

**TOWARDS MODULAR CONCEPTS IN SCENIC DESIGN  
HEURISTICS: INFLUENCES FROM PRODUCTION SCENERIES IN  
THE CINEMA HALL 2 OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF NIGERIA.  
(1995-2001)**

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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this work is the product of my own research efforts; undertaken under the supervision of Dr. Ema Ema and has not been presented elsewhere for the award of a degree or certificate. All sources have been duly distinguished and appropriately acknowledged.

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this thesis has been examined and approved for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Theatre Arts.

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## ABBREVIATION

1. NTN: This acronym is short for National Theatre of Nigeria
2. The National Troupe of Nigeria may sometimes be referred to as the The National Troupe
3. Elliptical abbreviations like ...Horseman and Trials..., may be used to refer to Death and the King's Horseman and Trials of Oba Ovonramwen respectively.

## ABSTRACT

The relatively high cost of making theatre sets to match the scenic symbology of dramatic productions in contemporary Nigerian theatres has engendered a rather unsavory scenic practice evidenced in the repetitive use of stock sets. Besides the sense of movement that is seriously dislocated, these sets are used without recourse to the technical problems associated with structural weakness, media weight, surface corrosion and stereotypic defects. However, the problems generated by this tendency are aggravated by the misnomic use of the term, 'flexibility' in design and by the desire to re-use sets made predominantly from a material (wood) which does not, in the least, assist this concept. In authenticating these claims, and in an effort to improvise a design concept that can assist in reducing stereotypism in set form and use, this thesis gathers its sample data from the scenic forms and concepts used in five widely varied dramatic productions by the National Troupe of Nigeria, in a stage space known as the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria. The scenic forms and concepts are presented from their construction media, joinery forms, rigging patterns, measurement variables and rendering styles, not leaving out authorial and space considerations. These are achieved through a Historical Research Methodology that leans heavily on primary data of photographs, videos and interviews. An analysis of the scenic design concepts behind these forms reveals a scenic trend that has suffered from acute stereotypism and indeterminacy of forms owing to concept multiplicity and financial problems, amongst other reasons, in the Nigerian theatre. However, the implications from our research findings fructifies in the recommendation of a new, more gratifying material of scenery, thermoplastics, and a modular design heuristics that can ensure flexibility, adaptability and re-usability without suffering from these problems. Though the proffered ideation encapsulated in what this thesis calls 'polymorphic stage design' has its technical limitations, it is, nonetheless, seen as a design heuristics that can give impetus to the needed scenic design experimentations in the Nigerian theatres. As its contribution to knowledge, this work goes beyond the shores of constructivism and its apperceptions which it affirms to evolving a new concept in set design heuristics that it refers to as polymorphism. Through this research exercise, knowledge is equally made of the traditions of production and set design in The National Theatre of Nigeria and in contemporary Nigerian theatres.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to Study

The emergence of digital technology and the digital revolution generally has dealt a devastating blow on live theatre and its practitioners. As the entire world welcomes the incursion of the “electronic theatres” heralded by this revolution, the troubles of its antecedent parent form, the staged play, appear to have increased particularly as a result of its commercially disadvantaged position. In especially the twentieth century, in a bid to wrest itself out from the apparent dangers posed by threats of this digital frenzy, the theatre had lunched itself into different forms of experimentations which are manifested in a large variety of theatrical conventions that have, themselves, spawned forms and concepts in the technical discipline of the theatre. Norris Houghton puts it succinctly:

For the past hundred years, a procession of revolution has moved across the stage: revolts against romanticism, against realism, in behalf of expressionism, surrealism, constructivism, existentialism, nihilism, the epic, the poetic, the socialist realist, many of them occurring simultaneously as the hue and cry has grown deafening (1).



According to Samuel Seldon, these theories "...ingenious as they may be are based upon nothing deeper than the immediate problems of technique" (viii).

Experimentations in theatrical conventions are manifest in the varied scenic forms used in visually interpreting these concepts. In global theatrical trends today, and as a reaction to the threat posed by the electronic media, the speed and urgency by which forms are meant to suggest concepts have left the designer of the stage with the challenge of ensuring a concomitant response by providing peculiar scenic structures that must conform to the dramatic significations of the staged plays. Ensuring a steady response every time a new theatrical concept evolves, however, presupposes that there must be adequate finances available to practically construct the sets pieces required by such an approach and concept. In instances where these finances are not forthcoming, the idea of 'forms following concepts' leaves the set designer with no other choice than to evolve creative method of reusing set stocks repetitively. At this point, however, the speed and resilience of the set designer is seriously enervated by the myriad of ideas and concepts that are enshrined in different forms and genres of plays fecundated by dramaturgical experimentations. For the set designer, this makes the choice

of using a set over and over again a resentful but necessary option. The designer who is saddled with the rather difficult task of using a wide variety of scenery materials in manifesting the fleeting ideas of playwrights becomes incapacitated where he is faced by the usual problems of finances, amongst other problems. This scenario captures, in graphic terms, what can be explained of the set designer in contemporary Nigerian theatre as practiced in the literary tradition of the university and professional theatres.

## 1.2 SET DESIGN PRACTICES IN NIGERIA

Design practices in the Nigerian literary theatres are traceable back to the colonial periods when foreign theatrical activities like the Opera, concerts and cantata were performed. There was equally a Handel Festival which featured a certain Mr. Lawson, a white colonial entertainer with creative and innovative abilities. Echeruo mentions that in August 1886, the play, Trial by Jury was produced with very realistic stage settings with other design attempts witnessed only after the establishment of the Arts Theatre of the University College, Ibadan in 1955 (356-369). It was this School of Drama that motivated the literary tradition of theatre within which scenic design developed through the rewarding efforts of Geoffrey Anxworthy, Martin Bentham, and Dexter Lyndersay. According to Sunday Ododo,

it was this design culture that partly cultivated and sustained the dexterous design works of early Nigerian designers in the theatre- Demas Nwoko, Esohe Omoregie Suinner, (now Molokwu), Agbo Folarin, Segun Akinbola, etc. (Challenges of the Young Designers in the Nigerian Theatre, 94).

The pioneering theatrical practices of the University of Ibadan and theatre practices in some other Nigerian Universities, in main, offer a veritable understanding of Nigerian University Theatre Tradition. In Sunday Ododo's words,

The literary tradition cuts across ethnic barriers in that its main language of expression is the English language. It has also grown over the years in the hand of playwrights, directors, actors, and stage and theatre designers through experiments that draw impetus from the indigenous theatre forms (Oni and Ododo, 18).

The Nigerian literary theatre consists not only of the university theatre genre which is the major progenitor of other variants, it equally consists of those categorized as semi-professional and professional. Under the semi-professional category fall Rasheed Gbadamosi's Phoenix Play House, Maitama Sule Film Players, Bode Sowande's Odu Themes, Olu Obafemi's Ajon Players, Fred Agbeyegbe's Ajo Productions and Ayo Oluwasanni's Gangan Productions. The production style of these groups in terms of set design and construction, costuming, lighting, etc. has followed the pattern of presentations in the universities. The purely professional group under the literary Nigerian theatre, however, constitutes the dramatists from non-governmental organizations whose salaries and emoluments are mostly paid

from gate takings. Others in this category are those from governmental organizations like the performing troupes which are seen as agents of cultural promotion. The non-governmental organizations which are equally in the purely professional group include the 1984 University of Calabar Performing Company (UCPC), the PEC Repertory Company founded by J.P. and Egun Clark, Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON Centre), Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos, New Culture Studios in Ibadan and the Gidan Makama Courtyard Theatre in Kano.

The production and scenic styles of these professional groups have also followed the patterns dominant in the university performances. As earlier mentioned, the governmental organizations in the professional category are the Cultural Centres or State Arts Council Troupes that are organized basically to promote arts and culture and to entertain audience during government functions. It is equally to this group that the National Troupe of Nigeria under the erstwhile consultancy of Late Chief Hubert Ogunde belongs.

Presently, the National Troupe, which is the subject of this research, performs regularly in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre Complex in Iganmu, Lagos. The style of performance and scenic traditions in the literary

genre of professional theatres can be properly understood from the antecedence of the University theatres that influenced their existence. The technical problems in these theatres can be equally appreciated from the perspectives of the problems in these university theatres that assisted in producing them.

Today, the literary traditions of Nigerian theatres have not only suffered from gross inadequate financial problems, they have equally suffered from poor patronage as a result of the proliferation of television, video and film. Since 1962 when the Ibadan School of Drama was formed, the scenic conventions carried by this genre of theatre in Nigeria has not known much change beside the usual material of wood constructed into flats and looped or nailed together to create the requisite forms needed to simulate locales for plays. The concept adopted from the use of these forms is largely a repetitive and stereotypic one motivated by the challenge of creating scenic forms for the myriad of plays that have inundated the literary theatre culture. The idea of putting these sets through repetitive use is propelled by the unpleasant financial situation with which the theatre is besieged. This situation is lamented thus:

In Nigeria, as indeed in most African nations, the practice of technical theatre which involves sets, costumes, make-up, sound and lighting is in a poor state of development.

In other words the designer in Nigerian theatre practice operates in an environment that is not theatre friendly (Gbilekaa, 6).

The problems of design in the Nigerian theatre is further highlighted by Musa Enna when he says,

The University based theatres, and perhaps, the National theatre, as well as some of the states' arts councils, are the only institutions that have embraced technical theatre as a professional field (Illah, 68).

Decrying the technical state of the Arts Theatre at the University of Ibadan, Adeyemi says most of the facilities in this theatre can no longer satisfy the needs of modern productions especially with the flying system archaic and posing a problem to performers (115). Ododo's comments on the university theatres are no less valid. He says:

At the University level, very few productions sparingly hit the stage; they are mostly hollow without technical spine. Those fruitful years of bubbling theatrical activities on University campuses are gone with the luxury of experimental productions too (Technical Aids in the Nigerian Theatre: Past, Present and Future, 158).

Presently, within the literary genre of theatre in the Nigerian universities, the problems of stage sets have transcended the dimensions of space and locations to that of constant use of materials and forms which has

distorted the reference to the use of the word, “flexibility”. In this misnomer, the adoption of wooden sets considered for repetitive use, owing to the aforementioned design problems, are wrongly considered to denote flexibility in their usage. Ododo helps to give an insight into what appears to be the characteristics of set design in the literary theatre tradition:

Basic set units (flats; basic window and door, flats; platforms, steps, staircases, door and window frames; tree trunks and columns, borders, cycloramas, etc.) are often used in scenic design to provide the traditional functions of aiding understanding and expressing the distinctive qualities of a play (Oni and Ododo, 23).

However adaptable these University drama sets might appear to be, they still present serious challenging problems. For instance, in the August 2002 production of Ovonramwen Nogbaisi in the University of Benin Assembly Hall, Israel Wekpe, set designer of the production, complained of stage sets consisting of wings and drops repositioned from their use in other productions thereby giving a drab and stereotyped appearance to his production. In this production, the flats which had been made several years earlier with 1.2m x 2.4m lumber had been over-rubbed with both oil and water based paint thus making it rather impossible to paint over them again. Major forms of joinery were impossible as the wood had suffered from too

much moisture and over-use and therefore could not hold together in this production. In his subsequent production of the Beatification of Area Boy by Wole Soyinka, in February 2001, Wekpe was forced to seek an alternative solution to solving the problem of his scenery by drastically minimizing his set and embracing what he prefers to tag “the metaphoric or symbolic scenery”.

In yet another example, the 2004 production of Femi Osofisan’s Red is the Freedom Road in Abraka Theatre Hall was to suffer from the problem of finance and constant re-use of stage sets. A.E. Anigala, the production director, said with these problems in mind, he had to create, in collaboration with Hillary Ararike, the set designer, naturalistic scenery which, in Anigala’s opinion, reduced the heavy reliance on finances. A large gathering of natural vegetation uprooted from around the university premises formed the thicket that complemented Akanji’s action in this epic university production.

In the same manner, a massive gathering of leaves was used in Ernest Agoba’s December 2002 production of Femi Osofisan’s Eshu and the Vagabond Minstrels in the Jos Open Air Theatre. In the opinion of this researcher, the adoption of such a rather quizzical approach to scenery was



necessary because the unchanging tradition of wooden flats and drops was almost becoming distracting from constant use.

In the 1992 production of Sizwe Bansi is Dead , designed and directed by Friday Nwafor in The Crab Theatre of the University of Port Harcourt, Nwafor spoke of the painstaking experience he faced. He lamented the haphazard manner in which the design of set was made, apparently from makeshift materials, necessitated by insufficient finances. For him, this problem was aggravated by the absence of scene changing and set conveyance mechanisms. According to him, to checkmate the peculiar problems of set design in Nigerian literary theatre, there is a strong need to engender newer and more dynamic design stratagems by its practitioners.

In the 1989 production of Say it Rosa by Gwenneth Dawes and directed by Columbus Irisoanga in The Crab Theatre of the University of Port Harcourt, Alani Nasiru's set suffered repetitiveness of forms made of vertical wooden flats and depicting mainly entrances and exits.

In Farewell to Cannibal Rage (1996) and Twingle Twangle (1997) both by Femi Osofisan, Obianenu Osuya, director and designer for these plays which were performed in the University of Benin Theatre hall, confessed that both productions suffered immensely from the limitations of

scenery. As much as Obianue Osuya endeavored to create distinctly different sets for the two productions, the falsehood created by both settings was let out by the almost unavoidable replication of scenic materials used, most of which could be passed as makeshifts.

The problems of set construction in the University theatres are like a magnifying glass through which the problems of set design as practiced in the literary professional theatres, particularly the National theatre of Nigeria, are enlarged. More often than not, the University theatres act as laboratories by which the acceptance and successes of these plays are first tested before they are presented in higher platforms. In the words of Soibifaa Dokubo, a resident artiste and photographer with the National Troupe of Nigeria,

The majority of the works of Nigerian Playwrights which have been earlier produced in Universities where they teach constitute over eighty percent of the drama staged in the National Theatre (Soibifaa, 2006).

In the National Theatre of Nigeria, the tradition of set design started with productions from both the National Troupe and other professional troupes in the Cinema Hall 1 and 2 and the Main Bowl of the National Theatre of Nigeria after it was officially commissioned in 1976. The Cinema Hall 2 which doubled as a structure for drama production along side with the multi-million dollar Theatre Bowl, up till 1997, is made of 650 upholstered

seats on metallic frames. The stage area which is a hybrid picture frame stage consists of back stage area with double back stage curtains, wooden upstage columns, permanent vertical flats, and a stage measurement area of 16.6m x 13.63m. The under listed problems in which this research exercise is interested elucidates on what the researcher considers to be a shared common problem for set making in this theatre stage and in contemporary Nigerian literary theatres generally.

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### 1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

For the practicing theatre designer in Nigeria, the job of effectively providing the play with its appropriate scenic locale has not been easy. In attempting to satisfy the technical requirements of different conventions of theatres the world has known today, and in trying to match authorial directions and directorial concepts with scenic forms, the set designer's decision in resorting to the idea of re-assembling old set stocks predominantly made of wooden flats, and patterned after Realism or Naturalism, appears to be his Achilles' heel. For the designer, a highlight of several technical problems peculiar to this genre of theatre begins to surface only after this decision, during production.

1. During scene changing, drags are often seen between scenes owing to problems from scenic materials which are heavy. In other instances, scenery pieces, which are more often than not, nailed, have to be disengaged. During this process, a lot of time is lost. Boredom and loss of interest become established. Where the set designer and director try to avoid such delays, the same backdrops and set objects are left unchanged giving the production a sense of immobility and repetitiveness. This is particularly true of the production of Biodun Abe's set design for Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman (1990) in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre.

2. Most floors of Nigerian theatres are either made of cement or of wood. Rigged sceneries are usually either nailed to the floor or are supported by braces which are equally nailed to the floor or held down by stage weights. However, during productions, such scenery pieces sometimes fall on actors. In open air theatres where the weather is windy, stagehands often wrestle with sceneries in attempt to prevent flats from being blown by wind during productions.

3. Problems that border on joinery and permanence for wooden flats equally emanate from scenery construction. Wood when nailed is rendered useless for other productions as joinery made by subsequent nailing loses strength and renders the set infirm. Additionally, in creating flats, the

permanence of fabric on the wood is often a cause of anxiety as, after productions, the condition to which they are subjected often leaves them torn or damaged and later unfit for subsequent use. For wood, continuous exposure to atmospheric conditions equally renders them damp with moisture or brittle from over dryness.

4. Paint, when applied on wood, cannot be washed or peeled off with ease in order to permit another application. Thus, wooden scenery on which layers of paint have been daubed becomes swollen making it difficult for paint to stay or maintain its original colour and intensity. More often than not, the applied colour which forms an impasto layer renders light falling on it undiffused and distracting.

In response to the aforementioned problems, certain research questions are raised:

1. Why are the literary Nigerian set designers restricted to the forms, materials and concepts used?

2. To what extent has finance, design training, authorial directions and perhaps, directorial concepts affected their creative efforts and artistic concepts?

3. Are there no other more viable mediums other than the predominantly used materials that can address the problems which have been outlined in this study?

4. Is it not possible to employ a design concept or method that can be integrative, flexible, and cost effective, permitting its use by different theatrical affiliations, and yet aesthetically gratifying?

5. Are such alternative materials and design concept capable of ensuring the quality of lightness, durability, flexibility and speed required in today's changing themes in theatrical concepts? The researcher opines, however, that the problems of design as are outlined in this study can be solved from two major perspectives:

1. Materials of scenery that can engender flexibility of form, ensure lightness and durability, and permit re-usability without being affected by the problems that accrue from re-use. In the opinion of this researcher, the proposed material is thermoplastic, an element of plastic which constitute an important class of synthetic material used increasingly in a variety of applications.

2. The second perspective by which these problems can be addressed is that of approach or design concept which can greatly emphasize inclusiveness and flexibility in scenic forms. It is equally the opinion of this

researcher that such a concept must generate from modular design heuristics which encourage flexibility and simplicity in scenic forms and which borrow concepts from such an artistic movement as Constructivism on one hand, and an aesthetic movement as Formalism on the other hand.

#### 1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

##### Main Aim

This work studies the traditions of scenery in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria, by the National Troupe of Nigeria, from 1995 to 2001.

##### Objectives

1. Within the total production activities under study, this research analyzes the scenic forms (materials) and concepts adopted by three different Nigerian set designers in tandem with the authorial directions from the scripts and the directorial concepts carried by the directors of these plays. It evaluates the successes and weaknesses of the scenic materials and concepts in tandem with their artistic concepts, mediums, construction methods, measurements, rigging patterns and surface rendering.

2. As the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre consists of a hybrid proscenium, this study concerns itself with the analysis and evaluation of

this stage space in the enactment of literary theatrical productions. It analyzes and assesses the various forms of stage machinery and sets which have been used for staging productions within the aforementioned time frame.

3. In addressing the research problems outlined in this work, this study devises an alternative design heuristics or methodology for set making by formulating a scenic design concept that can bring about new and more creative approaches to solving the problems of scenery as are outlined in this research work.

### 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

From concept to practice, design in the theatre has suffered a great deal of austerity leading to gross scarcity of academic materials on which researchers and scholarship can thrive. Ododo sees this problem thus:

It is true that some significant efforts have been made at documenting aspects of Nigerian theatre, but Nigerian stage designers and their works have not been so lucky. They do so much for theatre performances but get so little attention. At the moment there is no major work on any Nigerian designer, only extremely scanty and scattered information exist on them and their work. This is certainly another area begging for research (Scenic and Performance Style, 93).



It is in this direction that this study gets its inspiration and finds its importance as it serves the following functions:

i) At the postgraduate level where theses are written especially on theatre history, directing, criticism, and dramaturgy, it stands out as a major research effort for scholars who want to undertake further research work in the area of design.

ii) It serves as an academic effort at highlighting problems associated with the use of scenery material and concepts in literary Nigerian theatre. While these problems are highlighted, it acts as a beacon by which pathways for solutions can be achieved.

iii) This study also contributes to design resources by documenting productions and scenic styles for reference purposes. To achieve this, this study provides a collection of production photos for archival purposes and pictorial references.

iv) From the analysis of stage sets accompanying productions presented in the Cinema Hall 2, knowledge is made of the true status of literary Nigerian theatre from the perspective of the National Troupe of Nigeria.

v) From the application of modular and aesthetic theories from which this study has greatly benefitted, it is hoped that the solutions that are

proffered will alleviate the technical problem of set design and its usage, drastically reduce cost, and improve the general outlook of productions in the theatre.

vi) This study equally helps to improve the status of the designer in the theatre by further accentuating his values and emphasizing his roles in the theatre. The content of this study can eventually be disseminated through seminars, conferences and similar academic exercises that can help to educate students, researchers and design enthusiasts on the relatively un-researched area of scenery.

## 1.6 SCOPE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Design in the theatre is a large area covering set, light, costume and make-up. While this study concerns itself with this broad field, it has further narrowed itself to the area of scenery which encompasses set and light. By definition, the scenic subjects of the theatre are the combined spectrum of stage structures and lighting that effectively carry the visual significations of the play. They constitute the most visible and volumetric elements before and after the entrance of the performers. This is adequately reinforced by Jones when he says that, “scenery is often the first thing we think of under the general category of theatrical design” (418). Justifying the choice of this

area for the researcher, Cohen emphasizes that scenery is usually what we first see of a play either at the rise of a curtain in a traditional proscenium production or as one enters the theatre where there is no curtain. Cohen further reiterates that, “The scenic designer is usually listed first amongst designers in a theatre poster or programme” (417). Simonson corroborates Cohen’s position when he submits that:

The applause that often greets a stage setting at the rise of a curtain measures the appetite of a public for pictorial interpretation of human experience which modern easel pictures do not provide (9).

Further emphasizing on the importance of set design to which this research work is limited, Simonson reiterates that, “playwrights, today, bored with self effacement, are continuously asking the setting to speak up and lend a helping hand” (9). Simonson continues emphatically:

The increasing emphasis placed upon stage scenery is due not only to the director’s reliance upon it but to the fact that playwrights themselves use it more and more as a prop to play-writing and depend on the details of stage setting to do the work that they formerly had to do entirely with words (102).

Scenery is most usually visible before the entrance of the performers and is usually perceived in a subtle illusionary manner immediately the actor begins to relate with it during productions. Scenery consists of sets and light

but of these two, this study dwells more on stage setting, comprising the small scale, medium scale and large scale sets, and carefully avoiding small scale sets that can easily be misunderstood for properties and costumes. Therefore, beginning from the stage floor, defined as the base on which the performance would normally be carried out, this study focuses on stage wings, borders, drops, and major recognizable solid elements. It focuses on the materials by which they have been made and analyzes their theatrical concepts and formal relationships. This study comments on light only in so far as it is used to illuminate the sets. Because the disciplines of stage sets and lighting design are, themselves, broad and steep, the major thrust of this work is carried out on the area of the solid elements of the stage which constitute set.

This study concerns itself basically with scenery in productions that are classified as drama, excluding all forms of entertainments that are not mimetic and not carrying the variegated elements of drama. It is further concerned with dramatic productions that can conveniently be grouped as literary and produced in the medium of English language in the proscenium stage structure of the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria. From the broad numbers of productions presented here, those of the National Troupe of Nigeria are under the focus of this study. The choice of using the

National theatre for all the plays is made, first, owing to its vantage position as the nation's apex theatre. Like The Royal National Theatre located on the South Bank in London and the National Theatre in Washington, the National Theatre of Nigeria serves both as a platform for the presentation of high quality artistic productions and as an internationally recognizable symbol for the promotion of arts and culture. Like these foreign national theatres, the National Theatre of Nigeria attracts a wide spectrum of plays covering the entire culture of Nigeria. Plays produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National theatre are more foregrounded in culture and academic orientation than those produced in other public theatres like Muson Centre and the French Cultural Centre which are more inclined towards dance, musicals and non-mimetic entertainment performances.

To cover a wide variety of play genres, sceneries from five different dramatic productions by four different Nigerian playwrights and authors are selected. To further strengthen the need for diversity in concepts, the selected plays and productions are works from three different set designers and artistic directors. The set designers are Biodun Abe, Sunbo Marinho and Hilary Elemi. The choice of using Biodun Abe's work is due to his prominent role in design and construction for productions in the Cinema Hall 2 and his relatively more active roles in set design engagements

nationally. Biodun Abe, who was until recently, the President of NANTAP (National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners) was the set designer for The Bridge (1998) by Pedro Obaseki. The Bridge which received waves of reviews and positive comments from critics and participants was Nigeria's entry at the Festival of Experimental Theatre in Salam Theatre, Cairo. In the Nigeria International Bank (NIB) sponsored theatre production of Langbodo (1994) the set design which won national accolades for Biodun Abe, featured some multi-functional scenic elements with transformational ability. With references to this production, Ododo says Biodun Abe's set for the NIB production is "breath-taking when one takes a stock of the materials used" (Technical Aids in the Nigerian Theatre: Past, Present and Future, 159).

