor." A Paper Presented at the African Circle of Artists Conference, Enugu, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Between Talent and Scholarship: A Critical Review of the Art of the Actor in Contemporary Nigeria." A Lecture Delivered at Alliance Frances, Enugu, April 5th 2007.
- Wilson, Edwin. *The Theatre Experience* (fourth edition). New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1988.

---

Recebido: 13/06/2017

Aprovado: 04/11/2017