Sunbo Marinho has more than fifty scenic productions to his credit within and outside the University of Ibadan where he was based before he retired in 2002. According to Adeyemi, "Sunbo Marinho's set designs are seen in such productions as, Wale Ogunyemi's The Divorce, Langbodo and Ijaiye, Femi Osofisan's Kolera Kolej, and Who is Afraid of Solarin?, Zulu Sofola's King Emene, Rasheed Gbadamosi's The Mansion..., Samson Amali's Onugbo M'loko and Fidelma Okwuesa's Nobelium" (118-119).

Hilary Elemi is the resident set designer for the National Troupe of Nigeria. Most of his works are carried out under productions undertaken by this troupe in the Cinema Hall 2. Hilary Elemi is responsible for the majority of scenery works seen in the plays of the National Troupe. These include Ahmed Yerima's Attahiru (1999), The Silent Gods (1998), Trials of Oba Ovonramwen (2000); and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1998).

The five productions in which these set designers have actively been involved and of which this research is concerned are, namely:

1. Death and the King's Horseman, written by Wole Soyinka and directed by Ben Tomoloju and Jide Ogungbade. This play, produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria, had two versions: the English version, directed by Ben Tomoloju, and the Yoruba version, directed by Jide Ogungbade. Both were produced in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria in 1995. This work analyzes the English version which was directed by Ben Tomoloju and with the set designed by Biodun Abe.

2. The Concubine is a novel written by Elechi Amadi and adapted for the stage by Israel Eboh. The play was produced by The National Troupe of Nigeria and performed in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre from June 8th – June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998. It was directed by Martin Adaji and designed by Hilary Elemi.

3. The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen, written by Ahmed Yerima and directed by Bayo Oduneye, was produced in the year 2000 by the National Troupe of Nigeria to commemorate the centenary of the British invasion of the Benin kingdom (1896-1996) in the Cinema Hall 2. The set for this play was designed by Sunbo Marinho.

4. Attahiru, written by Ahmed Yerima and directed by Bayo Oduneye, was produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria in the year 2000 in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre. The set for Attahiru was designed by Hilary Elemi and assisted by Happy Ojanador, Austin Mbanefo, Bashir Usman and Ayodele Adesina.

5. Song of a Goat, written by J.P. Clark, had its command performance in the Muson Centre from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001. While the play was directed by Ahmed Yerima, the set for the production was designed by Biodun Abe. It was later restaged in Cinema Hall 2 of the National theatre on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001.

Scenic Productions taken for the purpose of this study entail those carried out from 1995 to 2001. The choice of using sets in dramatic productions from 1995 is made because that year marked the repositioning of the National Theatre for more professional production activities in the Cinema Hall 2 after the 1994 international tours by the National Troupe of



Nigeria where the troupe eventually won a performance prize. Yerima mentions that, “The crowning glory of the Troupe's overseas tour came in April, 1994 at the 12th April Spring Friendship Art Festival in North Korea where the National Troupe of Nigeria came first in the Dance Group category out of fifty one other countries” (14).

### 1.7 METHODOLOGY

This work is by the nature of the problem of investigation, suited for both the Historical Research Methodology and the Case Study. This study, like the Historical Research Methodology, therefore, investigates past events and things which involve their procurement, analysis and interpretation in order to enhance the understanding of the present as well as the prediction of the future.

This study, therefore, becomes an integrated narration of facts in the past, and written in a spirit of inquiry, for the purpose of discovering the truth so as to gain a clearer perspective of the present and a better forecast of the future. This definition makes this study depend heavily on materials that are generated from primary sources. Using the case study paradigm, a small sample of performance activities are used to acquire data that are used to generalize on traditions of scenery in Contemporary Nigeria. The research data are collected from primary sources achieved through what may be

referred to as personal observations or participant observation. Collected data are interpreted through qualitative data analysis approaches guided by the deductive process. In this process, the researcher uses a theoretical or a descriptive framework to analyze qualitative data.

**Primary Data:** While personally observing dramatic productions would have given an added strength to this work, it was practically impossible to witness all or any of the dramatic productions under study as all of them were past productions hence our reliance on video tape recordings and photographs.

**Videotapes:** Almost every production that takes place in the Cinema Hall 2 is videotaped for the purpose of documentation and research. Such video productions usually include pre-production shots of the stage and the sets. During the productions, the performances were captured showing how the performers relate with the sets. Equally captured were audience reactions and responses which helped to adjudge the success or failure of these plays. Therefore, for each of the production set assessed in this work, the researcher had availed himself the original tapes which were replayed several times, one, so as to enjoy each production electronically considering himself a member of the audience long after the production had been carried

out. The researcher, by this act, was able to vicariously enjoy almost the same aesthetic response experienced in a dramatic production by an audience. In this manner, the researcher was able to make approbations from his direct electronic participation of the production. Lastly, visual illustrations of some of the set design data were made from these videos through graphic capture cards where necessary, in photos, as plates, or in graphic drawings, as Figures, in Chapter Four. In instances where the resolutions from our capture did not afford clear enough photographs, the alternative of having them drawn was devised.

Technical rather than aesthetic presentation and analysis of our data in this work was carried out from photographs and drawings. While technical information were illustrated for each production set through a properly enhanced photograph, drawings of technical and construction details were presented through close examination of other photographs in drawings from a versatile graphic drawing software as Corel Draw.

**Physical Examination:** A physical examination of the Cinema Hall 2 was carried out by personally visiting the National Theatre of Nigeria several times to carry out measurement details on the floors and the stage wings so as to ascertain space and measurement variables. These visits were equally

carried out to inspect available stock sets used in these productions in order to certify the veracity of information accessed from videos and photographs.

## 1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is motivated by concepts that both promote flexibility in approach and permit freedom and experimentation in artistic and creative engagements. While this work can be seen to chart new courses in theoretical fields, it is inexorably bound by, 1) the aesthetic theory of Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg as is epitomized in the Formalist theory of aesthetics and 2) literary avant-garde movements that are enshrined in Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Minimalism and to a large extent, Constructivism. The concepts carried by the proponents of these movements have inherently similar elements that nurture freedom and flexibility of forms while proclaiming artistic and creative adventure of different sorts.

**Cubism:** Although inspired by the later work of Cezanne, the era of Cubism (1907 - 1920's) was first begun by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque. The major benchmark of this work was in Picasso's painting "Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O), 1911" (Herbert Read, 67). The Cubists (including Picasso,

Braque, Jean Metzinger, Gris, Duchamp) were attempting to depict their subject matter not as the eye, but as the mind saw the subject. Cubism is a protest against the use of paint to accurately depict texture and color, play of light on a form and shape, atmosphere, and the illusions derived by following the rigid, scientific laws of perspective. To break away from these traditions, the Cubists fragmented the subject and reconstructed it into an interlocking pattern. This is evident and perhaps most popular in many of Picasso's portrait paintings in which the front of the face and the profile of the face are interlocked, usually along the ridge of the nose (Herbert Read, 78). The Cubist revolution spurred much controversy and an alternative way of thought throughout all artistic expression, including poetry, dance, theatre, and sculpture. It also influenced many major movements such as Futurism and Constructivism.

**Futurism:** Futurism started out a few years after Cubism. Like Cubism it remained a 'submovement' within the overall field of abstraction (Ocvirk *et al* , 273). The Futurists repudiated the cult of the past and all imitation and praised originality. Ocvirk *et al* have it that they dismissed art critics as useless, rebelled against harmony and good taste, swept away all the themes and subjects of all previous art, and glorified in science (273). The Futurist painters were slow to develop a distinctive style and subject matter. In 1910

and 1911 they used the technique of divisionism, breaking light and color down into a field of stippled dots and stripes, which had been originally created by Georges Seurat (Marinetti Homepage)

**Suprematism** is considered to be the first systematic school of abstract painting in the modern movement of art. It was developed by Kazimir Malevich in 1913 with such famous work as “Black Quadrilateral on White” In the year 1913, in his desperate attempt to free art from the ballast of objectivity he took refuge in the square form and exhibited a picture which consisted of nothing more than a black square on a white field. Malevich’s art of Suprematism consisted of a world of will and idea in which the artist must live and work with a blissful sense of liberation and non-objectivity; a world where nothing is real except feeling (Buguslawski’s Homepage). Alexander Thus, feeling became the substance of Suprematist art. Suprematism is the rediscovery of pure art that, in the course of time, had become obscured by the accumulation of "things." For Malevich the black square on the white field was the first form in which nonobjective feeling came to be expressed. The square was equal to feeling and the white field was the void beyond this feeling. The Suprematist square and the forms proceeding out of it can be likened to the primitive marks (symbols) of aboriginal man which represented, in their combination, not ornament, but a

feeling of rhythm (Artchive Patron Programme Homepage) Suprematism did not bring into being a new world of feeling but, rather, an altogether new and direct form of representation of the world of feeling. The new art of Suprematism, which has produced new forms and form relationships by giving external expression to pictorial feeling, will become a new architecture: it will transfer these forms from the surface of canvas to space (Buguslawski's Homepage) As we can see, Malevich stresses almost endlessly that the name of the new style refers to the supremacy of pure feeling in art over art's objectivity. The simplest geometric forms - a square, a triangle, a circle, and intersecting lines - composed into dynamic arrangements on the flat surface of the canvas or into spatial constructions (sometimes called architectons) are to express the sensation of speed, flight, and rhythm.

**Minimalism:** This term describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music, where the work is stripped down to its most fundamental features (Harapnik Dwane's Homepage). As a specific movement in the arts it is identified with developments in post-World War II Western Art and most particularly with American visual arts in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Prominent artists associated with this movement include Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Richard Serra. It is rooted in the

reductive aspects of Modernism, and is often interpreted as a reaction against Abstract Expressionism and a bridge to Post-modern art practices. The term 'Minimalism' is also used to describe a trend in design and architecture wherein the subject is reduced to its necessary elements. Minimalist design has been highly influenced by Japanese traditional design and architecture. In addition, the work of De Stijl artists is a major source of reference for this kind of work. De Stijl expanded the ideas that could be expressed by using basic elements such as lines and planes organized in very particular manners.

Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe adopted the motto "Less is more" to describe his aesthetic tactics of flattening and emphasizing a building's frame, eliminating interior walls and adopting an open plan, and reducing the structure to a strong, transparent, elegant skin. Designer Buckminster Fuller adopted a similar saying, "Doing more with less" but his concerns were oriented towards technology and engineering rather than aesthetics. Another modern master who exemplifies reductivist ideas is Luis Barragan (Kearsley Greg's Homepage). In Minimalism, the architectural designers pay special attention to the connection between perfect planes, elegant lighting, and careful consideration of the void spaces left by the removal of three-dimensional shapes from an architectural design. In



general, the features of Minimalism include: geometric, often cubic forms purged of all metaphor, equality of parts, repetition, neutral surfaces, and industrial materials.

Likening Minimalism to the Gestalt, Robert Morris, an influential theorist and artist has often likened Minimalism to the idea of the gestalt: parts that are bound together in such a way that they create a maximum resistance to perceptual separation. Ad Reinhardt, actually an artist of the Abstract Expressionist generation believes art begins with the getting rid of nature. In a much more broad and general sense, one might, in fact, find European roots of Minimalism in the geometric abstractions of painters in the Bauhaus, in the works of Piet Mondrian and other artists associated with the movement DeStijl..

**Constructivism:** Of all the “isms” used in describing theatrical trends, none is to have more meaning in our theoretical framework as the design concept enshrined in Constructivist postulations. Constructivism is a Russian artistic and architectural movement that was equally influenced by Cubism and Futurism and is generally considered to have been initiated in 1913 by Vladimir Tatlin. “Constructivism” consists of the use of scaffolding and simple boxes stacked on top of one another or austere structural scaffolding

made of steel or wood on which actors can perform and with no attempt made to suggest locale, period or mood. One of the objectives of this concept was “to construct” art. Because of their admiration for machines and technology, functionalism, and modern industrial materials such as plastic, steel, and glass, members of the movement were also called artist-engineers.

In Constructivism, the scenic artist, like his colleagues in sculpture and painting, finds time to research into pure forms as they may relate to acting on stage. He seeks means by which the actors’ actions can be visually highlighted without playing the kow-tow to the playwright. Constructivist staging approach can be envisioned in the Revolving Stage, the Wagon stage, the Sliding Stage, the Architectural Stage, and in what is widely understood as the Skeleton, Truck and Trestle Stage. However this researcher considers these grossly inadequate especially in solving the peculiar problems of the Nigerian Theatre. The researcher therefore believes there is the need for a more flexible, more integrated concepts of design in the theatre.

The concepts of Constructivism, Suprematism, Futurism and Cubism, like other similar literary movements, are considered to be offspring of aesthetic theories. The major aesthetic concept to which all the concepts appear to owe allegiance is that proposed in the Formalist criteria to which

Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg belong. For this school of thought, the essence of art is ‘Significant Form’. They postulate that to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us a sense of form and colour and knowledge of three-dimensional space (Bell, 9). This study is, therefore, founded on theoretical dimensions proffered in these movements and literary schools.

### 1.9 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This study consists of seven chapters. While Chapter One consists of the introductory materials, Chapter Two is a critical review of relevant literature to this study. Chapters Three and Four are dedicated to presentation of research data. Chapter Three constitutes the history of the National Theatre of Nigeria and the Cinema Hall 2 while Chapter Four is a presentation of scenic forms and concepts from varied productions enacted in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria. Chapter Five is used for analysis of the data collected in Chapters Three and Four. Chapter Six, referred to as “Discussion”, is the chapter where the implications of our analyses and findings are made. Chapter Seven is the conclusive chapter carrying summary to the thesis, observations and recommendations.

## 1.10 CONTEXTUAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

**The Stage:** This work refers to ‘stage’ as the entire architectural structure in which drama is enacted without any sets of any kind or lighting of any form.

**Scenery or Scenic Design:** Either of these terms is used to suggest an emphasis towards the combination of set and light.

**Set design:** This term is used to reflect the small, medium and large scale movable items which are excluded from the category of those regarded as props.

**Mis-en-scene:** Mis-en-scene has often been used to mean scenery. In this work, it refers to the composite arrangement of the stage structure, the scenery as well as the performers.

**Heuristics:** This term is used, in this work, to denote the rules or set of rules intended to increase the probability of solving problems. Heuristic is a general design formulation used, here, to help guide our investigations.

**Modularism:** This term is used, here, to suggest part of a structure used as a standard by which the rest is proportioned; a self-contained part of something that can function on its own.

**Polymorphism:** This word denotes the process of bringing several simple geometric forms together to create interestingly new complex forms used in the theatre for creating sets that can easily assume new shapes and forms.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 THE MEANING OF DESIGN

Design is a conscious activity guided by aims and objectives. It refers to planned and organized actions intended to bring about some predetermined outcome from which there may also be accidental or unexpected results. Design has always been used and thought of as a means of interpreting the nature of world and life to human eyes and ears (Arnheim, 7). Design is created and enjoyed by many people for many reasons. However, one of the things that design does is that it extends and expands our shared common visual language. When new visual ideas are first introduced by the designer, they are often seen as shocking, and perhaps even as being incomprehensible. This is what informs Kenneth Cameron and Patti Gillespie definition of design when they contend that, “Good design is daring: it tries new technologies, avoids old solutions, and chances failure” (205). This tendency which is sometimes considered to be creative, has provoked the invention of new and varied forms in different category of design endeavour.

Designers show us new ways to see familiar things, and how to interpret new situations and events through various kinds of visual expression. This visual form of expression is seen as a kind of universal syntax through which artists communicate their ideas. (Ray Faulkner *et al* , v) According to them, to communicate his ideas an artist must engage our attention and hold it until his message is comprehended (377). The visual language of design is however imperative for the designer in the theatre and to all the disciplines of design that use them to create and communicate. “Form” which is considered to be one of the most important elements of design is the basis of all artistic and design enterprise as it encapsulates the totality of all visible, tactile and plastic entities; a synthesis of the myriad of design elements which stretch from dots or points to more complex configurations carried by lines, shapes, space, texture and colour. A proper understanding of forms in the theatre, as it is used and applied by the theatre designer, cannot be complete without expounding on the other elements that make up the visual language of design.

## 2.2 THE VISUAL LANGUAGE OF DESIGN

The visual language of design constitutes the elements or the physical constituents of any piece of art work. According to Faulkner *et al*, “designers use plastic elements – form, line, space, texture and colour –

when they express their plastic or graphic ideas. Plastic means formed or molded and implies, but is not limited to, three dimensional art objects; and that anything that we can see can be analyzed in terms of the plastic elements” (317).

The visual language of design can equally be called the elements of design. These form the totality of materials used by the designer to achieve pleasant effects that aid communication. These elements are point, line, shape, texture; form and colour and sometimes, space. Essentially these are things the eyes might not be accustomed to see in both recognized and unrecognizable objects that assume both geometric and amorphous appearances. For the theatre particularly, and for the purpose of this study, the important elements are motifs, lines, shapes, forms, colours, textures, and space.

A Motif is considered to be the first element in design because it is most suggestive of the emotional intent of the designer. Ocvirk *et al* (30) define motif as “a designed unit or pattern that is repeated often enough in the total composition to make it a significant or dominant feature.” A Motif can further be considered to be the subject matter or central idea in the design. A Motif can be made up of lines or of a combination of two or more

of the other elements. Depending on how it is used a Motif can be considered to be either an element of design or a principle in design.

A Line is a moving point; an extension of a dot. It is a symbol of which only dimension is length. “Line is the path of a moving point that is made by a tool, instrument or medium as it moves across an area. It is usually made visible because it contrasts in value with its environment (Ocvirk *et al*, 30). Ray Faulkner *et al* equally believe that the list of objectives that could be used to indicate the expressive power of line (as well as form, space, colour, and texture) is extensive (330). A line could be:

long or short; thick or thin; pointed or obtuse; straight, curved or zigzag; vertical, horizontal, or diagonal; ascending or descending; fast or slow; staccato or legato; vigorous or serene; majestic or playful (Faulkner *et al* ,330).

Lines abound in nature. Line may be thought of as the path of a moving point, the edge of a flat shape or as the axis (dominant direction) of a shape.

Dale Cleaver says the range of personality a line may express is wide:

Quick, slow or still, nervous, majestic or rigid. It can suggest mass, texture, light and shadow. It can emphasize form or create mood (32).

Cleaver’s position on the importance of line in an artistic composition cannot be overemphasized. He goes on to elaborate:



It is a most important force in composition because it is present in many different ways...An arrangement of several linear shapes does not only assume a direction but also takes an attitude towards each other... a composition may use line as dynamic force with a sense of violent action or as a static force with a feeling of strength and stability (32).

For the designer, Shape as an element is equally of importance in compositing. Shapes are different basic geometric and amorphous configurations. Ocvirk *et al* define shape as an area that stands out from the space next to or around it because of a defined or implied boundary or because of difference of hue, colour or texture (94). Like Line, Shape may have many personalities: rigid, flexible, precise, uncertain, calm, active, awkward or graceful. Foremost stage designers, Russian, Vychodil, and American, Robert Edmund Jones are practically incensed by the sensual and evocative power of Lines and how Lines and Shapes could help to create strong meanings on stage and in the theatre. The “Atlantise” and “Palleas et Melisande” are both curvilinear and rectilinear stage design works, evoking speed and fear from their linear renditions, by Vychodil and Robert Edmund Jones respectively. These works have helped to highlight their heavy reliance on the elements of design to achieve the desired language of design.

Texture as an element is considered equally important to the theatre artist as a result of the need for tactile sensations brought about by the

roughness or smoothness of a surface. Getlein categorizes texture into what he calls actual texture and visual texture. In his opinion actual texture is literally tactile, a quality we could experience through touch while visual texture is less literal and has the same properties of real physical touch effect that does not occur naturally (102). This touch effect is created by the deft manipulation the elements of design: - colour, line, point, shape and form.

Form is considered to be perhaps the most important of all the elements as it bears a totality of all the other elements. Ocvirk *et al* define form as the organization or inventive arrangement of all the visual elements according to the principles that can develop unity (94). Form is the content of a shape made visible through all the interplay of the entire elements. The form of an object makes it possible to immediately recognize objects like mountains, man, trees, buildings, etc.

Colour follows form as form is equally defined by the type of colours with which it is rendered. The American Heritage Dictionary defines colour as that aspect of things that is caused by differing qualities of the light reflected or emitted by them. It further defines it as the characteristics of light by which the individual is made aware of objects or light sources, through the receptors of the eye, described in terms of dominant wavelength, luminance and purity. Colour is a sensation produced on the eye when light

falls on the surface of an object. Among the elements of design, colour is the most complex. Getlein says “colour is a function of light without which there can be no colour... None of the visual elements gives us so much pleasure as colour” (92). Colour carries three basic characteristics, namely, hue, intensity and value. Hue is the different name given to colour. It is the quality that makes one colour different from another. It is the greenness, redness, blueness, while value is the relation between the light and dark of a particular colour or hue determined by the quantity of black or white within the colour. Intensity refers to the level of brilliance of a particular colour. It is used to differentiate between colours that are closer to the absolute hue and those that have been dulled or made less intense by mixing; for instance, a particular red could be more brilliant than others. Colours affect us on such a basic level that few would argue that we have a direct emotional response to it (99). In effectively using all these elements, an adequate understanding of the guiding principles of design is equally imperative.

### 2.3 PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Getlein contends that the task of making the decision involved in designing would be paralyzing were it not for certain guidelines that once understood, become almost instinctive (120) In his opinion:

These principles codify or explain systematically, our sense of “rightness” and help to show why certain design works are better than others. For the artists, they offer guidelines for making the most effective choices; for the observer, an understanding of the principle of designs gives greater insight into works of art (120).

In designing, therefore, the designer needs to know the principles that would help him combine effectively the different elements of design. This is because there are individual characteristics of the different elements of design which contrast or harmonizes with each other to create spatial relationship. Faulkner *et al* see these principles as existing but with no certain formula for their use (373). They argue thus:

The natural world reveals myriad examples of design in which beauty and utility are one, but the diversity of ways in which this is achieved is enormous... In nature and in arts the fundamentals do not change, but their specific formulations do (373).

These principles are Balance, Rhythm, Emphasis, Harmony, Variety, Contrast and Perspective. The first principle which is Balance is the arrangement of the various elements of a particular design so as to attain visual equilibrium or stability. This could be done by arranging the various units symmetrically or asymmetrically, but with visual care to make for stability. Balance is necessary in a design because it assists the overall

aesthetic effect of the design. Balance is equally seen as that sense of stability which results from the apparent equal distribution of weight on either side of a central axis (Brockett, 560). According to Brockett,

The stage may be thought of as a fulcrum with the point of balance at the centre. The scenic elements placed on each side of that line should appear to be equal in weight (560).

Rhythm is a form of sensation brought about by alternate uses of elements. Rhythm is considered as that factor which leads the eye easily and smoothly from one part of a picture to another (Brockett, 562). It is the regular succession or repetition of colour, shape, hue, texture or form to create a feeling of movement and flow in a piece of art work. Flow in a design could be made by continuous repetition of a unit element or a combination of them. For instance, in a counterchange design, one colour or shape is used against another in a repeated sequence to create flow and harmony. Brockett puts it that all the elements of design may be used to achieve a sense of rhythm (562).

Emphasis is the centre of interest which readily strikes one's attention on looking at a design. Expounding on the importance of Emphasis, Variety and Harmony in the stage set, Brockett remarks that all of the elements of

each setting should be harmonious and the various settings for the same play should be related so that all are clearly parts of an ordered whole (560).

Contrast is quite similar to Variety. Contrast is the joint usage of the elements of design, [shapes, forms, figures, colours, lines, etc] to create unrelatedness so as to impact the feeling of variety. This is equally necessary so as to avoid sameness or monotony in them thus increasing aesthetic appeal and impact. This condition is obtained by placing side by side elements which are unrelated or similar elements with dissimilar attributes. The use of a warm colour against a cool colour, for instance, could produce contrast. These pairs could be used to produce contrast: blue and orange, blue and red, and red and green.

Perspective which is last in this listing is one of the most important principles of design perhaps because of its pervasive effect especially in paintings and drawing. Perspective, in art is a graphic system by which the impression of three-dimensional space is convincingly conveyed on a two-dimensional surface such as a canvas or relief sculpture. Perspective is based on elementary laws of optics, in particular the fact that distant objects appear smaller and less distinct than near objects.

#### 2.4 THEATRE DESIGN AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION

Theatre design and technology in the world today, by a foundation of

traditional theatre aesthetics, cover the art, technique, craft and mechanics of stage scenography and technology. This definition falls under what could be divided into scenery, properties, lighting, costume and make-up, theatre sound and, in fact, theatre architecture. Each of these elements of the theatre employs creative artistry and imagination in form of design which are realizable in theatrical terms and production by the aid of developed technological equipment and know-how.

Smith and Parker claim that the paths leading to design in the theatre are numerous and varied and that they may come from within the theatre itself or from the outside of the world (3). The traditional elements of theatrical production are logically associated with the actor, scenery, light, properties, sound, costume and make-up. Parker and Smith affirm that the major portion of a designer's training is spent in learning to interpret and expand the ideas of the playwright (6).

Besides the actor who is coordinated by the director, every physical and visible theatre element is a product of theatre design. This accounts for the reason why Harris and Montgomery assert that the designer is responsible for everything which makes the stage picture visible (8). Francis Reid claims that the designer's contribution to a production arises out of a visual response to the dramatist's or composer's music (2). In Reid's

opinion:

This response will be influenced by discussions with the other members of the creative team. Ideally it would also be a response to observation of character and ensemble development during rehearsal (2).

In explaining who the theatre designer is, a clear explication is given:

Unlike the easel painter in two dimensions or the sculptor in three dimensions, the theatre designer thinks in terms of the fourth dimensions, the passage of time – not the stage picture, but the stage moving picture... There are no limits as to how this stage space can be used, but deciding what to do with it is the most crucial decision the designer takes (Griffith, 73).

While Francis Reid (2) categorizes theatrical design into costumes, settings, lighting, and props this study will be more concerned with scenery which is considered to be a combination of light and set.

## 2.5 SCENIC DESIGN

Parker and Smith define scene design as the area in the modern theatre which is concerned with the total visual effect of a dramatic performance (16). This definition is however strengthened thus:

The designer's contribution to a production arises out of a visual response to the dramatist's words. Ideally it



would also be a response to observation of characters and ensemble development during rehearsals (Simonson, 9).

Simonson expresses that the applause that often greets a stage setting at the rise of a curtain measures the appetite of a public for pictorial interpretation of human experience which modern easel pictures do not provide. He further emphasizes that:

The increasing emphasis placed upon stage scenery, is due not only to the director's reliance upon it but to the fact that playwrights themselves use it more and more as a prop to playwriting and depend on the details of stage setting to do the work that they formerly had to do entirely with words (108).

Asomba says "the scenic designer ought to be thoroughly informed by both the aesthetic and technical needs of the drama and its theatre" (8). Its compositional elements are expressive of the action and collectively or individually assist in advancing it in time and space (Asomba, 8).

Parker and Smith concur that the significance of drama to the designer is evidenced by the fact that the major portion of a designer's training for the theatre is spent in learning to interpret and expand the ideas of the playwright (6). According to Parker and Smith, in a presentation, scene

design exists to bring, solely through the stage setting, visual substance to the dreams of the playwright (14).

Additionally, through light, colour, shape, line, mass and texture, the scene designer's aim is to intensify the visual effect of the actor and bring unto the stage, the result of careful research not withstanding whether the play is a comedy or tragedy, satire or fantasy (Brown, 107). Still on the scenic designer and the stage, Simonson instructs that,

The stage is part and parcel of the total efforts of interpreting scripts, an integral factor in overcoming the resistance of an audience to dramatic ideas that transcends its stereotyped expectations." He further clarifies that in the theatre, as well as outside of it, the designer tries to give to the background of action some kind of design relevant to the experiences that it is supposed to shelter (98).

It is the scene designer's job, therefore, to create a performing space for the actors and a physical environment for the play's action. In Cameron's and Gillespie's opinion, the result is the setting, which normally has the added function of supplying the audience with clues about the play's locale (197). However, Griffith's summation on the scenic designer's role is incisive and emphatic:

The stage designer's most significant function is to manipulate stage space in relation to human actors, their

movements and how they create the visual experience of a play for an audience. There are no limits as to how this stage space can be used, but deciding what to do with it is the most crucial decision the designer takes (3).

Scenery is made up of lighting design and set design. While it is almost impossible to talk about set without light, and vice versa, it is equally possible to see them as separate entities by which detailed and separate studies can be made.

## 2.6 THEATRE, DESIGN, AND SCENIC CONVENTIONS

The origin of the modern theatre which is said to date from 1875 is characterized by revolutionary trends which came as result of intellectual revolution in philosophy, science, social understanding and religion thereby altering human consciousness in several uncountable ways. The eighteenth and nineteenth century marked the beginning of a score of serious challenges to traditional thinking which were accompanied by public debates and disputes. Cohen says,

By the turn of the century an investigative ferment had seized Western civilization: data were being collected on every conceivable topic and scientific questioning and testing replaced intuition and dogma as the accepted avenue to truth. Experimentation, exploration, documentation, and challenge became the marching orders of the artist and intellectual alike (209).

It was during these periods that the first major literary and artistic movement, Romanticism and Realism were born as revolts against the international artifice of neoclassic forms. To a large extent, set design as with the other forms of design in the theatre were drastically affected both in the ways the architectural structures of the stage were constructed and in the materials and concepts with which the physical and structural elements of the stage were created and rendered. For instance, Realism showed scenery that depicted ordinary living environments that were just as messy and ill-kept as their real life counterpart (Cohen, 214).

Naturalism which came on the tail of Realism is akin in style but much more extreme in its dramatization of human reality. However in the late nineteenth century to earlier twentieth century, a counterforce of equal impact to realism and naturalism was witnessed in a spate of antirealist literary movements. This was witnessed in their united hatred of realism and their desire to move the theatre beyond the narrow confines of verisimilitude. These anti-realist movements were exemplified, amongst others, in such movements as symbolism, expressionism and constructivism.

Symbolism was an aesthetic movement that encouraged writers to express their ideas, feelings, and values by means of symbols or suggestions rather than by direct statements. Symbolism in art was an international

ideological trend that served as a catalyst in the movement towards abstractionist art. In Cohen's views:

Symbolism would explore by means of images and metaphors – the inner realities that cannot be directly or literarily perceived...United in their hatred for literary details the symbolists demanded abstraction, enlargement and innovation... Realism, more and more people concluded, would never raise the common place to the level of art. It would only drag art down into the muck of the mundane (237).

Expressionism, however, was an artistic style in which the artist seeks to depict not objective reality but rather the subjective emotions and responses that objects and events arouse in him. He accomplishes his aim through distortion, exaggeration, primitivism, and fantasy and through the vivid, violent, or dynamic application of formal elements. The objective was to create a totally unified stage picture that would increase the emotional impact of the production on the audience. Prominent expressionist directors the theatre has known today are Germans, Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator, and the Russian, Vsevolod Meyerhold. Set designers such as Edward Henry Gordon Craig of Great Britain and Robert Edmund Jones of the United States used techniques similar to those of expressionist painters to provide visual stimulation consonant with the dramas.

In forging a drama of social protest, expressionist writers aimed to convey their ideas through a new style. Their concern was with general truths rather than with particular situations, hence they explored in their plays the predicaments of representative, symbolic types rather than of fully developed individualized characters. In Expressionism, emphases were laid not on the outer world, which is merely sketched in and barely defined in place or time, but on the internal, on an individual's mental state; hence the imitation of life is replaced in expressionist drama by the ecstatic evocation of human minds.

## 2.7 CONSTRUCTIVISM AND THE STAGE

Constructivism is a Russian artistic and architectural movement that was first influenced by Cubism and Futurism and is generally considered to have been initiated in 1913 by Vladimir Tatlin. “Constructivism” consists of the use of scaffolding and simple boxes stacked on top of one another or austere structural scaffolding made of steel or wood on which actors can perform and with no attempt made to suggest locale, period or mood” (Wolf, 290).

The creative liberty in Constructivism prevents the scenic artist from the arduous task of creating sets exclusively for particular plays and periods but rather creates forms and structures that permit their permutation as set

stocks that can be adapted for use in any production. This is put very clearly:

Some designers believe that the setting should belong to the stage and the actors rather than to the play. They care nothing for mood and advocate the elimination of all features that are not absolutely functional and specifically needed for stage business. The aim is rather to create structures which give the maximum intensity to the movement of the actors (Brown, 117).

The great prophet of the new art of lighting Adolphe Appia, has staunchly supported the constructivist approach. Describing the “Appian stage,” Woodruff says of this approach: “The stage should no longer be a flat picture but a three-dimensional area of ramps and platforms through which the actors move” (11). Adolphe Appia is not alone. In the new kinetic scenery of which prominent actors are Gordon Craig and Joseph Svobada, scenic models are woven around the constructivist style giving lesser cognizance to the individual plays so as to make room for integrativeness and adaptations. Gordon Craig equally had the idea of: “...dividing the stage floor and ceiling, making stairways platforms, seats, thick walls and wide spaces. These are not supposed to be interpretations of any particular plays but show how a single assembly of mobile units becomes capable of infinite adaptations” (Woodruff, 111-112).

The Constructivist designer in the theatre fashions his scenic solids after images that make them part of permanent stage machinery, adaptable through manipulations by him. On the integrative quality inherent in this concept, a major submission is made:

In theatre architecture, you've got to be sure you don't make any definite statements. It may be a total exaggeration but, ideally, theatres should be built of paper. If you want to build a space that is moldable each time for whatever you want to put into it, you can't build great re-enforced concrete beams. In this time of great metamorphosis, the best thing is to design a great envelope, sound proof it, heat it, and inside it let the activities happen, and design it in such a way that permits the activities to change at all times (Kenny, 47).

With the scenic models flexible and re-moldable, it is thus possible, through a constructivist formula, to create naturalism, restricted realism, expressionism, surrealism, symbolism etc.

## 2.8 INFLUENCE OF ADOLPHE APPIA AND GORDON CRAIG

The two most important theoreticians and designers of the non-illusionist movement were the Swiss, Adolph Appia and the Englishman, Edward Gordon Craig. Adolph Appia and Gordon Craig have been hailed as prophets who could save the theatre from an encircling doom (Simonson 18). Appia began with the assumption posited by Wagner that the fundamental



goal of a theatrical production was artistic unity. Appia felt, however, that the incongruity of placing three-dimensional actors in front of two-dimensional settings, which many of the stage reformers rejected, was intensified by the mythic, symbolic nature of the Wagner operas. He concluded that there were three conflicting elements in production—the moving three-dimensional actor, the stationary vertical scenery, and the horizontal floor. Explaining Appia's theatre, Simonson elucidates that:

We have been assured that the theatre has been regenerated because its new backgrounds emphasized and aureoled the actor, then that every form of tangible background must be destroyed in order to give emphasis to the actor picked out by a spotlight from the void (19).

Appia proposed replacing illusory scene painting with three-dimensional structures that could be altered in appearance by varying the colour, intensity, and direction of lighting. The solid structures, according to Appia, would serve to create a bond between the horizontal floor and the vertical scenery and enhance the actor's movements, which were rhythmically controlled by the music of the score (Albert and Bertha Johnson, 117). Appia has equally explained this in clear terms:

The stage should no longer be a flat picture against which the actor gestures, but a three-dimensional area of

ramps and platforms through which the actor moves (Beecham, 1).

In another instance, Beecham explains that “Appia devoted his efforts to investigating the implications which an understanding of the human body, as it moves in space, had for new forms of theatrical arts” (Beecham, 2).

This is further elucidated in an introductory text by Lee Simonson:

Appia abandoned the traditional provision of external historical or fictive locales to illustrate the stories and sought instead to derive the settings directly from within the work itself as it was generated and conveyed by the music... Appia thus, began by attempting to visualize, purely and simply, the settings suggested to him by music and the requisite stage action (Beecham, 1).

Beecham sees Appia’s concept of stage setting, its expressive aesthetic element and his call for solid scenery as revolutionary. In Beecham’s strong opinion “Most of what we call innovations is a variation of Appia’s ideas deduced from his original premises” (64). Beecham concludes:

Because it is the most expressive, and is subject to few conventions, it is unobtrusive and is able to communicate external life in its most expressive form (30).

Edward Gordon Craig, the son of the designer, Edward Godwin and the actress Ellen Terry Craig was an actor before becoming a designer and director. Craig is considered to be more a man of the theatre than Appia (Macgowan and Melnitz , 437). Craig is equally seen as, perhaps, the most influential advocate of symbolism (Woodruff, 11). Whereas Appia's work followed a continuous developing line, Craig's was characterized by a restless experimentation. Simonson categorizes Craig's design as falling into four groupings: 1) A simplified scene with some representational elements; 2) curtains; 3) architectural vertical masses; 4) screens (125).

Woodruff remarks that,

Craig was a genius of high imaginative gift who along with Inigo Jones affected a radical change in scenic convention. He freed the theatre creative possibilities from the outward bonds of realism (11).

One of Craig's most interesting scenic innovations was a flexible structure made of hinged screens, which permitted a fluid readjustment of space during performance. He experimented with movable proscenium arches for adjusting the stage opening to suit the play or scene. Craig's theatre is explained thus:

Craig had the idea of dividing the stage floor and ceiling into chessboard and making each square rise and lower. Thus the space became endlessly variable, with the floor

and ceiling making stairways, platforms seats, thick walls and wide spaces (Woodruff, 11).

From the outset, Craig propounded an art of the theatre in which reality, instead of being reproduced by traditional representational methods, would be transcended and interpreted by symbol. To him, outlines, forms, colours, and lightings were a means of conveying atmosphere. His most original theatrical concept was that the entire “scene” in a dramatic work should be movable in all parts; both the floor and the ceiling were to be composed of squares that, under the control of the artist, could be moved up and down independently or in groups within a constantly changing pattern of light. Thus an emotional response might arise in the audience through the abstract movement of these plastic forms.

Defining the role of scenery for his theatre, Craig was quoted to have said “The theatre should not be a place in which to exhibit scenery...it should be a place in which the entire beauty of life can be unfolded...the inner beauty and the meaning of life” (Devlin, 156). According to Macgowan and Melnitz:

Craig knew the power of suggestion. He recognized, as Appia had done, that the stage must be three-dimensional...he put into his design no place “which could not be traveled into actually by the actors” unless

so far away that no one could see figures, and “our imagination alone could people it (437).

Modern conventions affecting set design in today’s theatre have not only been deeply affected by the concepts of these great designers of the theatre, these conventions, and indeed, forms and concepts in set design traditions have equally been affected by aesthetic theories and postulations that presage scenic conventions.

## 2.9 AESTHETIC THEORIES AND STAGE DESIGN CONCEPTS

Theatrical conventions and particularly scenic concepts have been equally affected by the norms surrounding the literary beliefs and dicta carried in aesthetic theories. For instance, realism was ascribed to the influence of Aristotelianism and the aesthetic theory of imitationalism, while expressionism and constructivism, and their annexure with symbolism and stylization are closely conjugated with the formalist theory of aesthetics. The relevance of aesthetic theories to the stage designer is, here, discussed:

Every designer hopes that the design will have beauty. That beauty is a variable should be clear - the romantic loveliness of a magic forest cannot be compared with a construction of a gleaming metal bars and white plastic plates - but that every designer aims at a goal of aesthetic pleasure seems true. Intentional ugliness may occasionally be aimed at, but even we are tempted to say that the result is beautiful because its ugliness is artfully arrived at (Cameron and Gillespie, 197).

In the same vein the importance of aesthetics to scenic design is further corroborated thus:

The total stage picture, the choice and arrangements of its details, are of aesthetic importance because they determine, to a great extent, the kind of emotion a performance will release... Modern stage settings are able to provide the kind of aesthetic satisfaction that painting no longer affords” (Simonson, 125).

Designers and design concepts in the theatre have been largely influenced by different aesthetic schools and theories. Graham Woodruff regards Craig as the most influential advocate of symbolism, while Simonson thinks Appia freed the theatre’s creative possibilities from the outward bonds of realism. While Craig’s and Appia’s theatres connote the aesthetics of the formalist school where abstract outlines, forms, colours, and lighting are a means of conveying atmosphere, the contemporary American, Richard Finkelstein appears to believe in what David Belasco’s concept evokes: photographic realism. What therefore are these aesthetic theories and how do they approximate the design concepts carried by designers in the theatre?

The beginning of Aesthetics is traced to Alexander Gotlieb Baumgarten when he called for a science of perception. By this action he became the first modern philosopher to approach the subject of beauty

systematically, defining the experience of beauty as the sensory recognition of perfection. Since his attempt to systematize and properly define the subject of aesthetics, the difficulty associated with understanding its concepts is summed up in what Uji considers to be problematic (9). According to Odiri, aesthetics is so relative, complex and open-ended that philosophers, aestheticians and scholars, right from classical times to the present, still do not agree on its definite meaning, properties and applications (9).

Despite the awesome regiment of aestheticians ranging from Plato and Aristotle, to Kant, Tolstoy, Veron and Croce, despite their obvious polarities and dissensions, the attempts to analyse the nature of beauty have been equally met with considerable success by which certain unequivocal and isomorphic attributes have been generated. For all of them, aesthetics is a methodical attempt to analyze the true nature of beauty that hovers around the fringes of three different modes of thoughts: science, psychology and philosophy. For science, if beauty is a quality that can be isolated in an object, then science can surely attempt to measure the amount and intensity of that quality. For the psychologist, beauty is purely subjective and depends less on the nature of object seen than on the capacity of the perceiver to be moved. This school of thought, carried by the subjectivist school of

aesthetics, equally thinks that what make something aesthetically valuable are not its own properties but the aesthetic consumer's. According to their dictum, there is no beauty making property in aesthetic objects. Beauty, in their view, is in the eye of the beholder.

The third major school of aesthetics to which the philosopher belongs thinks aesthetics is man's sense of beauty created by an emotional response to a quality that cannot be measured. They enunciate that aesthetic emotion belongs to the realm of disinterested contemplation where the aesthetic object is disassociated from all forms of usefulness and all connections with the life of action. From these three broad schools, there have come four more elaborations and mutations. The first is the imitationalist school represented by Plato and Aristotle that proposed that beauty is only achieved when genuine likeness or verisimilitude is struck with nature or eternal forms. Aristotle, like Plato, believes recognition of imitation in an art is naturally pleasant to man and thus constitutes the beauty a man must strive after in art. The closer the artist gets to representing his image or subject, the better or more beautiful his art becomes (Macleon, 267).

The second school known as the emotionalist or expressionist is coined, as seen by Szu Hsien Lee, in her World Wide Web Home Page, to be the expression of the inner emotions, feelings, moods and mental states of



the artist. According to Collingwood, good art effectively and sincerely brings these inner states to an external objectification (108). In the same vein, Charlton discloses that a work of art speaks to the heart, not just to the intellect. According to him, to appreciate it we must feel it (84). The romantic evolution in feeling and taste, especially notable under Schelling's philosophy of nature, conceived of art as essentially the expression of the artist personal emotions. The heat of emotionalist aesthetics was felt in the early part of the nineteenth century in the doctrines on beauty as is encapsulated in the tractates of Benedictta Croce and in Art-for-Art's sake. In properly defining the emotionalist aesthetics, Carrit says the distinctive function of the artist is to express emotions and that all art must be expressive of something (129). In Hospers assertion, "If the artist does not express in his work, what he does is to that extent less entitled to be called art; and that all art must be expressive of something" (45).

The third school considered to be, perhaps, the most influential is derived from the formalist criteria to which Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg belong. For this school of thought, the essence of art is 'Significant Form' In Bell's and Greenberg's opinion, representation, expression and other subject matters are irrelevant. In defining the importance of the formal properties of art, Harold Lee says the basis of all

aesthetic experience is perceptual grasp, and that this grasp is the apprehension of the materials as they are formally related (48). For Charlton, psychology has revealed, or will someday soon reveal, certain forms which we endeavour to find in our field of vision, certain principles of grouping which we try out before others. In Charlton's opinion, only one answer seems possible: 'Significant Form.' According to him, in each line and colour combined in a particular way, certain forms and relation of forms stir our emotions aesthetically (22-25). Another popular aesthetician avers in this direction:

The sensory medium itself has a beauty all its own. Certain colours sit quietly side by side, others enhance each other; certain lines are graceful, directive and organizing; certain masses are mutually supportive, coherent (Jessop, 14).

For Clive Bell, Significant Form is the one quality common to all works of visual art. Bell postulates that to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and knowledge of three-dimensional space (92). Giving the formalist School its clear cut stand, he avers:

The ideas of men go buzz and die like gnats; men change their institutions as they change their coats, the intellectual triumphs of one age are the follies of another; only great art remains stable and unobscure because the

feelings that it awakens are independent of time and place, because its kingdom is not of this world (96).

In this school, therefore, the expressive qualities of the elements of art and their formal relationships are held as the supreme basis by which beauty in an object can be created. In Bell's view, "to see objects as pure forms is to see them as ends in themselves... these formal elements in art suggest the mark of great art with an appeal that is universal and eternal... these forms stand charged with the power to provoke aesthetic emotions in anyone capable of feeling it" (97).

The instrumentalist or pragmatist school is considered to be the last major aesthetic school. Championed by John Dewey and Monroe Beardsley they attempt to give art domestic or utilitarian ends in interpreting the aesthetics object as an art that must have usefulness in helping us to comprehend and improve our overall life experiences. In their opinions, good art is always a means to some important end. According to Beardsley; "function is not necessarily connected to serve in a certain (desirable) way, whether or not they were created for that purpose" (Szu-Hsien Lee Home Page).

The instrumentalists see ideas as instruments that guide the actions of men, their validity being determined by the success of the action. While the

imitationist school is particularly insistent on verisimilitude, the expressionist school is interested in ensuring that the mind of the artist or designer is effectively expressed. In ensuring verisimilitude the imitationist, however, does not declaim expressiveness. For the expressionist school, what is important is that the minds of the designer must be externalized notwithstanding the mode through which this is done. While the formalist school proffers methods seen in the formal qualities of design (lines, shapes, form, colour etc.), the instrumentalist aesthetic school is interested in the end purpose, notwithstanding the means. For the instrumentalist school however, it must be utilitarian, the matter of methodology or processes being of little concern. However what the formalist school appears to be engrossed in is a methodology in design that can help to arouse emotions through imitating the cognitive and essential elements that embody every piece of art work. The formalist school believes that these elements which carry semiotic universal languages or connotations can be further juxtaposed to convey deeper emotions that are incapable of being reached through verisimilitude. This is where the realist art of set design as is exemplified in the photographic realism of David Belasco is affected by anti-realist movement that strove to show the essence of a play through simplification, suggestion, and, often, stylization. This is evident in

the works of Edward Gordon Craig with his stage of many levels, Jacques Copeau with suggestive forms and screens, Vsevolod Meyerhold with his constructivist sets of skeletal structures and geometric forms, Max Reinhardt with his expressionistic sets of abstract distortion, and Erwin Piscator with his theatricality and educational approach. They all brought imagination and creativity to realist design which had become cluttered and uninteresting. In the art of painting and sculpture, the departure from Gustave Courbet's, Leonardo da Vinci's and Rembrandt Van Rijn's realism are envisioned in the art of Kurt Schwitters, Vladimir Tatlin, George Braque and Paul Cezanne.

While all the Schools are tended towards similar and overlapping goals, their most important concern is seen in their strong desire for a method of grouping the elements to achieve Harmony, Rhythm and Symmetry. Harmony in art is beauty and a sign of virtue. On the pleasure of beauty, Aristotle says tragedy grows out of our natural disposition to melody and rhythm, which may be taken as the pleasure in beauty (Macleon, 267). On the matter of symmetry, the Stoics concur that beauty depends on the arrangement of parts. To the Stoics, beauty is symmetry (Szu-Hsien Lee Home page). Symmetry and Unity, here, can be seen synonymously from what Plotinus says: "When an object becomes unified, beauty enthrones

itself” (Szu-Hsien Lee Home Page). Part of St. Augustine’s key concepts of beauty and aesthetics are equally referred to as unity and order.

The second factor important for all the aesthetic schools is seen in their insistence on expressiveness. For a work of art to be expressive, it must be seen, in Finlay’s opinion, to embody a set of sensory impressions often embodied in a material medium. According to Finlay, a set of sensory impressions characterized by beauty is an organic whole of considerable complexity, the constituent parts of which are impenetrable organic whole (202-203). Osborne holds that “an aesthetic object can only be experienced towards an object that is an organic whole of a high degree of complexity and that has a certain configurational unity, a certain organic wholeness inviting us to perceive it as a whole” (19). Szu-Hsien Lee says an aesthetic observer apprehends values in a work of art when he enjoys or takes satisfaction in the purely sensuous characteristics of the phenomenal object. She attributes the sensuous values to a form that is organic in unity. She quotes Dewitt Parker as saying, “balance,” amongst other variables, and synonymous with symmetry, is the central criterion for unity in form. The afore-mentioned sensory impressions are therefore the emotions of the artist passed onto the medium and containing an amount of self or feeling. Jessop says of the sensory medium:

The sensory medium itself has a beauty of its own. Certain colours sit quietly side by side, others enhance, and certain lines are graceful, directive, organizing (44).

Colours, shapes and lines carry the sensory impressions by which symmetry, unity and order are achieved, and by which an organic whole is realized. According to Finlay, artists, critics, curators, and historians see, in the term “beauty,” a denotation of that which is said to interest, excite, or arouse through certain formal and structural qualities (33). In Bell’s strong postulations, “Significant Form”, constitutes the one quality common to all works of art. He says to appreciate a work of art, we need to bring with us nothing but a sense of form and colour and knowledge of three-dimensional space. For Bell, to see objects as pure forms is to see them as ends in themselves (92). The concepts spawned by the artists of the theatre and by aesthetic theorists have given birth in several ways to different stage and scenic forms which characterize the modern theatres of today.

## 2.10 ASPECTS OF STAGE DESIGN

Throughout theatre history, there have been four basic types of Stages and certain other adapted forms of these four, each with its advantages and disadvantages, each suited to certain types of plays and certain types of dramatic productions. The four Stages are, namely, (1) the Proscenium, or

Picture-Frame, stage , (2) the Arena, or Theatre in the Round, (3) the Thrust stage with three-quarter seating, and (4) the Non Formal Space (Wilson and Goldfarb, 78).

### 2.10.1 Proscenium

In theatre, this is the frame separating the stage from the auditorium, through which the action of a play is viewed. In the ancient Greek theatre, the proscenium originally referred to a row of colonnades, supporting a raised acting platform, and afterward to the entire acting area. Wilson and Goldfarb define this type of stage as the Fourth Wall, from the idea that the Proscenium opening is an invisible glass wall through which the audience looks at the other three walls of a room (79).



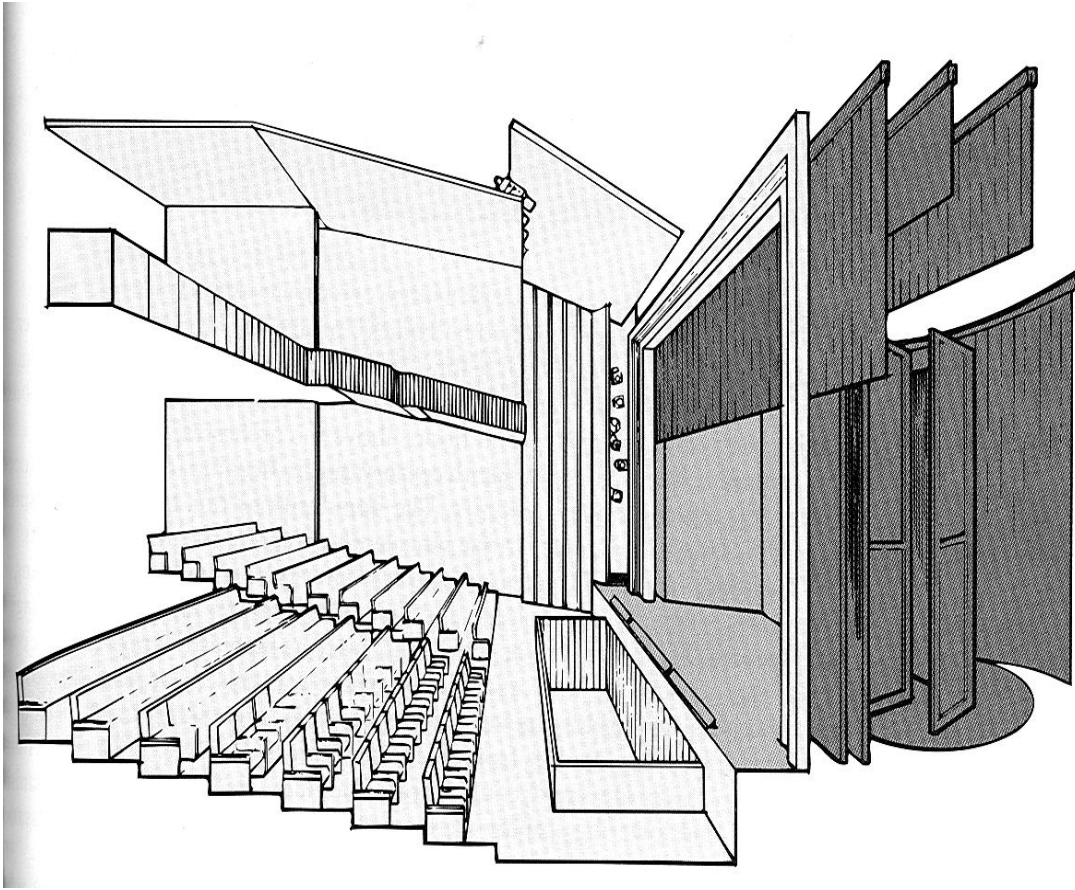


Fig. 1. The Proscenium Stage. Source: Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfab.  
Theatre: The Lively Art. Fourth Edition.

Because the action takes place largely behind the Proscenium opening or frame, the seats in the auditorium all face in the same direction - toward the stage, just as seats in a movie theater face the screen. Although its arch did contain a stage curtain, its main purpose was to provide atmosphere and a sense of spectacle, and scene changes were still carried out in view of the audience.

However, because the Proscenium is perceived to be an architectural barrier, it creates a sense of distance or separation between the stage and the spectators.

The proscenium theatre, though still popular in the 20th century (especially for large auditoriums), was supplemented by other types of theatres designed for fuller communication between actor and audience. Hence the revival of other more intimate forms of theatre, such as the Thrust stage and the Theatre-in-the-Round.

#### 2.10.2 The Thrust Stage

The Thrust Stage is equally referred to as the Platform or three-quarter stage. It is a stage form without a proscenium, projecting into the audience and surrounded on three sides by the audience. Zanzan Uji refers to this design format as a stage where elaborate and sometimes complicated

scenery are eliminated or greatly reduced in addition to bringing both the performers and audience in greater physical intimacy and proximity (87).

This type of staging is equally seen thus:

The Thrust design which was pioneered in North America by Tyrone Guthrie, was in fact the favored format in ancient Greece and Elizabethan England. Because it places much of the action in the midst of the audience, the Thrust stage is a more actor-centered (rather than scenery centered) theatre configuration. In the Thrust format the members of the audience are more aware of each other than they are in a darkened proscenium "fan," (Cohen, 413).

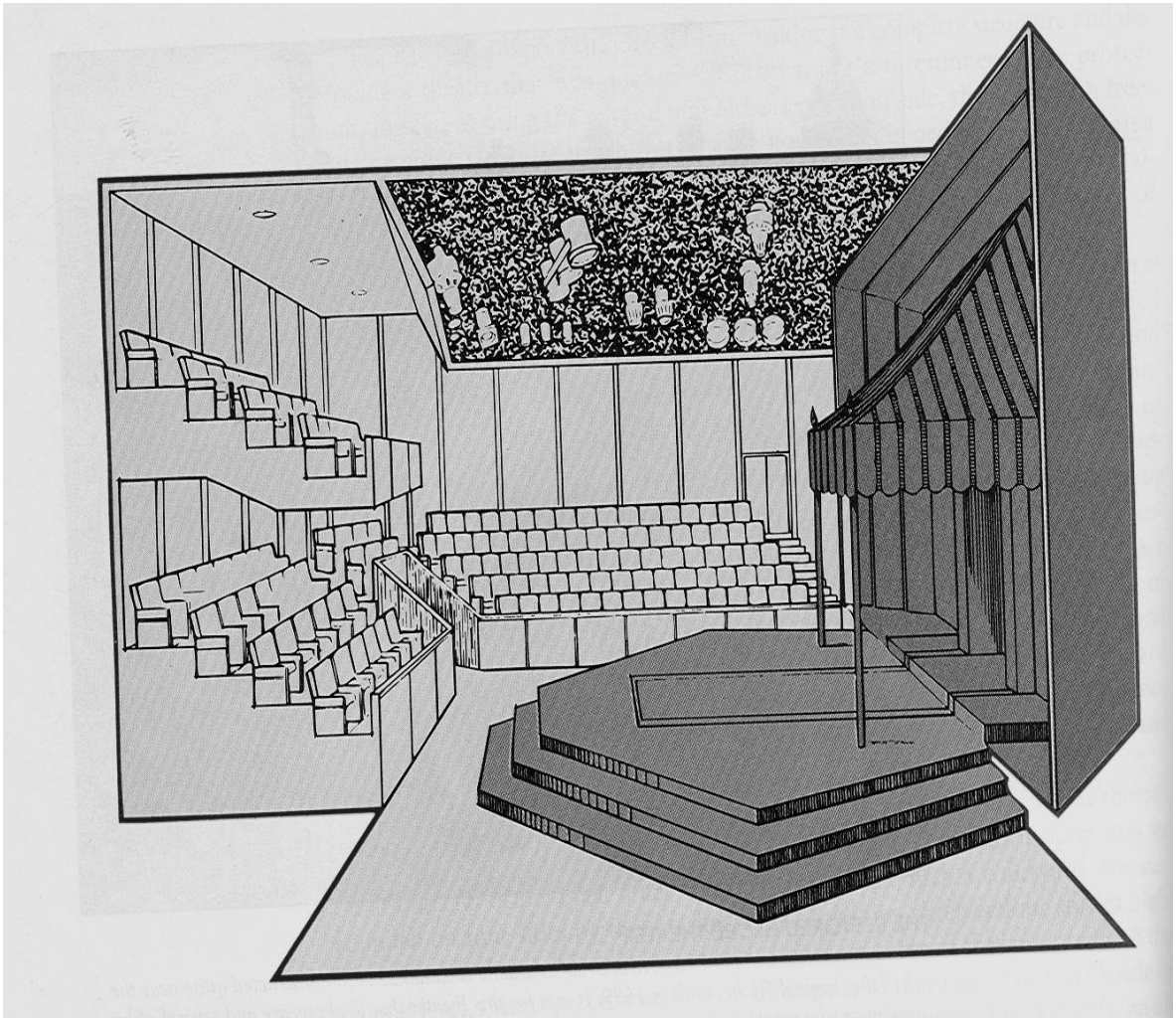


Fig. 2. The Thrust Stage.

Source: Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfab. Theatre: The Lively Art. Fourth Edition.

The Thrust form was used for ancient Greek theatre, Elizabethan theatre, classical Spanish theatre, English Restoration theatre, Japanese and Chinese classical theatre, and much of Western theatre in the 20th century. A Thrust may be backed by a wall or be appended to some sort of end stage. The upstage end (back of the stage, farthest from the audience) may have scenery and provision for entrances and exits, but the thrust itself is usually bare except for a few scenic elements and props. Because no barrier exists between performers and spectators, the Thrust stage generally creates a sense of greater intimacy, as if the performance were occurring in the midst of the auditorium, while still allowing for illusionistic effects through the use of the upstage end and adjacent offstage space.

### 2.10.3 The Arena Stage

The Arena Stage is also called Theater-in-the-Round, Arena Stage, Central Stage, or Island Stage where the acting area, which may be raised or at floor level, is completely surrounded by the audience. Zanzan Uji sees this staging format as derived from the ancient theatre configuration used in the great coliseums and arenas of Greece and Rome. According to him, this arrangement puts the greatest number of the audience in intimate physical proximity with the performer (87).

The necessity of providing equal sight lines for all spectators puts special constraints on the type of scenery used and on the movements of the actors, because at any given time part of the audience will inevitably be viewing a performer's back. Illusion is more difficult to sustain in an arena, since in most set-ups, entrances and exits must be made in full view of the audience, eliminating surprise, if nothing else. Nonetheless, the arena, when properly used, can create a sense of intimacy not often possible with other stage arrangements, and, as noted, it is well suited to many non-dramatic forms. Cohen opines that "the Arena staging dispenses with all scenery except floor treatments, furniture, and out-of the-way hanging or standing pieces and focuses audience attention sharply and simply on the actors" (413).

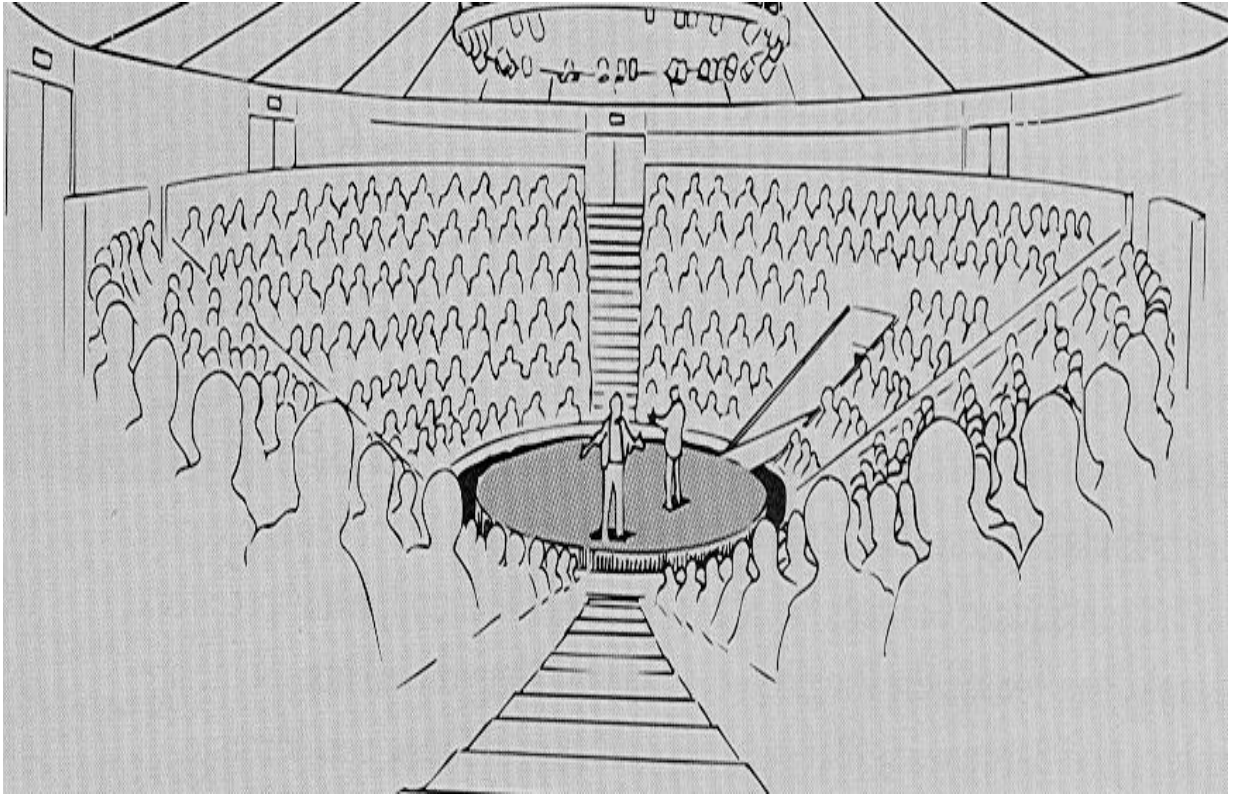


Fig. 3. The Arena Stage.

Source: Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfab. Theatre: The Lively Art. Fourth Edition.

#### 2.10.4 The Non-Formal Stage

One variant form of staging is environmental or the non-formal staging structure which has its precedents in medieval and folk theatre and has been widely used in 20th-century avant-garde theatre. It eliminates the single or central stage in favour of surrounding the spectators or sharing the space with them. Stage space and spectator space become indistinguishable. Another popular alternative is the free or flexible space, sometimes called black-box theatre because of its most common shape and colour. This is an empty space with movable seats and stage platforms that can be arranged in any configuration for each performance.

#### 2.11 THE QUALITIES OF A THEATRE STAGE

From Proscenium through Semi-circular stage to the Arena theatre, there exists a wide range of variations on method and techniques for creating the basic stage structure and the sets for these structures. For the Proscenium stage, the rules which are almost standard are the same, both in the architectural layout, measurement and specifications, and in the mediums and actual construction techniques.

However, for all the types of theatre stage available to theatre artists, the most important factor considered by set designers is that of space.



Purdom declares that “a theatre stage should have a good view from every part of the auditorium and with sufficient area for performance; this way the stage would have accommodation for the necessary scenery” (115). Elucidating on the methods of constructing scenery, Nicola Sabbattini, in his manual for constructing scenery and machines, puts it that is necessary to select as convenient and spacious a hall as possible (43). Serlio further adjudicates on how the stage should be built thus:

In building the stage you must watch not to take up too much or too little space, otherwise one of two inconveniences will result: (i) because of the limitation in space the scenery will not show sufficient perspective distance and consequently will not prove so pleasing to the eye... (ii) Because by too much space the, number of spectators will be curtailed, which is bad (Nicola Sabbattini 44).

## 2.12 BASIC ELEMENTS OF SCENERY

The majority of settings today are composed of a few set pieces and stage properties, or steps and levels. In other words, they tend to be fragmentary and suggestive rather than fully representational. In designing, the scenic designer utilizes two basic types of units: standing units, ground row, and hanging units. The basic standing unit is the flat, made of light wood over which either plywood, canvas or muslin has been stretched. Griffith affirms

that flats are the most fundamental unit of scenery in the theatre accounting for about three quarter of constructed scenery (147). The different types of flats include the door flat, the window flat, and arch flats. Flats are used in many kinds of settings, but they are of special importance for interiors. There are basically two types of scenery: 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional scenery. "A two dimensional scenic unit is characterized by a height and a breath and with a shape that is always flat. Draperies, drops and cyclorama belong to this class and are fundamentally used in delineating performance spaces to create environments for dramatic actions" (Asomba, 114). The material with which two-dimensional scenic pieces are covered may be in canvas, muslin, calico, gauze, velous or duvetyn. Framed scenery can also be covered in hardboard and plywood. However, the choice to cover framed scenery in fabric or hardboard is largely dependent on the role the unit is designed to play in a performance.

Glue is needed in giving firmness to the joints and equally used in applying on wood surface to hold down the fabric covering before it is nailed down. All flats, irrespective of size and shape, are fundamentally constructed in the same manner hence they are realized in the same construction procedures. Essentially, the area intended for framing is enclosed in light weight framing members usually 1" (0.025m) by 3"

(0.075m) lumbers. Asomba states that:

In Nigeria, well dried 'obeche' or 'marima' wood is the nearest equivalent to the white pine (select grade), and is therefore, appropriate for use as framing members in construction of flats. 'Obeche' and 'marima' have been tested and found sufficiently strong, light weight, durable and inexpensive for stage application. After the preconstruction preparation of the wood, the assembling commences (117-118).

Domba Asomba further submits that three-dimensional scenery is fundamentally characterized by three perceptible dimensions: length, breadth (thickness) and height and is solid in form. He reiterates that it is designed and constructed as weight bearing structure unlike in the case of two-dimensional scenery that is not weight bearing (120). According to Asomba:

They are, in conception and realization, not intended to support heavy load and are characteristically employed in evoking illusion of real solid pieces such as rocks and trees. Because they are more often than not, not meant to support extraneous load, they are constructed only sufficiently strong and rigid to support their own weight and to withstand the stress of stage contacts and movements (120).

### 2.13 MATERIALS OF SCENERY (WOOD)

Wood is said to be one of the most adaptable and versatile of materials that has a long and honorable history in the service of mankind (Millet and Storey, 19). Wood is the principal strengthening and nutrient-conducting tissue of trees and other plants and one of the most abundant and versatile natural materials. Produced by many botanical species, wood is available in various colours and grain patterns. It is strong in relation to its weight, is insulating to heat and electricity. Furthermore, it imparts a feeling of “warmth” not possessed by competing materials such as metals, and it is relatively easily worked.

Today, in spite of technological advancement and competition from metals, plastics, cement, and other materials, wood maintains a place in most of its traditional roles, and its serviceability is expanding through new uses. In addition to well-known products such as lumber, furniture, and plywood, wood is the raw material for wood-based panels, pulp and paper, and many chemical products.

On the properties of wood, Luker confirms that, “the most obvious characteristics of wood are the presence or absence of pores to indicate hardwoods or softwoods, and the visibility of the rays which would most likely indicate oak, beech, or plane” (73). All wood are composed of 60% cellulose

and 28% lignin. These substances make up the fibrous and woody cell walls of plants and trees and are held together by cementing properties. Other characteristics are due to the way that the wood is sawed and cured. There are hardwoods from deciduous trees and softwoods from coniferous trees.

Luker submits that:

Softwoods are obtained from Conifers (pines and firs) and of these the Pines are the most prolific source. Hardwoods from broad-leaf trees are more numerous and vary much more than the timbers from conifers (73).

Lumber that must be used for scenic construction must be straight, free from knots and lightweight. In addition, it must have low resin content and must be easily workable, tough and will not splinter when in use. Few lumber possess these qualities and so the designer has to balance the limitation with availability and use, and select the wood which is best under the circumstance.

Lumber prices vary with quality and supply. Demand and competition exert greater influence upon them than do proximity to source of supply and cost of transportation. In Nigeria, Indeed in Africa, the types that are in common use by the scenic designer are discussed below giving their characteristics.

Table 1. Wood and its Characteristics

WOOD	APPEARANCE	CHARACTERISTICS	WORKABILITY	GRAIN	RESIN	STAGE USE	MEASUREMENT
Black Afara	Light brown	Will not splinter. Light, soft, good for bearing set pieces.	Light weight, tough, good for weight bearing set pieces.	Fine, tiny	Very light.	Framing battens and weight bearing set pieces(1"x12"x12')	1"x12"x12'
White Abora	Creamy	Light, soft. Will not splinter or warp	Light weight, tough but not too good for weight bearing set pieces.	Fine, straight	Very little	Flats, framing, batten, platform, doors and windows	1",2"x12"x12'
Abora	Brownish	Strong, will not splinter	Light and tough for weight bearing set pieces.	Straight, very good surface		Heavy weight bearing platforms, steps and flooring	1",2"x12"x12'
Okpekpe	Light yellow	Not very strong, may splinter	Good for flat frames, not too strong for the construction of weight bearing set pieces	Fine little knots but straight	little	Properties, frames for flats, battens, trims.etc	1",2"x12"x12'
Ekun	Dark brown	Soft, inferior, not strong	Tough, too light when dry. Fragile	Fine and straight	little	Frames, flats, doors	1",2"x12"x12'
Ologbo	Cream brown	Not strong, will splinter	Very soft, easily broken. May fracture over heavy weight	Fine straight little knots.	much	Frames, flats, battens	1",2",x12"x12'
Red Wood	Red	Strong, may splinter easily	Tougher, heavier than Ologbo and Ekun	Fine and straight	Very little	Properties, frames and for framing battens	1",2"x12"x12'
White Wood	White with yellow tint	Light, soft, inferior	Very soft, easily broken, light	Fine and straight	little	Framing battens, properties and flats	1",2"x12"x12'

Source: Hilary Elemi, Modern Scenery Fabrication for the Nigerian Theatre.” M.A. Thesis Submitted to the School of Post Graduate Studies, University of Calabar.

## 2.14 MATERIALS OF SCENERY (METAL)

**Metals:** These are chemical elements that usually have shiny surfaces and generally a good conductor of heat and electricity. They can be melted or fused, hammered into thin sheets, or drawn into wires. The characteristics of metal are further highlighted:

Metals form about one-quarter of the earth's crust in mass. Some metals occur more abundantly than others, and very few (such as gold) occur as pure elements. The metals are usually found in combination with other elements, such as oxygen, sulphur and silicon, in the form known as ores, and elaborate industrial techniques are employed to separate out the pure metals (Hicks *et al*, 7).

Metals comprise about two-thirds of all known elements. Steel is a metal alloy whose major component is iron, with carbon being the primary alloying material. Carbon acts as a hardening agent, preventing iron atoms, which are naturally arranged in a lattice, from sliding past one another. Varying the amount of carbon and its distribution in the alloy controls the qualities of the resulting steel. Elucidating on the actions of metal, Hicks et al stress that:

When metals are heated and melted, they oxidize rapidly and absorb gases. This process increases greatly with the rise in temperature and the metal should not be overheated (7).

Thomas classifies metal as belonging to ferrous materials which contain chiefly

iron with small proportions of other metals and non-ferrous metals which contain little or no iron, and alloys (1). According to Thomas's clarification, Metals physical and chemical properties which affect their working qualities are:

- 1) Relative density: the ratio between the weight of the metal and the weight of an equal volume of water.
- 2) Colour: besides being a means of distinguishing metals, colour is useful in decorative work.
- 3) Fusibility: this is the property of becoming liquid when heated. Different metals have different melting points.
- 4) Conductivity of heat and electricity: copper and silver are the best conductors of both heat and electricity.
- 5) Magnetic properties: iron and steel are the most important magnetic metals but others are slightly magnetic, e.g. cobalt and nickel. Some irons and steels become permanently magnetized but others lose their magnetism immediately the magnetic field is removed.
- 6) Elasticity: the ability to regain shape after deformation.
- 7) Hardness: this is the resistance the metal offers to scratch, cut or wear. There are a number of standard hardness tests (e.g. Brinell) by means of which the hardness of metals can be compared.



8) Malleability: the property which allows a metal to be hammered or rolled without breaking.

9) Ductility: the quality of being able to be drawn into fine wire. Ductility often increases with heat. It bears little relation to malleability, e.g. lead is malleable but not ductile.

10) Toughness: the resistance to fracture or deformation. Toughness decreases with heating.

11) Brittleness is the opposite of toughness. Brittle materials break easily with a sharp blow, are usually hard and are neither ductile nor malleable.

12) Tenacity: the measure of tenacity is tensile strength and is the property of materials to resist fracture when stretched (Thomas, 1).

These qualities have been listed here, however, in ensuring that the needfulness of metal as a material of scenery is either emphasized or played down in the course of our study.



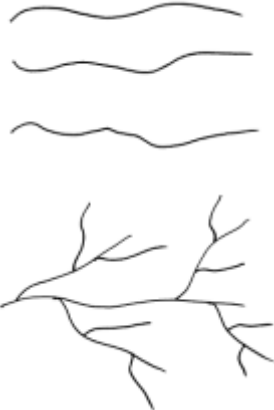
Table 2. Nails for Joinery

	LENGTH	USES
Common Nails	1/2 inch	Used for platforms and objects for tacking fabrics
	<b>1 inch</b>	Used for tacking facial boards onto platforms and risers, corner blocks and keystones
	<b>1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>- 2" inch</b>	Used for marrying platform tops, for the construction of flats and joining of flat members
	<b>2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub></b>	Used for the marrying of platform of 2" thickness and for assembling and joining of flats together
	<b>3" inch</b>	Used for marrying platforms of more than 2" in thickness
	<b>4" inch</b>	Used for joining of thick lumber for weight bearing purposes
	<b>5" inch</b>	Used for joining of thick lumber of Weight bearing. Rarely used except particularly necessary
	<b>6" inch</b>	Used for Construction of thick lumber. Rarely used for scene building

## 2.15 MATERIALS OF SCENERY (PLASTICS)

‘Plastics’ are materials that are capable of being modeled or shaped. According to Cherry, “Natural materials which are plastic at some time include wax, clay, rubber, concrete, and even glass. Wax is plastic and moldable when warm; glass when very hot; clay and raw rubber are plastic before being heated, and cement can be shaped before it sets up” (17). On the basis of their physical characteristics, plastics are usually divided into thermosets, elastomers and thermoplastics. These groups differ primarily with regard to molecular structure, which is what determines their differing thermal behavior. Thermoplastics constitute an important class of synthetic material used increasingly in a variety of applications including the theatre. For example, in building and construction, they perform various functions as light structural and decorative components or as auxiliaries to other materials and components. In the theatre, a majority of scenic materials are gradually being converted to plastic materials because of its plasticity, re-usability and relative lightness. The following Table lists the characteristics of the various types of plastics.

Table 3. Types, Structure, and Characteristics of Plastics

Type of plastic	Molecular structure	Characteristics and applications
<b>Thermosets</b>		<p>Thermosets are hard and have a very tight-meshed, branched molecular structure. Curing proceeds during shaping, after which it is no longer possible to shape the material by heating. Further shaping may then only be performed by machining. Thermosets are used, for example, to make light switches.</p>
<b>Elastomers</b>		<p>While elastomers also have a cross linked structure, they have a looser mesh than thermosets, giving rise to a degree of elasticity. Once shaped, elastomers also cannot be reshaped by heating. Elastomers are used, for example, to produce automobile tires.</p>
<b>Thermoplastics</b>		<p>Thermoplastics have a linear or branched molecular structure which determines their strength and thermal behavior; they are flexible at ordinary temperatures. At approx. 120 - 180°C, thermoplastics become a pasty/liquid mass. The service temperature range for thermoplastics is considerably lower than that for thermosets. The thermoplastics polyethylene (PE), polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and polystyrene (PS) are used, for example, in packaging applications.</p>

Source: [www.plastics.co.uk](http://www.plastics.co.uk)

**Thermoplastic:** Thermoplastic materials soften when heated and harden when cooled. They can withstand many heating and cooling cycles and are often suitable for recycling. Most thermoplastics consist of polymers, long chains of molecules that contain smaller, repeating units called monomers. Some thermoplastic materials contain filler materials such as powders or fibers to provide improved strength and/or stiffness. Fibers can be either chopped or wound, and commonly include glass, fiberglass, or cloth. Some products contain solid lubricant fillers such as graphite or molybdenum disulfide. Others contain aramid fibers, metal powders, or inorganic fillers with ceramics and silicates.

Thermoplastics constitute an important class of synthetic material used increasingly in a variety of applications. For example, in building and construction they perform various functions as light structural and decorative components or as auxiliaries to other materials and components. In Cherry's definition,

Thermoplastics are based on linear or slightly branched polymers in which the molecular chains flow over each other when heated and solidify into new shapes when cooled (20).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF NIGERIA, THE NATIONAL TROUPE OF NIGERIA, AND THE CINEMA HALL 2**

#### **3.1 THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF NIGERIA**

One of the most important accomplishment of the Federal Government, under General Yakubu Gowon (1967-1975), in the promotion of arts and culture in Nigeria, was the design and construction of the National Theatre which occupies an area of about 23,000 square metres and stands well over thirty-one metres in height. The National Theatre complex which is home to several government departments and parastatals occupies an area of about 1.1 million square metres in the heart of the city of Lagos.

The arrangements for the establishment of the National Theatre started in 1973 when the Federal Government appointed a 19 member Theatre Consultative Committee to give advice on the concept and the organizational structure of a theatre. The Committee proposed the establishment of a National Theatre which should also be the home of a national troupe (Yerima 186).



Plate 1: The National Theatre of Nigeria, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria.

The design for the National Theatre was taken from the Palace of Culture and Sports in Varna, Bulgaria and contract for its construction was signed on April 22, 1973 with a Bulgarian company called Technoexportstroy. The multi-purpose National Theatre in Lagos is about three times bigger than the one in Varna, Bulgaria and about four times bigger than the National Theatre in London.

The implementation of the policy to construct the National Theatre was supervised by Chief Anthony Enahoro who was then the Federal Commissioner for Information. He was succeeded in 1975 by Major General I.B.M Haruna. On the order of General Murtala Ramat Mohammed, who was then Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Federal Department of Culture of the Federal Ministry of Information moved into the complex in 1975 to oversee the maintenance, administration and preparation of the National Theatre for the hosting of the Second World Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), in January 1977.

Even though the National Theatre was officially handed over to the Federal Government of Nigeria on July 5, 1975, by Technoexportstroy of Bulgaria, the monumental edifice was formally declared open, by the then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo on September 30, 1976.



The nearest that the National Theatre got to having its own management was seen in the National Theatre Interim Board which was expanded beyond the parent Ministry from May 5, 1987 to September, 1991. It was the Interim Board that gave birth to the National Troupe of Nigeria, in 1987. The National Troupe was incorporated into the National Theatre Management Board which appointed the late Chief Hubert Ogunde a contract employee, as the first Artistic Director of the Troupe. Jimmy F. Atte who became the first General Manager and Chief Executive of the National Theatre represented the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) on the National Theatre Interim Board, from May 1987 to December, 1989.

The Federal Department of Culture which was to oversee the administration of the National Theatre till September, 1991 when the General Ibrahim Babangida administration, through the then Federal Ministry for Culture and Social Welfare, appointed a management team to run the affairs of the National Theatre and the National Troupe of Nigeria. The first Management team came into effect from October 4, 1991 with Mr. Jimmy F. Atte as General Manager and Chief Executive.

While the National Troupe leadership concentrated on professional performances, the National Theatre Management was to handle the administration of the Theatre and the Troupe in the areas of general

administration, personnel management, commercial services, technical services including maintenance of facilities and legal matters. Since its inception, the complex has offered venue and facilities for national and international events and programmes which include drama, musical concerts, film shows, beauty pageants, exhibitions, conferences, meetings and other social and cultural activities. Today, diverse facilities and innovations have been integrated into the basic structure so that a variety of events can take place within the complex at the same time. The complex is designed to host twelve programmes simultaneously.

The Management is committed to achieving the objectives for which the National Theatre was established, as regards to presentation, preservation and promotion of arts and culture in Nigeria and as a partially commercialized Federal Government parastatal, it is determined to broaden its mandate and become innovative and adventurous in order to survive in a competitive market (Atte, 147). Amongst other things, the National Theatre is to be customer-oriented, to recognize the social needs of the society, to be able to meet the demands of patrons and the society, to display the qualities that can attract tourist attraction and to enhance the good image of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The functions of the National Theatre as a parastatal are carried in The National Theatre of Nigeria and The National Troupe of Nigeria Board Act,

CAP. 80; Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The National

Theatre of Nigeria was set up to:

- 1.) Encourage the discovery and development of talents in the performing arts.
- 2.) Ensure that the National Theatre is efficiently managed as a commercial concern.
- 3.) Safeguard the property of the parastatal.
- 4.) Specify the category of persons who may be admitted to the National Theatre premises.
- 5.) Contribute to the improvement of the artistic standard of the National Troupe.
- 6.) Approve the use of the National Theatre Complex and its facilities for the promotion of arts, culture and other social activities which include drama, music, dance, exhibitions and film shows, conferences and meetings.
- 7.) Impose a scale of fees for the use of the National Theatre, and its facilities and for the services rendered by the parastatal.
- 8.) Promote healthy cultural activities and theatre culture in the society.
- 9.) Provide the National Troupe of Nigeria with essential Management and technical services in regard to general administration, accounts, stores,

maintenance of equipment, costumes, props, musical instruments, artistes' hostel, office accommodation, venue for rehearsals and performances, design and construction of stage and sets.

10.) Enhance and exploit the tourism potential of the National Theatre Complex.

11.) Promote the positive image of the National Theatre and that of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

12. Provide technical services support to national and international performers and productions in the Theatre Complex.

13. Offer advice on troupe development or organization to public institutions or agencies of the Government of the Federation.

### 3. 2 THE NATIONAL TROUPE OF NIGERIA

In line with the practice the world over, Nigeria launched its own cultural policy in 1988. The policy was to form the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization. In that cultural policy, Nigeria wrote in a clause for the establishment of a National Troupe, a symbol of unity. The nation's cultural policy states that:

6.32 The state shall establish a National Troupe of Nigeria whose repertoire shall draw their materials from drama, dance and music.

6.33 The National Troupe of Nigeria shall be part of the National Theatre.  
(Cultural Policy for Nigeria, 11)

The National Troupe was created to help project Nigeria's image abroad, celebrate Nigeria's Cultural heritage and help achieve the practical fulfillment of the signed Cultural exchange agreement between Nigeria and other countries. The decision to establish a National Cultural Troupe, as this was the first name which later evolved into the National Troupe of Nigeria started as far back as 1973 when Nigeria was preparing to host the World Festival for Arts and Culture (Yerima, 187).

At the council of Ministers meeting of November 1981, the Ministry for Social Development, Youth, Sports and Culture as the supervising Ministry was then known, presented the memorandum on the establishment of the National Troupe and it was approved by the Council of Ministers meeting of October 1982 (Yerima, 188).

Between 1981 and 1986, the Department of Culture, the then supervising department consulted professionals and academics in the field of the performing arts for suggestion on how well to establish the Troupe. Chief Hubert Ogunde, a respected personality in theatre and film making in both English and Yoruba languages, was appointed the first Consultant Artistic Director of the National Troupe which had been established by the National Theatre Interim Board of the then Federal Ministry of Information and Culture. The Consultant Artistic Director ran the troupe with due consultation with the Chairman of the Board, Col. Tunde Akogun, Sole Administrator of Culture (1985-1989) and Dr. Gabriel Adeosun, Director General of Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare (1990-1991) and with the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (1992-1993) (Yerima, 189).

In 1988 Chief Ogunde and a team of bureaucrats embarked on the recruitment of artistes from all over Nigeria. On 14th February, 1989, Chief

Ogunde started the screening exercise of the National Troupe artistes at Osoa near Ijebu-Ode in Ogun State. The screening exercise involved about 700 short listed artistes out of which 110 artistes were left in the camp for training (Production Booklet for The Strong Breed: 2002).

A new management team with Bayo Oduneye as head was appointed in September, 1991 with Ahmed Yerima as Deputy Artistic Director. Arnold Udoka headed the Dance Section while Martin Adaji headed the Drama Section. The new management team inherited 99 Artistes from Chief Ogunde's auditioned artistes. This number was however cut down drastically to 40.

A Task Force Committee made up of Dan Awodoye, Zainab Jose, Yusuf Atai, Mamood Ali Balogun, Segun Ojewuyj, Disun Delano, and chaired by the Artistic Director started its sitting on the 13th July, 1993. The committee evolved a contract form and the new conditions of service. The exercise helped to compensate and create incentives for the Artistes of the National Troupe. Between 1992 and 1994, the Troupe travelled out of the country six times to the United States of America, Japan, North and South Korea. The crowning glory of the Troupe's overseas tour came in April, 1994 at the 12th April Spring Friendship Art Festival in North Korea where the National Troupe of Nigeria came first in the Dance Group category out of fifty one other countries (Yerima, 191).

Decree No. 47 of 19th November, 1991 established the National Troupe as a parastatal. This decree is presently The National Theatre of Nigeria and The National Troupe of Nigeria Board Act. CAP. 80; Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

This Act listed The National Troupe as established to:

(a) Encourage the discovery and development of talents in the performing arts.

(b) Achieve high artistic productions specifically designed for national and international tours.

(c) Ensure that productions of the Troupe are geared towards national aspirations.

(d) Encourage the development of children's theatre.

(e) Ensure the preservation of the repertoire of the Troupe. ( The National Theatre of Nigeria and The National Troupe of Nigeria Board Act. CAP. 80. Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).



### 3.3 THE CINEMA HALL 2

The Cinema Hall 2 is the traditional place of performance of the National Troupe of Nigeria having successfully hosted over three quarter of the plays produced by the troupe. The hall is a hybrid proscenium setting originally meant for non-dramatic entertainment activities. It was however later adapted for the National Troupe's performance following the problems associated with the usage of the Main Bowl - the international standard theatre hall meant for major dramatic productions. The abandonment of the proscenium but adaptable stage structure of the Main Bowl followed the stampede that occasioned the film show of Ogunde's 'Ayanmo' the film version of its stage production premiered as one of the first productions seen in the Main Bowl of the National Theatre. Other notable productions that preceded this were Things Fall Apart directed by Bayo Oduneye and Foot Prints, a collaborative work by a wide variety of artistes. The Cinema Hall 2 which was initially used for cinema presentations as is presently the case with the Cinema Hall 1, was later re-designed for Open Theatre Productions by the Culture Department of the Ministry of Arts and Culture by extending its apron and by introducing lighting equipment. This action permitted the use of the Cinema Hall 2 by theatre practitioners outside of the National Theatre in combination to its use by the performers of the National Troupe of Nigeria.



Plate II: The Theatre Space of the Cinema Hall 2 - Photo by Soibifaa Dokubo

During the productions in this hall, the uses to which sceneries were put were usually limited to stock scenery which were large scale and produced by the National Troupe. Small and medium scale scenery, made in wood, was usually transported by collaborating theatre groups that were to produce their drama.

The majority of drama productions by the National Troupe has however been produced on the stage structure of the Cinema Hall 2 which boasts of a proscenium stage structure with a performance space assuming a posterior position in a rectangular architectural structure shared by a raked auditorium.

As the name implies, the Cinema Hall 2 is a hall that falls short of a true proscenium, assuming rather the status of an adapted proscenium by the stage floor which ends stage left and right without the traditional walls or wings of wooden flats into which exits and entrances are provided. At the border line area that marks the beginning of the down stage floor left to right, there are no proscenium or frame-like demarcations that can strongly define it as a typical proscenium stage. The Cinema Hall 2 can conveniently be categorized as a spurious picture frame stage that lacks the sophistication and mechanization offered by European and American Proscenium setting. This is because, considering its intended use for a cinema hall, the stage cannot boast of underground scenery storage space and an overhead fly loft to and from which scenery can be sunk and flown.

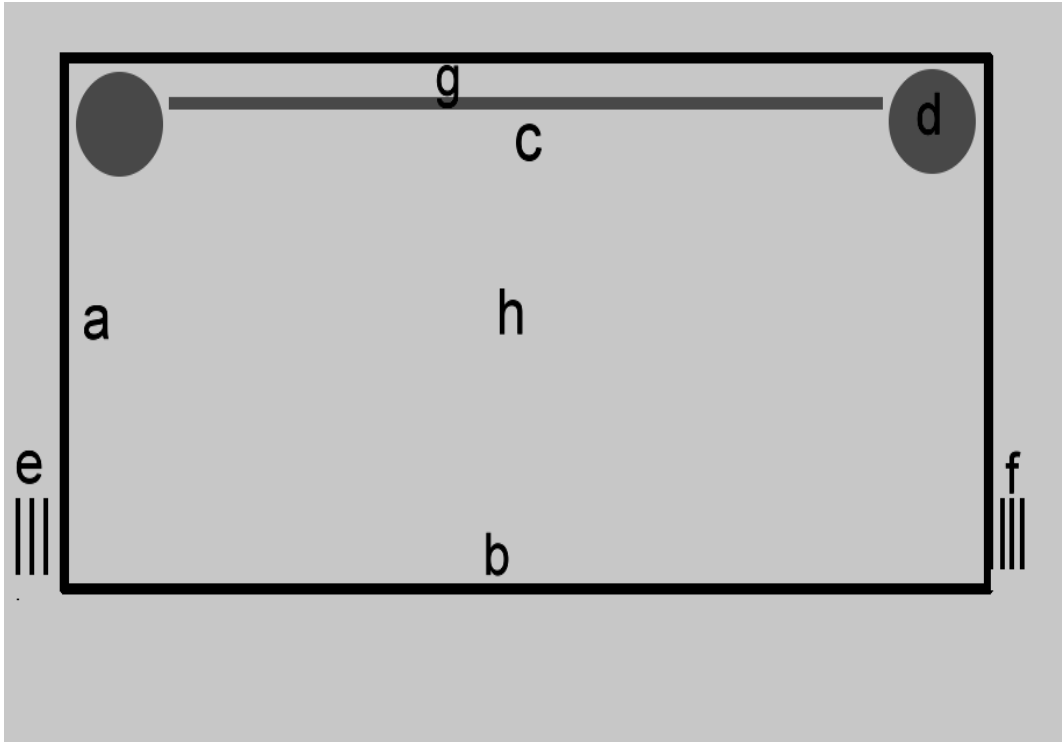


Figure 4: Floor Plan of the Cinema Hall 2

### Keys to Figures 4

Figure 4: (a) is the dept line of the stage which runs from both down stage left and right to upstage left and right. This area measures 35.9ft. (10.9m) deep.

Figure 4: (b) marks the apron or down stage area closest to the audience. However it equally represents the total width of the stage from the end, stage left, to its end, right. The total width of this stage is 56.7ft (17.1M) wide. Figure

4: (e and f) are stair cases attached to the base of the stage upstage left and

right. These stair cases are interchangeably used for both exits and entry onto the stage. Figure 4: (h) is the stage floor on which the sets are rigged. The floor is made of cement onto which series of vertical bars of black 'afara' hard wood are vertically and closely placed. Since this stage floor is flat, the desire to vary its height is often sought by the means of platforms which are spread at different points to break the monotony created by this flatness. These wooden bars are of no more than three inches and are made from hard wood and placed on the stage floor running from upstage to downstage of the entire length and breadth of the stage floor. They are held onto the surface of the stage floor by cement and three inches concrete nails. The wooden bars at the edges of the stage run vertically from the top of the stage floor to the base of the auditorium floor. This wooden coverage, amongst other functions, help to soften the undesirable effect the bare cement floor base has on the feet. The wooden base helps to dramatize the sound of footsteps by accentuating such sounds without actually creating echoes. It equally helps to conceal the bareness of the cement flooring thereby establishing more aesthetically pleasant base.

Figure 4 (c) is the backstage Curtains: The back stage curtains mask the entire back stage area from the views of the audience. There are two backstage curtains: a black calico fabric immediately rigged at the front of a red velvety one. The curtains are drawn apart from the middle to reveal the bare walls of

the backstage when productions are to be held. Both curtains measure 36 ft. (10.90m) wide and 20 ft. (6.06m) high when totally stretched out.

Figure 4 is the Wooden Upstage Columns: These are positioned more for aesthetic use than for use as weight bearing structures. They consist of a hollowed diameter with a space of no more than 9 ft. (2.72m) each for changing costumes and storing small sets and props. The width between the left and the right column is 36 ft. (10.90m) marking the ends of the curtains.

Figure 4 (g) is the back stage wall of the stage. It carries a permanent white paint which is often seen to distract when productions are to be had. Thus it is usually masked out by the backstage vertical flats created for such a purpose. Near this wall are the vertical flats which are often set up to mask away the white distracting walls and to create backgrounds for productions. These consist of frameworks of wood onto which plywood or fabrics are mounted, sized, primed, and surface-treated. The heights of these vertical flats range from 8 feet to 12 feet, with width that, in most instances, cover the entire upstage area. Some of the productions in which these flats were used are, namely, The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen by Ahmed Yerima where variegated types of entrance arches and motifs were applied and The Concubine by Elechi Amadi as was adapted by Israel Eboh, where thick massive and concrete walls were suggested.

Attached to this basic stage area is the auditorium. It is made of 650 upholstered seats on a metallic frame affixed permanently to the floor. Basically the auditorium faces the stage in the typically proscenium tradition. It is raked with six inches incremental distance between rows to assist sightlines.

The entire presentations are facts related to the Structure of the Cinema Hall 2 inside the National Theatre of Nigeria. The Cinema Hall 2, amongst several other productions, played host to Wole Soyinka's Death and the King's Horseman. The scenic elements for this play are first presented in our next chapter.



Plate III: Back Stage Area of the Cinema Hall 2 – Photograph by Ernest Agoba



## CHAPTER 4

### PRODUCTION SCENERIES IN THE CINEMA HALL 2

Having presented the architectural edifice in which the Cinema Hall2 is found, and having studied the proscenium structure of the hall itself, this work will now dwell on the physical structures that are constructed by individual set designers or brought in for mounting in the familiar space of the Cinema Hall 2. In Chronological order the production and set design presentation, in combination with their set designers, will follow thus:

- 1) Death and the King's Horseman (1995) – Biodun Abe
- 2) The Concubine (1998) – Hilary Elemi
- 3) Trials of Oba Ovonramen (2000) – Sunbo Marinho
- 4) Attahiru (2000) – Hilary Elemi
- 5) Song of a Goat (2001) – Biodun Abe

In this chapter, a synopsis, a detailed listing of set used, design concepts, ground plan and other detailed drawings will be made in conjunction with an analysis of construction, rendering and rigging patterns for each production.

#### 4.1 SET DESIGN IN DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN

Death and the King's Horseman, written by Wole Soyinka, recounts the historic and epic tale of a Chief Horseman to a king who had just died. In a bid to satisfy an age long traditional ritual, the horseman is meant to commit a ritual murder in order to transport the hovering soul of the dead king to the land of the dead. The horseman's reluctance and the eventual tension that ensues become the conflict around which the dramatic activities spin.

Death and the King's Horseman, produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria, has two versions: the English version which was directed by Ben Tomolaju and the Yoruba version which was produced and directed by Jide Ogungbade, both, in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria. This play which saw Toyin Oshinaike as Elesin Oba was enacted as part of Wole Soyinka's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 1995.

The setting for the play, designed by Biodun Abe, was an admixture of traditional and modern environment occupying a space of 42ft x 20ft. (12.72 x 6.06m) of the Cinema Hall 2. The director, Jide Ogungbade, wanted a set that could suggest the poesy and elegance carried by the characters of this play and that could complement the eulogies and traditional historical recitations with which the play is rendered.



Plate IV: Set Design Before Performance in ...Horseman

#### 4.1.1 Set Listing for ...Horseman

##### Pilkings' Office

Flats

Door Panel

Window Sill

Balcony Rails

Wooden Steps

##### Prison Cell

Platforms

Mat Hut: Front and Back mat

Vertical Wooden Support:

Platform Base

Scenic Painting Base: muslin.

#### 4.1.2 Design Concepts in Death and the King's Horseman

The biggest standing set on this stage is the scenic background. The background which is 36ft. x 30ft. (10.9m x 9.0m) is made of muslin onto which a painted landscape of a village scene is rendered in a combination of dye ink and oil paint. The painted scenery pictures a village scene in which three sharply

focused thatch roof houses are seen, with others thrown into perspective obscurity. At the top of the entire scene is a virulent cumulus cloud rendered with the entire scene in both cyan and cerulean blue. The cool somber atmosphere cast by these colours is further dulled by the monochromatic overtone created by the entire palette of colours: Prussian and cobalt blue, combined with slight shade of alizarin crimson and viridian green are slightly dulled by raw umber and ivory black at shadow areas.

The middle areas of the cloud which open up to the stage carry daubs of fluorescent cerulean blue heavily tinted with flakes of white paint. The material used in creating this background is semi-pervious muslin onto which a water based dye ink is applied. The absorbent quality of the medium helps to prevent the projected light on the background from being reflected back to the audience thereby obliterating their views and the painted forms on the vista. The scene, therefore, is effectively projected by light falling on its entire width and breadth. The major ancient structure on the scene is the ancient architecture of the Yorubas. This is reflected in the round huts with thatch roofs and barns that flank the huts. The three major standing sceneries on the stage are, namely, Pilking's apartment, a prison cell, and the small mat compartment used for the ritual act.

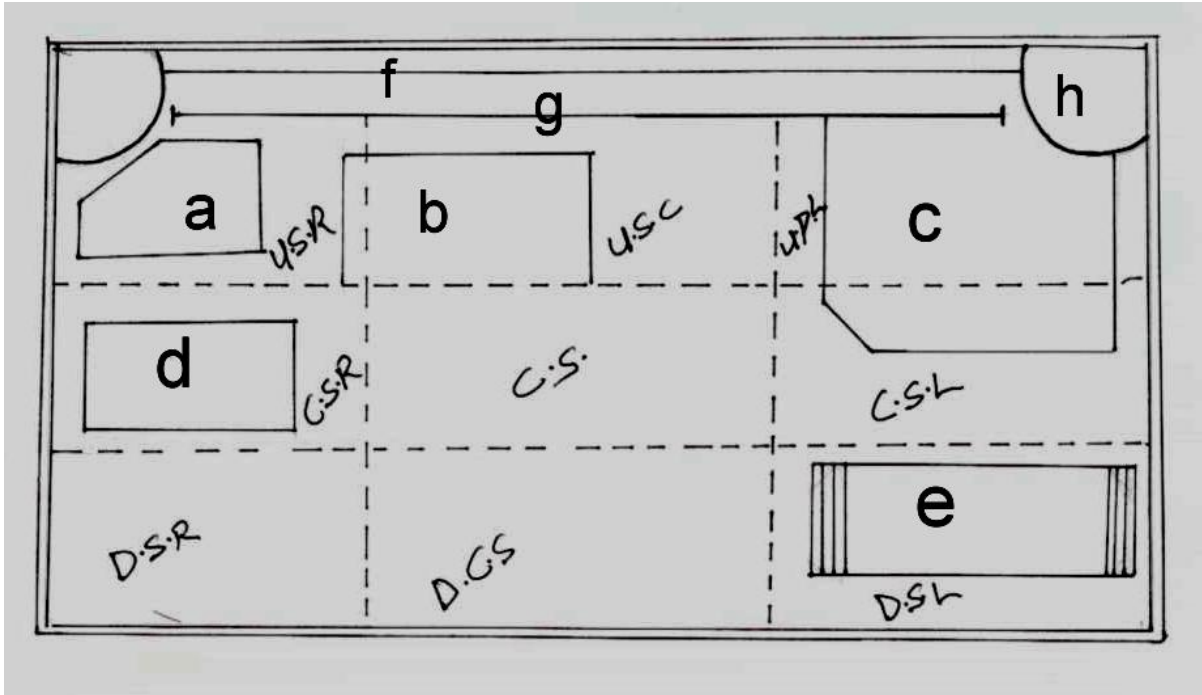


Figure 5: Ground Plan for ...Horseman

Keys to Figure 5

- a. Mat apartment: It is in this apartment that the Horseman is meant to commit suicide.
- b. This is the cell where the Horseman is first kept.
- c. This structure represents Pilking's office. It is the biggest 3-dimensional structure on this set.
- d. This structure is the first independent platform on stage. Platform structures are used here to variegate stage levels.
- e. This is the second independent platform on stage equally used to variegate the stage levels
- f. This represents the back stage area masked away by the upstage curtains or by platforms on stage.
- g. This line represents the backstage curtains that run from one wooden pillar to the other. They are used to mask the back stage area whether there is a production or not.
- h. This marks the position of the wooden pillars with a hollow inside each about 7ft. (2.12m) wide that serves as a changing room.

#### 4.1.3 Set Construction for Death and the King's Horseman

##### Pilking's Office [Description]

This is the biggest standing three-dimensional set on stage in this production. The materials used for its construction are basically wood of the Mahogany and Obeche types and muslin fabric with which the flats are covered. The materials used for joinery are mainly metal nails ranging from 1' to 3' inches. This set which is used by the Pilkings for several scenes, owes much of its beauty to the modern architectural outlook it carries from a balustrade consisting of carefully sawn and joined wood to an independent stair carrying three risers, decorative items like flowers and hedges by which the structure is flanked.



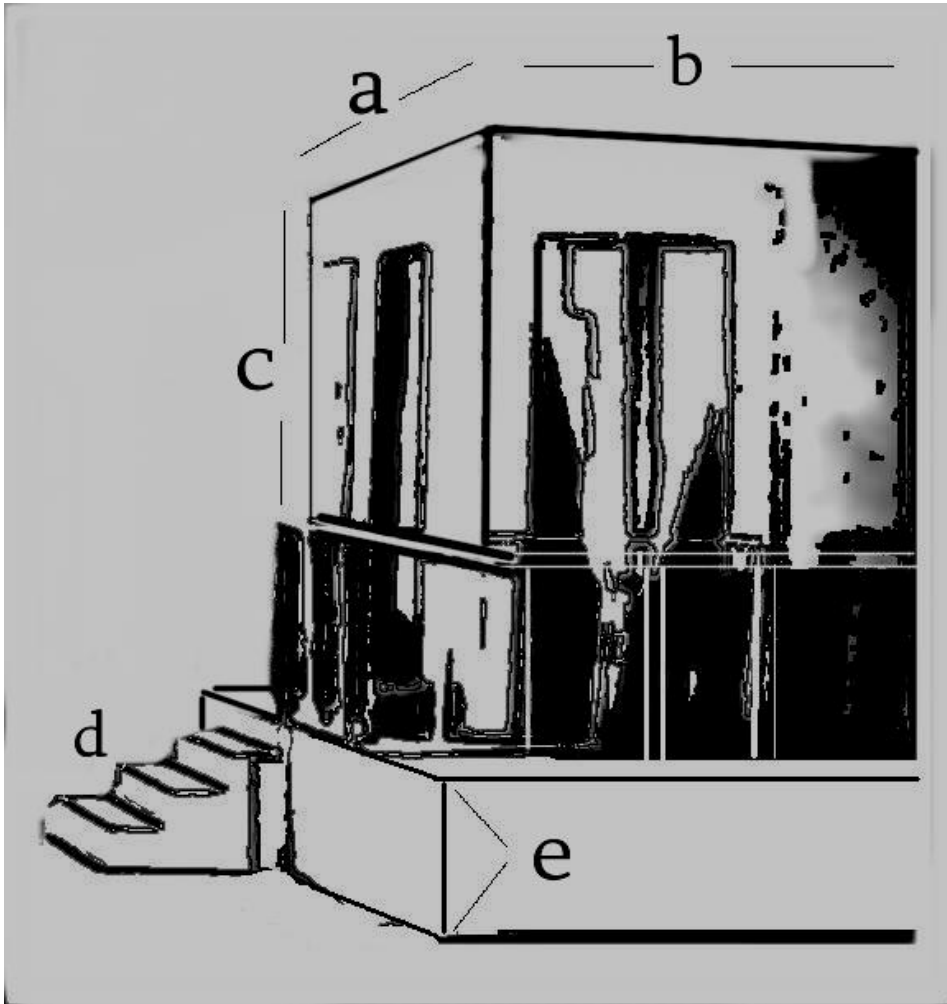


Figure 6: Pilking's Office

Keys to Figure 6

- a. Facade of structure. It measures 8 ft. (2.42m) and faces the audience with a door which serves as an entrance. This door is 7ft. (2.12m) high by 2ft. 8inches wide. (0.84m)
  
- b. The side wing of this set has another door which is used interchangeably for either entrances or exits. All the sides of this set carry railings made of wood which are used for decorative purpose. The railings are made of 2inches by 2 inches (5.08cm x 5.08cm) mahogany wood attached onto themselves through T-joinery and overlapping edges.
  
- c. The sides of the set. It measures 8ft. (2.42m) high and all sides or edges are strengthened by flats made up of vertical 2' x 2' (5.08cm x 5.08cm) lumber acting as styles. Attached to these lumbers on the entire framework of the flats that make up this structure is the fabric coated with paint to take the appearance of its wall making up a. b. and c.
  
- d. This is a detachable and independent stair case leading to and out of the structure. It carries three risers, 8" (0.12m) and treads of 10" (0.15m) with its total height standing at 2ft. (0.60m)

e. The Platform is 2 ft. 6 inches (0.78) high and 11ft. by 11ft (3.33m) square. It is made of 2' x 2' (5.08cm x 5.08cm) lumbers for framework on which strips of 1' x 1' x 11ft. (2.54cm x 0.30 x 3.33m) planks are covered on the top and four sides. This platform creates sturdiness for the box shape set it carries. Attachment to this platform with the box shaped set is by means of 3' inches nails which are driven from the edges of the wooden base of the first box unit to the edges of the top of the second unit. The pilking's office is realistic in its design but lacks the needed precision in construction and required proportion in relationship to the scales of actual architectural measurements and the occupants: human structures.

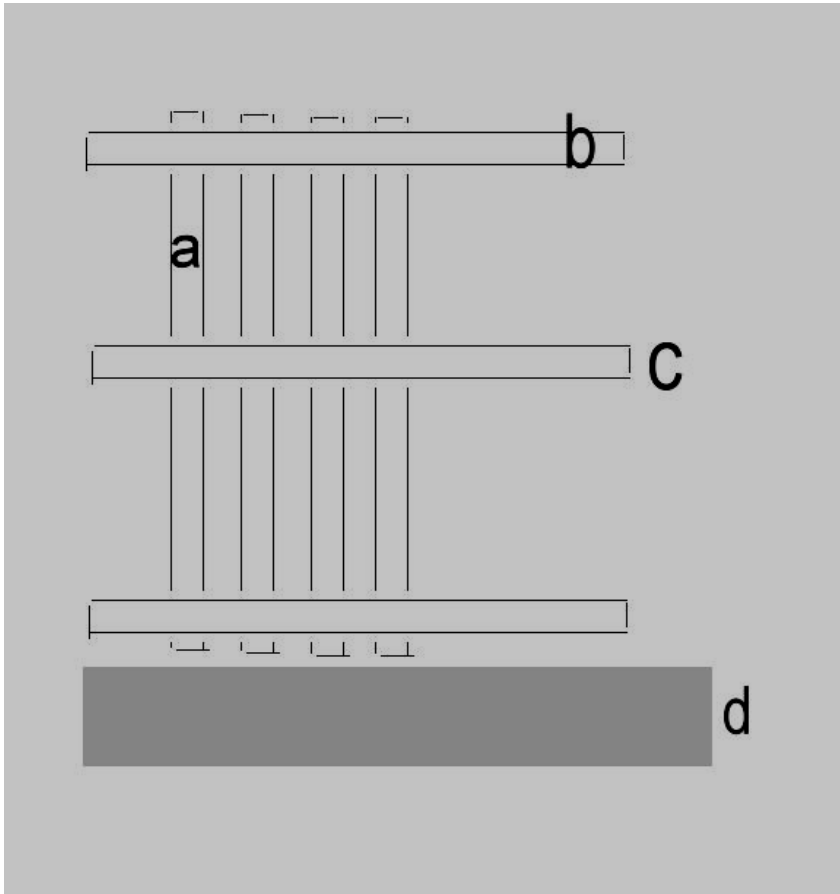


Figure 7: Elevational View of Elesin-Oba's Prison Cell

### The prison cell

The is the second largest set on stage next to the Pilking,s set. It is however the most significant considering its symbolic references to the theme of the play and the character of the Horseman, Elesin-Oba. Its construction concept set is however a far cry from that adopted for the Pilking's office. Symbolic and suggestive in approach, the prison cell looks more like a cage for a primate than like a cell for a man. The see through effect created by the bars of 'iron' is necessary in creating visibility for the Horseman who is meant to be seen and heard while in the cell.

### Keys to Figure 7: (Elesin Oba's Prison Cell)

- a) This represents the vertical wooden bars of 1' x 1' inches (0.30 x 0.30m) wide with a height of 8 ft. (2.42m). 36 in number, they are spaced out at approximately 6 to 9 inches wide. The width it carries, left to right, is 7 ft (2.12m), while the dept is 6 ft (1.81m).
- b) This represents the horizontal wooden bars carrying a slightly bigger size in thickness than the vertical ones. They are three of them creating a wider space interval of about 3 ft. 10 inches (0.93m) wide.
- c) This is the middle horizontal wooden bar. It has the same measurement configuration as the former.
- d) This is the platform for the cell. Made of wood, it is 2 ft. (0.60m) high with a width of 10 ft. (3.03m) by a depth of 6 ft (1.81m).

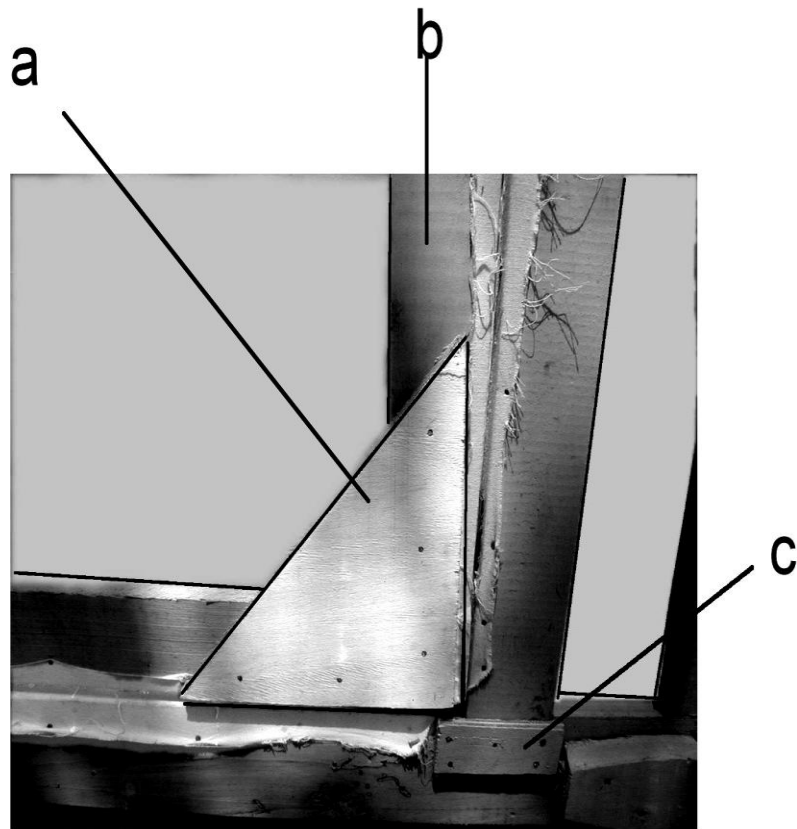


Figure 8: Joinery Methods for Flats (Braces) a. Corner Blocks b. Stiles c. Key stones

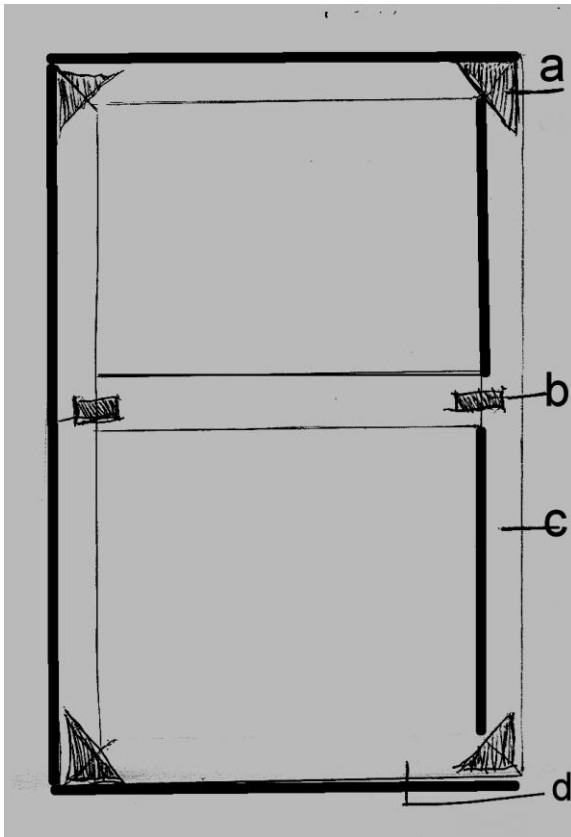


Figure 9: Constructed Unit of a Flat in Horseman Showing Complete Joinery

Keys to Figure 9

- a) Corner Blocks
- b) Keystones
- c) Stiles
- d) Rails

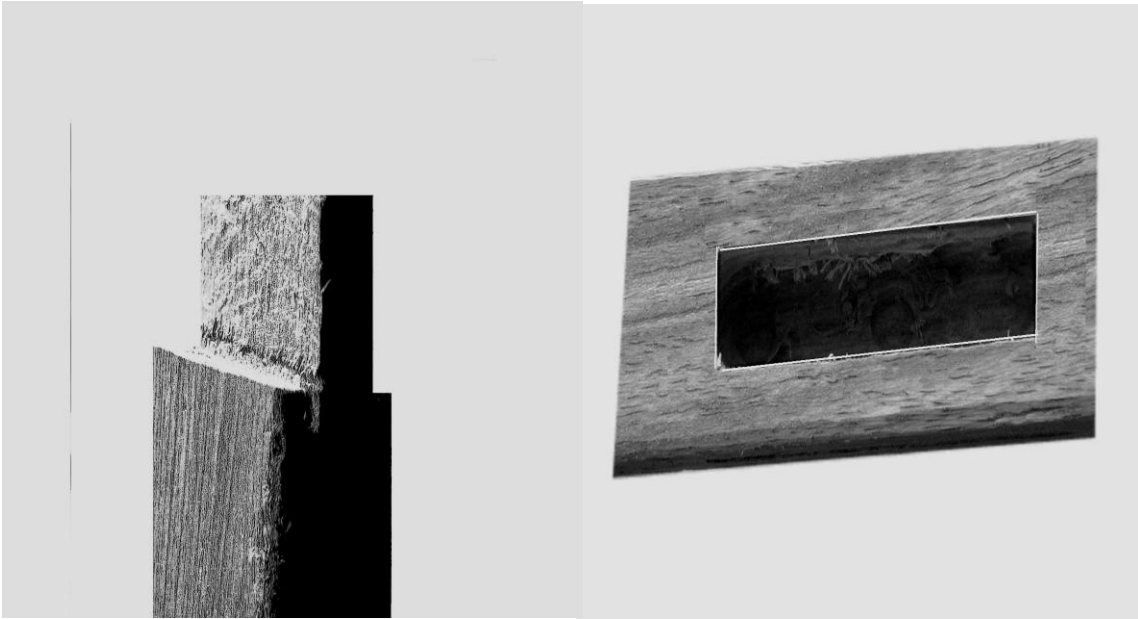


Figure 10: Joinery Methods for Platforms (Tenon and Mortise)



Figure 10 represents the joinery methods adopted for the weight bearing platforms and independent platforms. The thickness of the lumber used is 2 x 3 inches (5.18 x 7.62cm). The thickness of 2 inches is reduced back and front by 6 inches to leave a tenon thickness of 1 inch (2.54cm) long. This is attached to a hollowed width that acts as a socket (mortise) into which the tenon is fitted with white wood, glue and nail. The areas to which this form of joinery is concerned are the four top edges of all the platforms on which strips of 1' x 2' (2.54cm x 5.08cm) planks are attached. Mortise and tenon joints are much stronger than any other form of joinery as the connection made by this joinery makes the two joined edges like a single unit.

#### 4.1.4 Set Rigging in ...Horseman

Rigging for sets in Death and the King's Horseman is simple, depending on platforms alone rather than on devices such as triangular and L - braces. Figure 11 illustrates a large set that puts its weight on a weight bearing platform which itself is weightier and occupies a larger space than the weight it is bearing. Thus, the entire set for ...Horseman depends on the strength and sturdiness of platforms illustrated by figure 11.

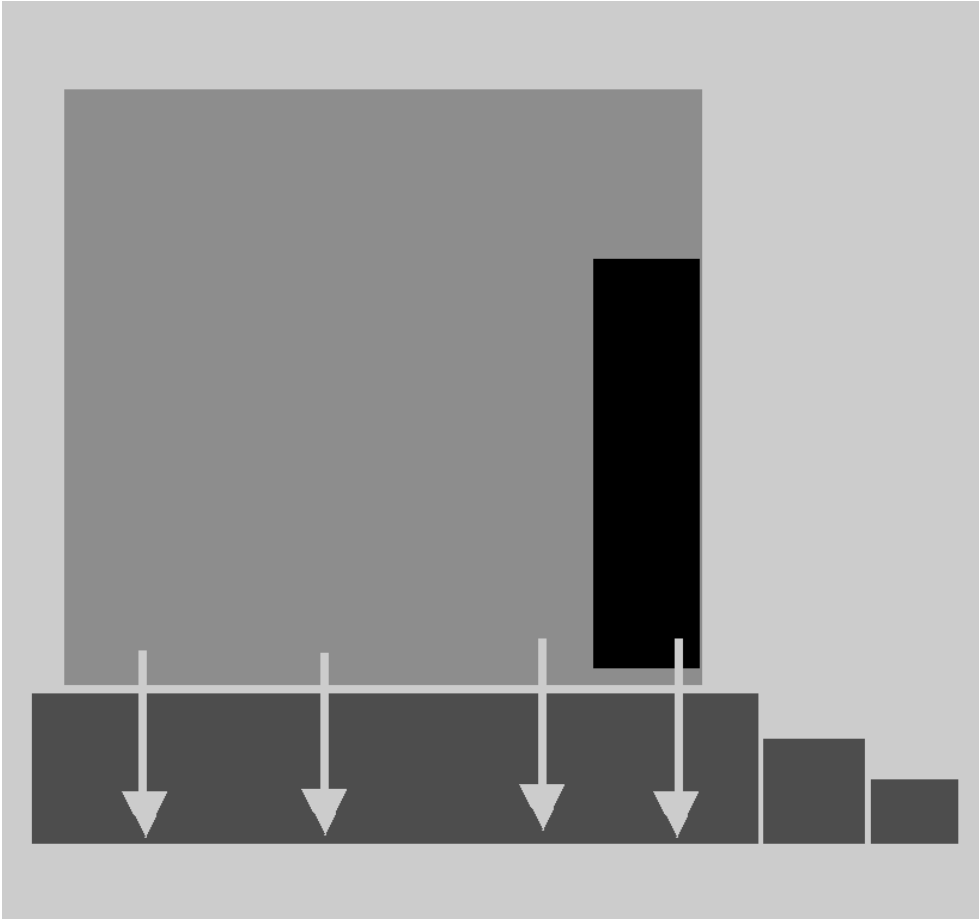


Figure 11: Rigging Methods for Sets (Self Supporting 3-d Objects)

#### 4.1.5 Surface Rendering for Sets

The fabric surfaces of the painted backdrop scene reveal the painting without any form of surface treatment. However the fabric reveals tiny fragments of cracks as a result of folding and movements during transfers and rigging. These cracks are left the way they are to forestall any more paint or resinous application that can further worsen its already reflective surface.

However the wood by which all the free standing structures are made are repainted with white to obliterate the old frayed colours that were there when they were used in other productions. The floor sets seen in the independent platforms are, however, left in the black colour with which they were rendered in previous productions.

#### 4.2 SET DESIGN FOR THE CONCUBINE

The Concubine is a novel written by Elechi Amadi and adapted for the stage by Israel Eboh. The play which was produced by The National Troupe of Nigeria from June 8<sup>th</sup> – June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998, was performed in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre was directed by Martin Adaji. The set for the play was designed by Hilary Elemi. The Concubine is the story of Iheoma, a beautiful woman, ordained by the gods not to be married to by any man. Betrothed to the sea king, any man who marries, or plans to marry her dies a most untimely death. The play presents some of the most tasking challenges of the theatre in terms of directing and scenic exploration. This is on account of the cinematic approach to which the script easily subscribes and with regards to the multiplicity of scenes and locales about which the play revolves. The play which carries Charles Omoregbe as Madueme, Austin Mbanefo as Omonike, Funsho Alabi as Ekwueme and Evelyn Ikuenobe as Iheoma, has as its co-set designers, Happy Ojadonor and Ayo Fashekin.



Plate V: Photo of Set for The Concubine . (Photo by Hilary Elemi)

#### 4.2.1 Set Listing for *The Concubine*

1. 5 large and medium scale platforms
2. Long and short benches
3. Upstage walls
4. Cement house affixed to the walls upstage
5. Mud huts
6. Cassava barn
7. Hedges and flowers
8. Mats

#### 4.2.2 Design Concept for *The Concubine*

The set for *The Concubine* is drastically different from the two others already presented because, as opposed to the concepts in all the others, the space in the Cinema Hall 2 for this play is used completely to effect the design concept of simultaneous staging. In this play, almost the entire stage is used to depict five different scenic locales that project from the upstage area to the central stage area. The dominant atmosphere is that of an African village with traditional architecture and structures. From centre stage left, an attempt is made to depict a naturalistic representation of a hut. Next to the hut is a white wooden platform carrying a step. The rectangular shaped platform is positioned perpendicularly

on the side near the centre stage, and adjacent to the hut. Behind this obvious platform is a smaller one which acts as a connector between the big one and the end of the wall, upstage. What is obvious about the walls are their dwarf nature as from beyond the point of its 10ft height is a view of the white towering wall of the backstage. This façade is the central and most important setting in the production. In its frontispiece, it reveals another set of three grey stools and a long brown bench with a mat spread on the floor of the platform which supports and projects beyond the façade to another level of low platform that creates a step.

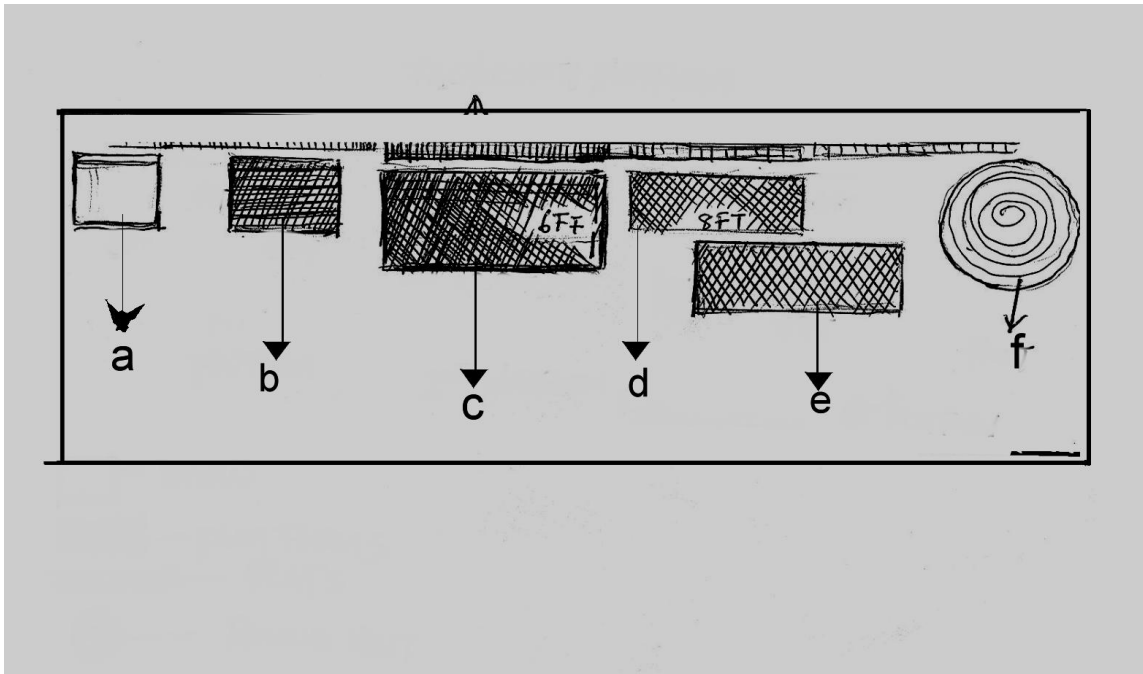


Figure 12: Floor plan for The Concubine

Keys to Figure 12

- a) Barn made of raffia palm and grass
- b) Platform on upstage right
- c) Cement house attached with platforms
- d) Table on platform
- e) Platform
- f) Mud huts



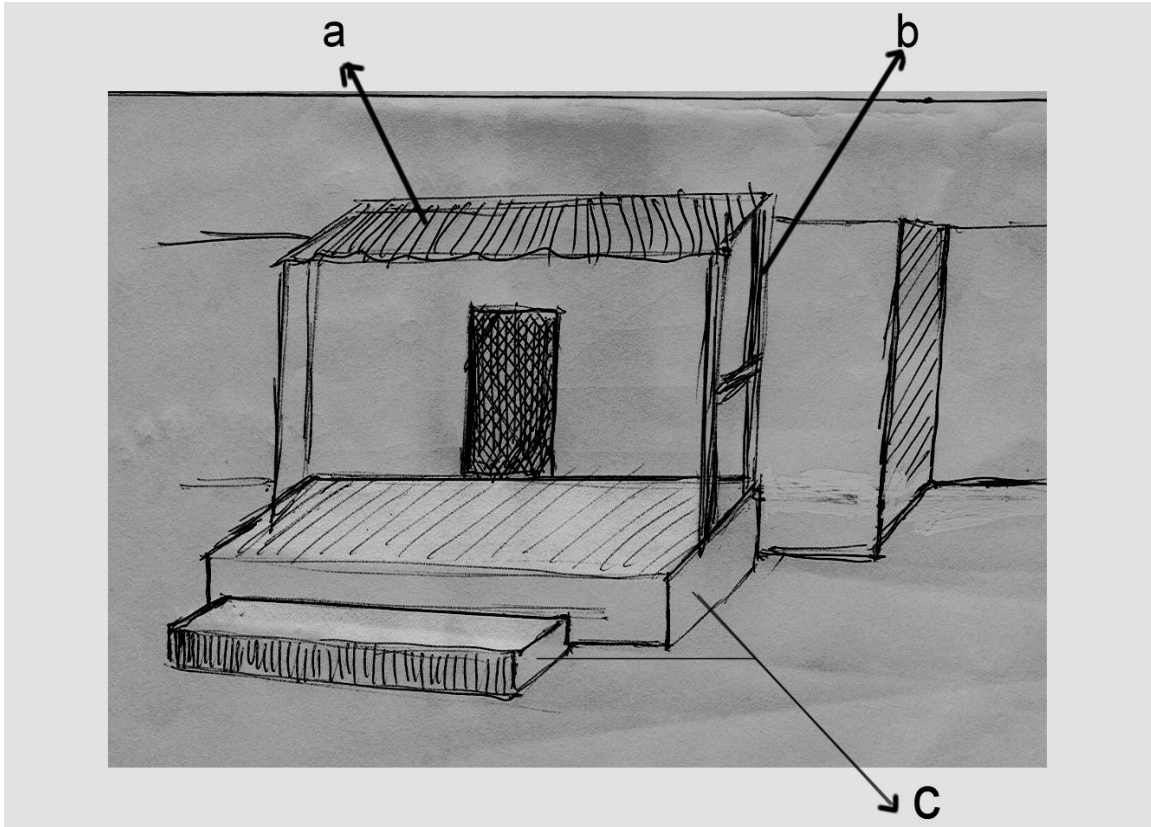


Figure 13: Cement House Façade with Platforms

Keys to Figure 13

- a) Dried palm fronds roof
- b) Wooden frame support for the roof
- c) Platform base carrying the wooden frame support

#### 4.2.3 Set Construction for The Concubine

The flats with which the walls upstage of the entire stage were created consist of the usual elements of a flat: rails, stiles, toggle bars, corner braces and keystones. The covering with which the frame of the flat is made is muslin on which the processes of sizing with glue and priming with paint are done. On the floor however are series of platforms and steps used to variegate the stage floor. Overleaf is a basic structure of the frame used in the construction of the flats.

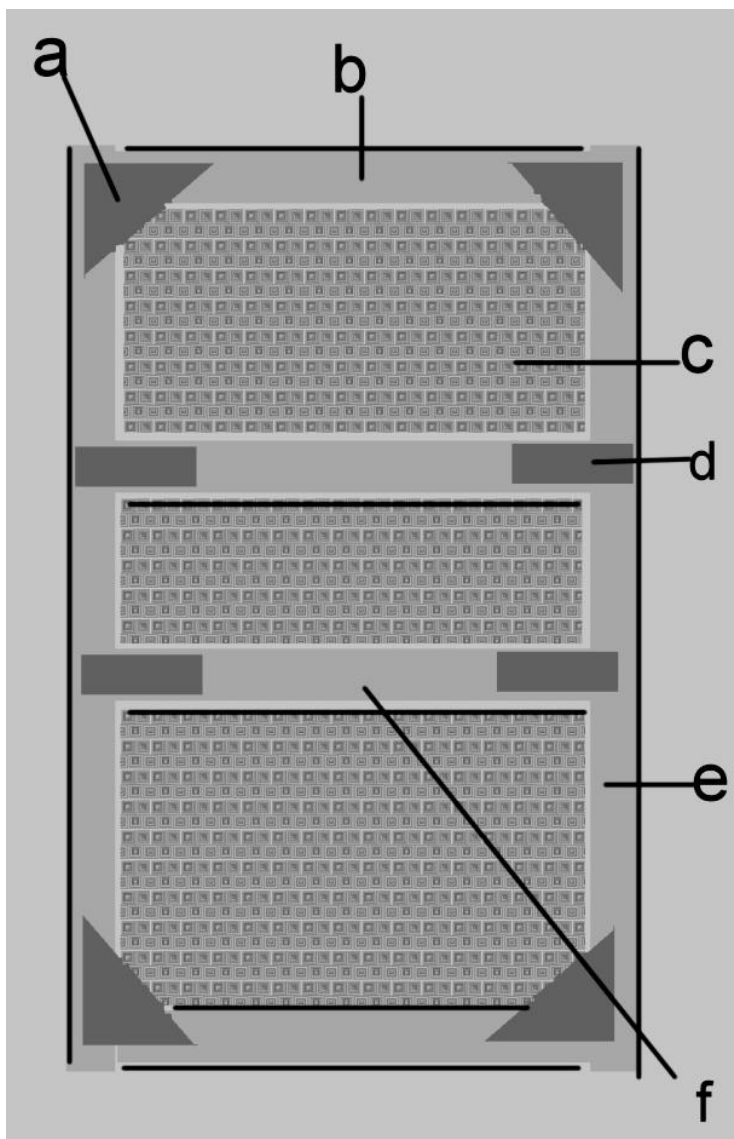


Figure 14: Structure of Flats Used in The Concubine

Keys to Figure 14

- a) Corner brace which is used to hold the stiles and the rails together.
- b) Rails are made up of 1' x 3' (2.54cm x 7.62cm) planks and are between 4ft to 5 ft. (1.21m x 1.51m) high.
- c) The covering with which the frame of the flat is made is muslin on which the processes of sizing and priming are done.
- d) Keystones are used to strengthen the joints between stiles and toggle bars.
- e) Stiles are equally made of 1' x 3' (2.54cm x 7.62cm) planks and are 10 ft. (3.03m) high
- f) Considering the height of the stiles which are 3.03m high, double toggle bars are used to create more firmness. They are equally 1' x 3' (2.54cm x 7.62cm) in sizes and are connected to the stiles by means of overlap made possible through the sawing of 6 inches (15.24cm) off the sides of both overlapping edges.

#### 4.2.4 Joinery for Sets

Different sizes of nails are used for joinery. This is in addition to the devices found in a flat, namely, corner braces, keystones, and toggle bars for vertical flats. The edges of the sawn frames used for making the flats are cut exactly to  $90^{\circ}$  for both styles and rails and joined together with 2 inches nails.

For three-dimensional structures, platforms and staircases, mortise and tenon joints are used for platform edges while long and short benches are held together by bracing. Middle part of long benches are made firm by double horizontal braces.

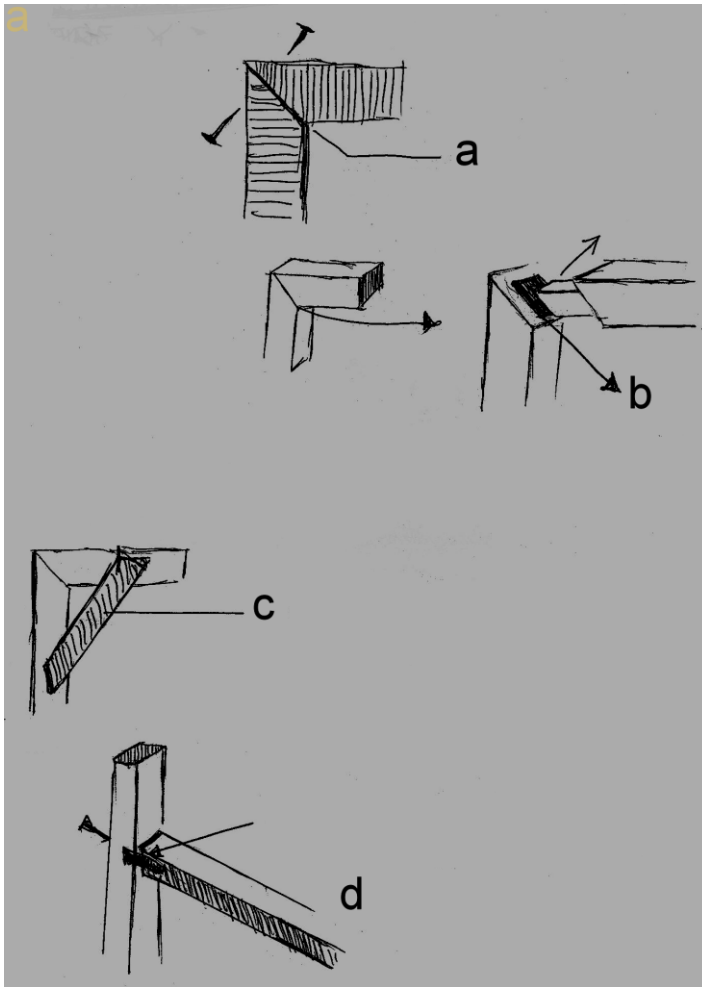


Figure 15: Joinery Methods in The Concubine.

Keys to Figure 15

- a) 90<sup>0</sup> edges for both styles and rails
- b) Mortise and tenon joints
- c) Braces
- d) Double horizontal braces.

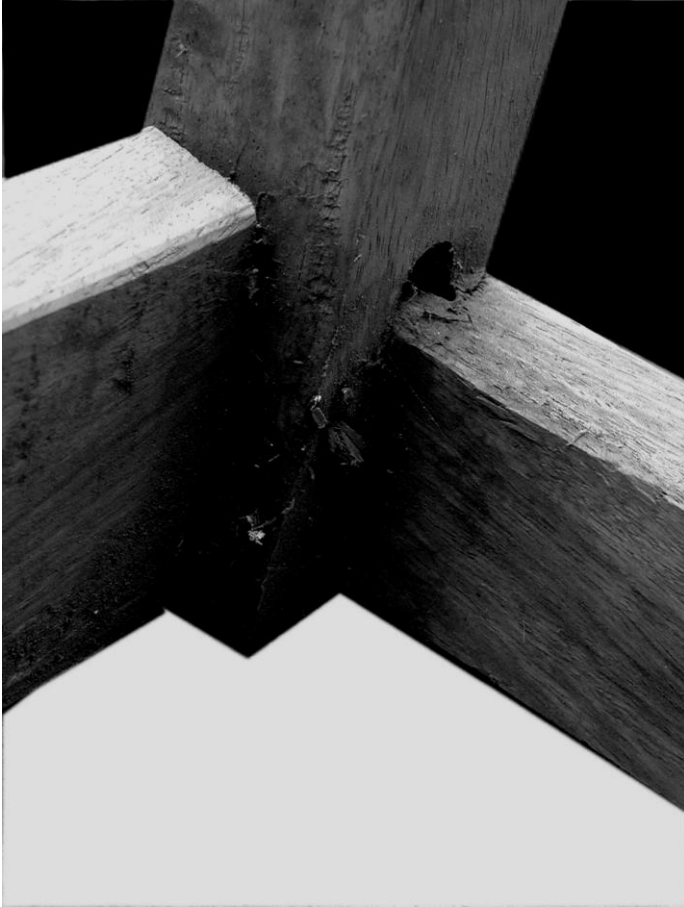


Figure 16: Joinery for Platforms

#### 4.2.5 Set Rigging in The Concubine

Rigging is heavily dependent upon attaching flats to the flat edges of independent platforms. In the set for this play most of the platforms are kept very close to the wall set upstage so as to make the flats by which the walls are made to gain strength and firmness in their upright positions. The platforms are usually heavy and occupy a wide area of the floor to allow it gain permanence even when it has to give support to the flats. The platforms are built with 1' x 3' (2.54cm x 7.62cm) planks to which hinges are attached. They are used to prop areas of the flat that cannot be supported by means of platforms.



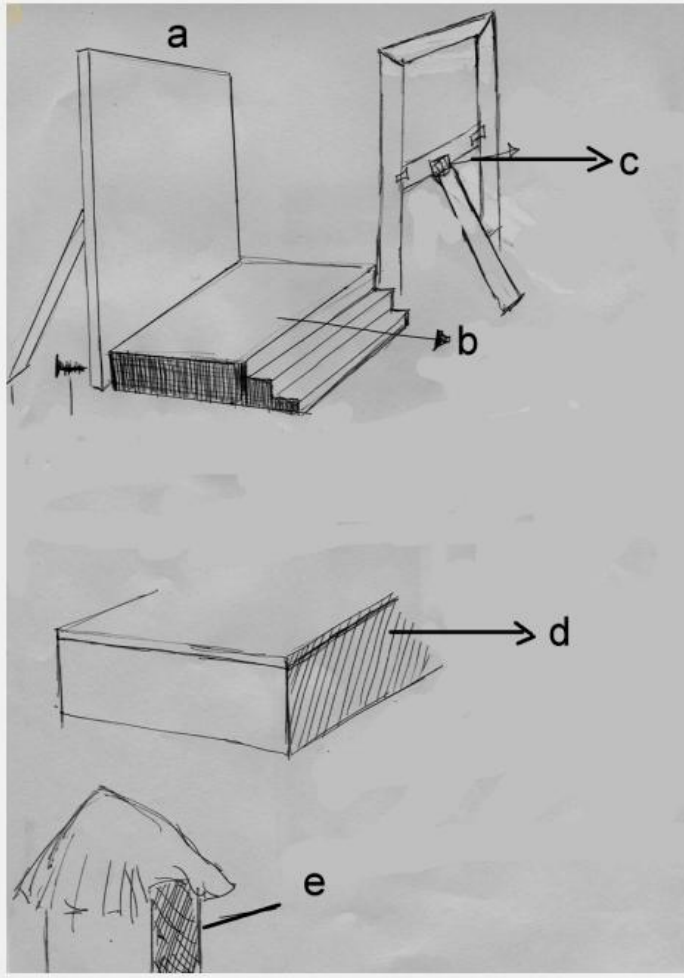


Figure 17: Forms of Set Rigging in The Concubine

Keys to Figure 17

- a) Flats to the edges of independent platforms.
- b) Heavy and bogus platforms.
- c) 1'x 3' (2.54cm x 7.62cm) planks to which hinges are attached.
- d) Free sitting and independent platforms.
- e) Free standing mud huts.

#### 4.2.6 Surface Rendering

The sets which are made up of both flats and platforms had been coated with grey paint from previous productions. To be re-used they were further coated with water based emulsion paint. For effective coverage, the choice of using good quality water based paint was opted for as this made it possible to apply only two layers before coverage was achieved. The major colour used was burnt umber, (a dark muddy brown) significant of the traditional locale in which the play was enacted. This is slightly contrasted with the grayish pink coloured wall which is in fact an addition of Cadmium red onto burnt umber, and adding a little tint of white.

Dutchmanning: In this set, the technique of ‘dutchmanning’ was introduced to conceal points of joinery. Thus, edges created by adjoining sections of flats are properly smoothed out by the use of putty, jute bags and clayey sand. While putty and clay are applied in thick layers with spatula, and smoothed out with the fingers, the jute bags are glued onto both edges of the joints with adhesive rubber glue and painted. There are no designs on these walls that require stenciling, ragging, or stippling as they are meant to be plane.

#### 4.3. SET DESIGN FOR TRIALS OF OBA OVONRAMWEN

The Trials of Oba Ovonranwen, written by Ahmed Yerima, was produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria and directed by Bayo Oduneye to commemorate the centenary of the British invasion of the Benin kingdom (1896-1996) in the year 2000. The play which saw the likes of Albert Egbe, Olu Jacobs and Ahmed Yerima as leading characters had its set designed by Sunbo Marinho.

Its setting is the palace where the Oba meets his chiefs. The setting of Trials... succinctly defines the socio-political culture of the Binis by the sitting arrangement that suggest the stability that was prevalent before the advent of the white man. Platforms are used to break the monotony of the flat floor to create rhythm and to step up the heights of those in higher authority. The rhythmic movements brought about by the deft positioning of these platforms reinforce the prevailing social and cosmic order. The elephant tusk symbolizes the presence of strength, stability and solidarity. Form, line and contrast are used to achieve a certain degree of balance in design while levels are explored to create emphasis. Levels are equally used to demarcate the British yacht which is symbolized by the floating British flag (Union Jack). General Moore's office and the palace of the Oba are played on varied stage levels.



Plate VI: Set Design during Performance in Trials... Photo by Hilary Elemi

#### 4.3.1 Set Listing for Trials

1. Towering upstage flats
2. Ascending series of platforms
3. Royal bench
4. Chief's wooden benches
5. British Yacht
6. British Union Jack
7. Knitted cane chair

#### 4.3.2 Design Concepts for Trials of Oba Ovonramwen

In this set, the set designer, Sumbo Marinho has employed an eclectic concept which sees realism interweaving with motley of forms resembling those used in constructivist setting. However considering the large number of cast list and the limited availability of financial resources for set, he devised a method where space can be traversed without the obstruction of set forms, a realism that is restricted with a wide set of upstage flats that can permanently remain as background to all the actions. This conspicuous scenic background is a brick red painted flat (wall) towering 16ft. (4.84m) high by the unit width of 4ft. (1.21m) wide. This wall which occupies the entire width of the upstage area carries six arched doorways for both entrances and exits. The wall is made up of

adjoining units of flats forming the major 3-d vertical set used as the scenic background for the play. Midway between the left and right sides of the entire flats is a recessed plane of not more than 2ft. (0.60m) deep, creating what appears like two pillars on both sides. It is in between these pillar-like structures, carrying two arched doorways that the throne of the Oba is mounted.

On the entire vertical flats, a striking and noteworthy effect is created by the artistic and symmetric interplay of arched patterns seen on the flat and on the white costumes worn by the chiefs. This is achieved by creating, behind the standing vertical flats, long hanging horizontal unit of flats that cut across the arched parts of all the six doorways in a predetermined style. In this combination, an inverted white semi-circular shape hanging mid-way over the stage is projected. The striking symmetry this creates with the white skirted costumes worn by the entire chiefs is further heightened by the strong contrast the white costumes make with the mud red background. From the construction and the look of this background a strong overpowering feeling of monumentality and strength is conveyed not only by the towering height of the walls but equally by the recessive lines created by angles simulated to feel like pillars. The overbearing presence and monotony created by this background unit is drastically reduced by the use of a large set of 'stone-hill' platforms carrying levels but yet made of wood. The entire units of platform are

positioned midway between the left and right side of the wall unit. On the whole, there are three units of platform each lying on the surface of the other. This composite unit is seen in the middle of the stage elevating the throne thereby raising the Oba up and higher than any personality on stage.

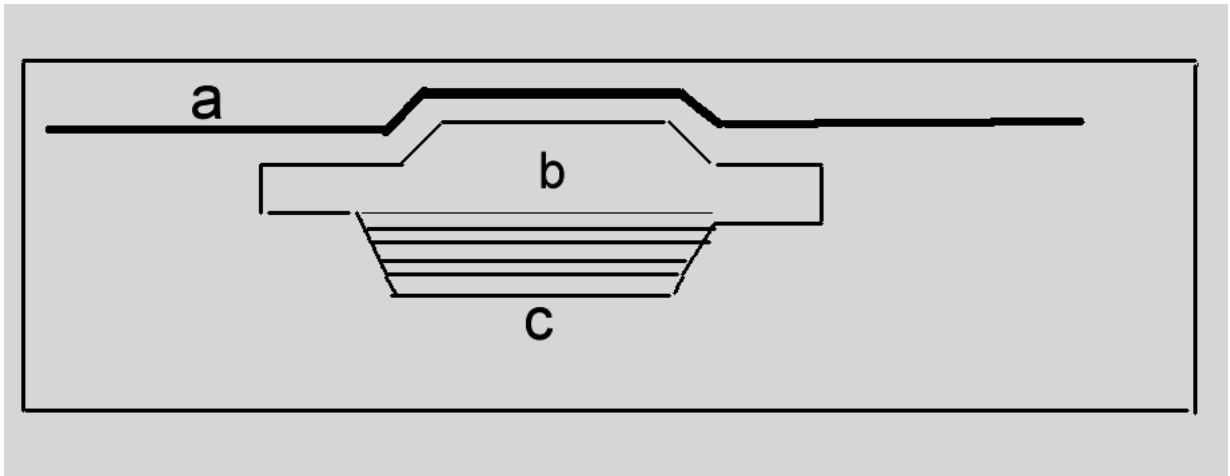


Figure 18: Floor Plan of Set in Trials...

Keys to Figure 18

- a) Upstage flats used as walls and as background to the Oba's palace.
- b) Top of platform used as the Oba's throne
- c) Stair formation by series of platforms put together



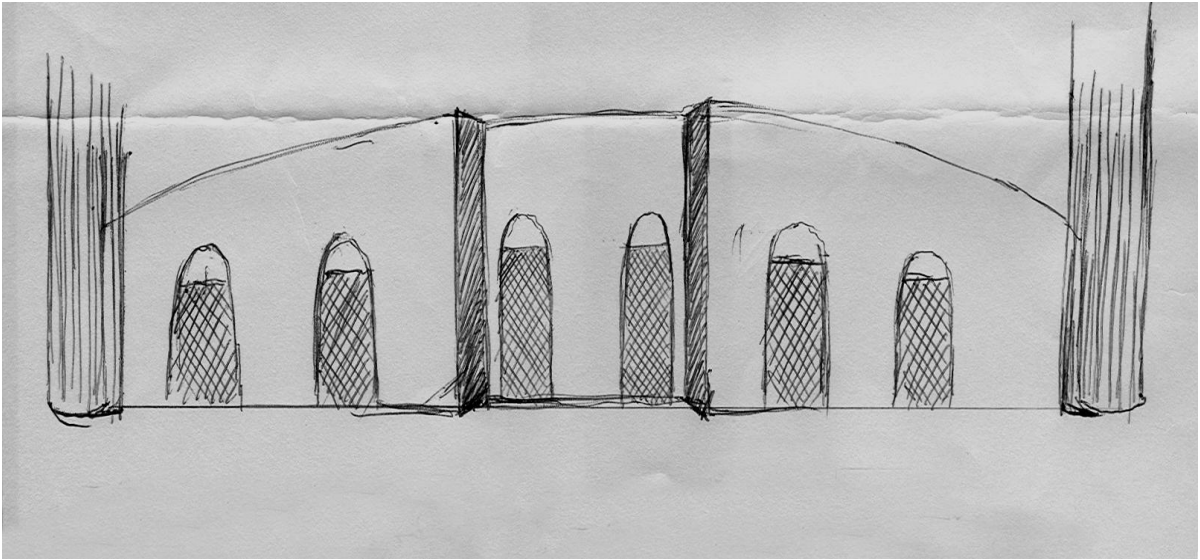


Figure 19: Elevation Drawing of Upstage Flats in Trials...

#### 4.3.3 Set Construction for Trials of Oba Ovonramwen

The majority of sets in this production were created with wood. Platforms which constitute a large number of these sets are created with white obeche wood. In the large mass of platform unit used as the base on which the Oba's throne sits, units of smaller platforms are arranged together to create this mass. Except for the stair cases, the height of each unit of platform is 1 ft. (0.60m), 4 ft. (1.21m) deep and 8 ft. (2.42m) wide.

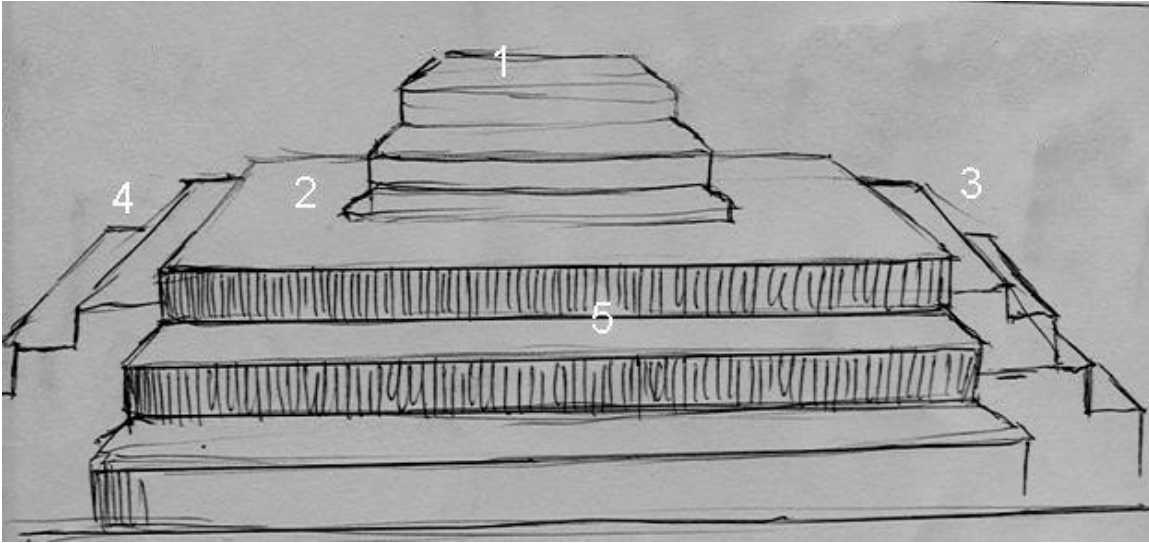


Figure 20: Perspective Projection of Composite Platforms

Keys to Figure 20

- 1) Top platform containing 3 risers and 3 treads
- 2) Second platform is three 1 ft platforms joined to achieve a height of 3 ft.
- 3) Left stair case is attached to 2) to enable easy ascension by chiefs and messengers of the palace.
- 4) Right stair case does the same function as 3)
- 5) Front stair case is widest than those in left and right and is used by more important chiefs and by the Oba himself.

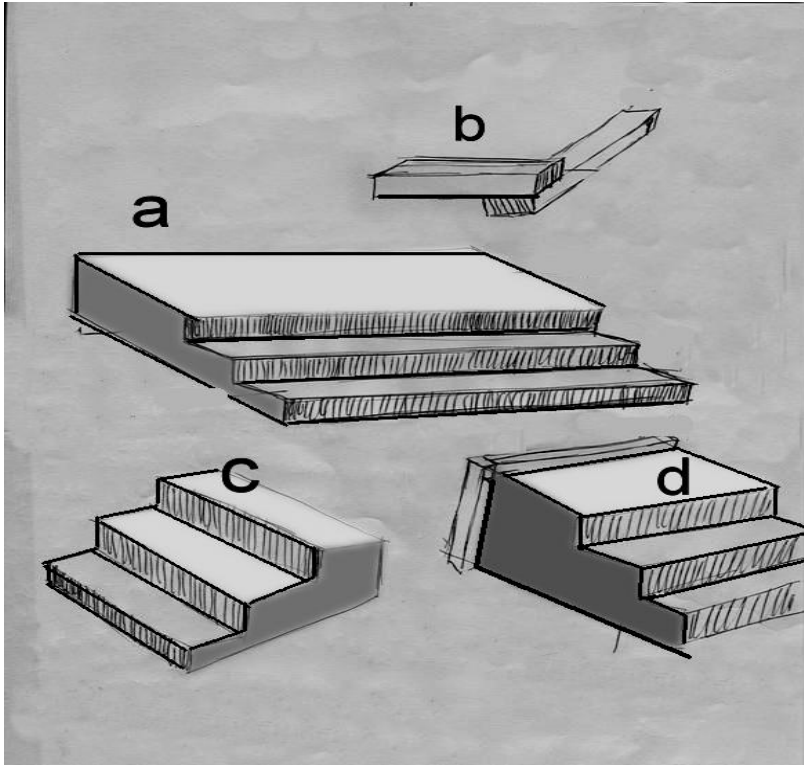


Figure 21: Platforms and Stair Cases

- a) This is the central platform on which a smaller one is yet mounted
- b) This illustrates the overlap type of joinery used.
- c) Left side stair case
- d) Right side stair case

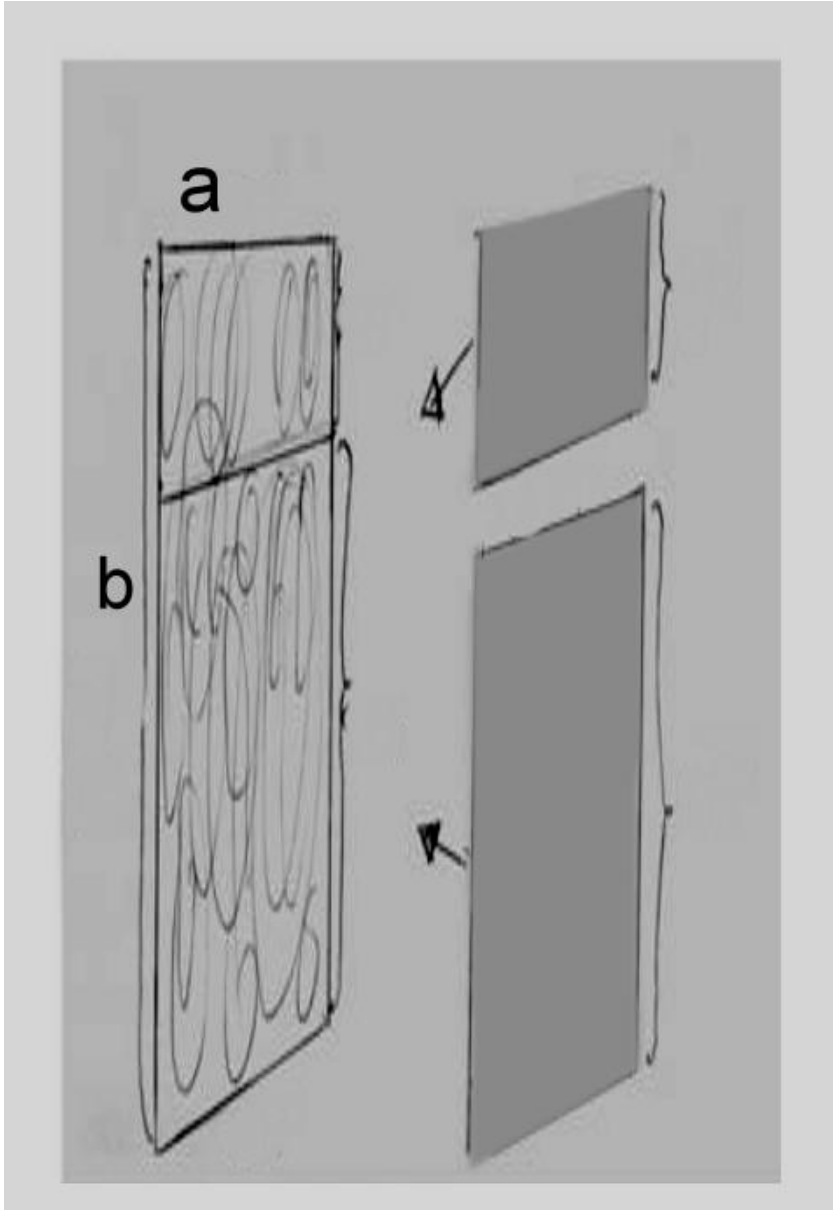


Figure 22: Components of Flats Used in Set for Trials...

Keys to Figure 16

Figure 16: a) and b) are additional joinery made for the flats used as walls for the Oba's palace. The first unit, a. 4 ft. (1.21m) is joined to the second, b. 8 ft. (2.42m), to achieve a towering height of 12 ft (3.63m). The material by which the walls or plains are created is 'baft' fabric on which thick layers of paint are applied.

#### 4.3.4 Set Rigging in Trials...

Set rigging in this production is achieved by the means of three methods: Figure 23 overleaf illustrates the triangular brace method. Planks 1'x 2' (2.54cm x 5.08cm) are cut to about 6 ft. (1.81m) on all triangular sides and propped against the toggle bars of the flats. To ensure that the triangular braces are firm, they are nailed to the floor of the stage with 2 to 3 inches nails.

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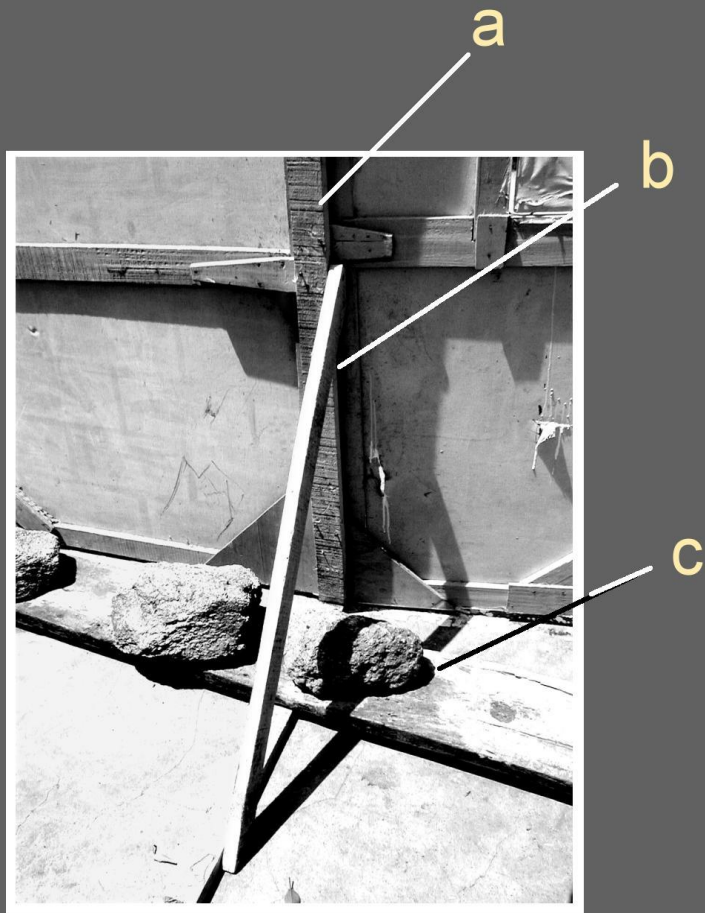


Figure 23: Set Rigging in Trials



#### 4.3.5 Surface Rendering for Flats

The major sets rigged for this play are the vertical upstage wall units which are sized slightly with a desired quantity of white glue. Application of the glue is, however, irregular thus giving the application of the water based emulsion paint on it a rather irregular spreading. While the use of 4 inches (10.16cm) bristle brushes was necessary for the sizing process, a wider 6" (15.24cm) roll brush was necessary for the application of pigment. Sizing which is necessary in sealing the wood pores and aiding sand papering is not heavy on the plywood used for covering the framing members of the flats. This therefore necessitated an initial covering with white emulsion paint. A different layer of coating was later introduced by the combination of raw sienna and Vandyke brown. The application of this colour which stands as the final colour of the set creates a light translucent quality as the base colour of white is still slightly visible. Because no Dutchmanning process was applied on joined vertical edges of the flats in this set, the points of joinery are still seen.

For the platforms, however, considering the need for resistance to corrosion from feet, sizing is avoided. Rather, heavy coatings of domestic home oil paint are applied in four layers. The avoidance of water-based emulsion paint is equally used to prevent swelling or bubbling.

#### 4.4. SET DESIGN FOR ATTAHIRU

Attahiru was written by Ahmed Yerima and directed by Bayo Oduneye. The play is a historical replay of the last British expedition in Nigeria in which the hero, Attahiru, the 12<sup>th</sup> Sultan of Sokoto led a counter expedition against the British forces of Lord Lugard in 1903. The play is a call to arm by the Caliph, Attahiru 1 against the infidels' determination to rule over the Caliphate. The play was produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria in the year 2000 in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria. It had the author of the play, Ahmed Yerima as Caliph Attahiru, Francis Onwuche as Mai Wurno and Funsho Alabi as Waziri. The set for Attahiru was designed by Hilary Elemi.



Plate VII: Set for Attahiru

#### 4.4.1 Set Listing

1. Upstage vertical flats
2. large sets of platforms
3. Leather puffs
4. Settees
5. Floor rugs
6. Floor mats
7. British Union Jack and a photograph of the Queen
8. Set of chairs and table

#### 4.4.2 Design Concept for Attahiru

In direct contraposition to the vertical scenery, the platforms and steps constitute the horizontal floor sets, which beyond simply just being sets for sitting and defining movement patterns, helped to break the monotony in the verticality of the semi-circular flats. Access stairways have been provided both downstage left and right for easy entrance and exits of performers. This is done so as to allow characters to leave the stage unobtrusively without re-entering the acting area.

In the set for Attahiru, there are six platforms, each carrying at least two side-steps. While the platforms and steps have helped to both break the

monotony of the vertical flats and define actors' movements, they are equally there to create simultaneous acting areas. Each level or platform becomes an acting area with steps on both sides leading off or onto this acting area. This arrangement which conjures up a constructivist atmosphere has created horizontal and vertical linear formations on the floor that has helped to create a sense of rhythm.

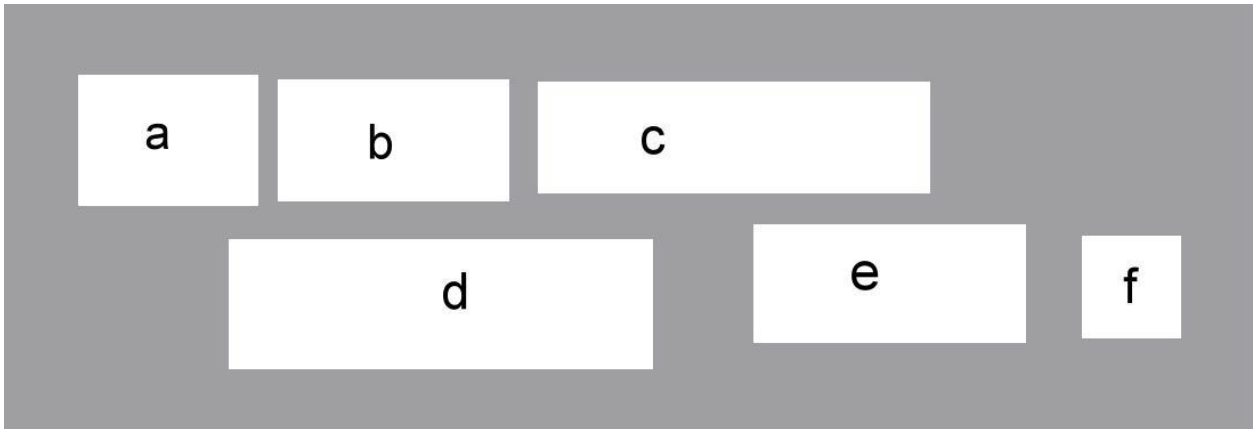


Figure 24. Floor Plan Showing 3-D Platforms and Steps

### Keys to Figure 24

Figure 24 shows the vertical upstage flats. On the whole, these flats which measures 36ft (10.90) wide, were used to create 11 planes from stage left to stage right. The platform unit is two joined 4' x 8' (1.21m x 2.42m) platforms each. This which is positioned upstage right constitutes a set of platform on its own for some of Attahiru's chiefs: b) is platform used for Attahiru's palace; c) is another set of two 4' x 8' (1.21m x 2.42m) platforms upstage left, joined to create symmetry with the ones upstage right. It is attached with a unit of stair case which is used for exit or entrance purpose; d) is a large platform set with a stair case (down stage to centre stage) used to variegate floor levels while e) and f) are equally used to variegate floor levels (down stage to centre stage right) and are equally attached with stair cases for exit and entrances.

#### 4.4.3 Set Construction for Attahiru

Of all the sets presented for study, this production carries the highest amount of built flat which are used here to both populate the stage space, mask the back stage area and as entrances and exits for the performers. The flats which are constructed to simulate the feeling of a wide stretch of wall equally double as part of the interior of Attahiru's palace. Stage left to stage right, the entire plane of flats is 36ft (10.90m) wide and positioned upstage. It however projects into the centre stage from its position upstage with no more than 12 ft. (3.63m) on its wings. Twenty five units of flats are used to create 11 major planes stage left to stage right. Methods used in creating these flats are basically the same used in Trials of Oba Ovonramwen and Death and the King's Horseman. Flats used for the sets in these productions are re-adapted for use in this production. However, they have been heavily recoated with white emulsion paint on which the Arewa symbols are made.



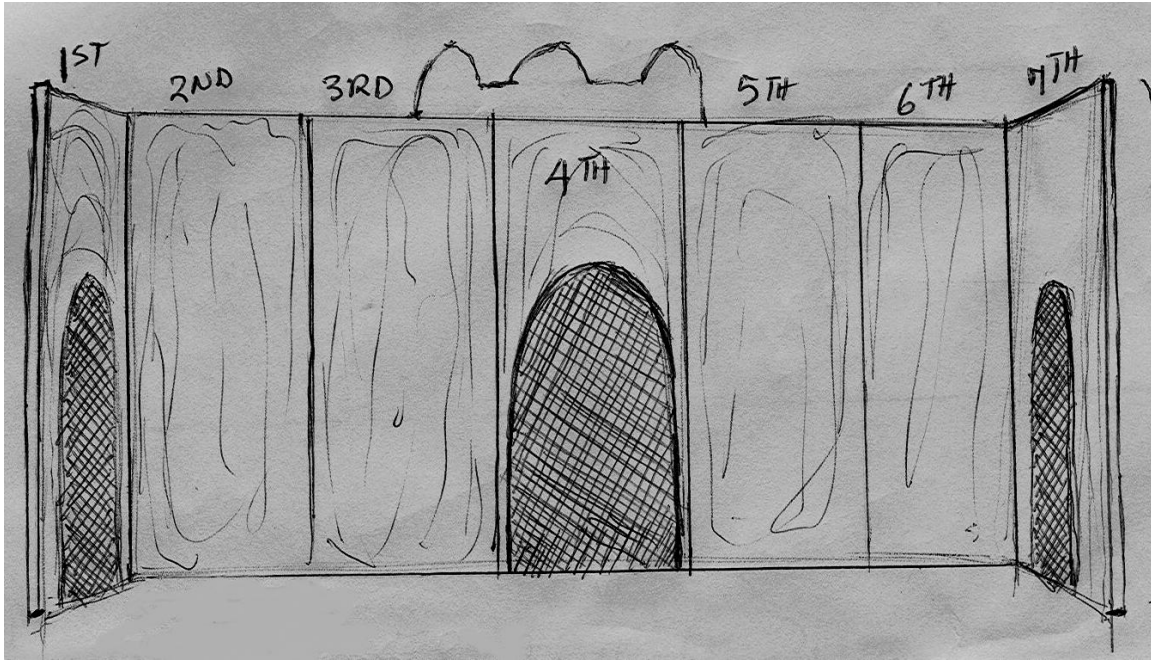


Figure 25: Flats as Walls in Attahiru. This illustration represents only the middle section of the entire upstage flats used. While all the doors in the stage left extreme and stage right extreme parts of the row of flats are hardly used, the three most important arch doors used for entrances and exits are those created from the first, fourth, and seventh flats.

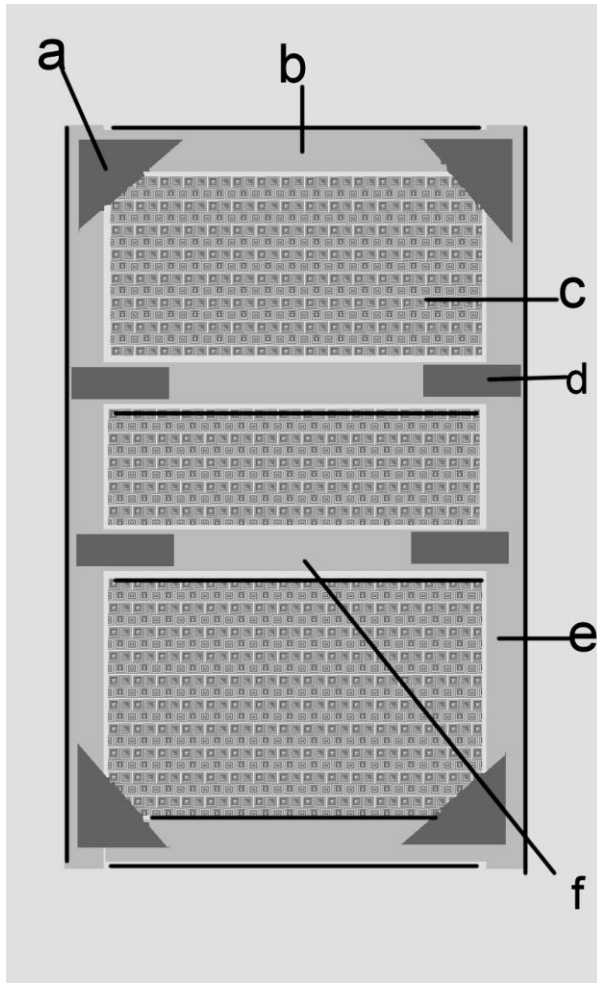


Figure 26: Parts of Flat

### Keys to Figure 26

a) Corner blocks are made of  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1.27cm) plywood; b) Rails are made from 1' x 3' planks (2.54cm x 7.62cm); c) Plane used in covering wooden frame is made of fabric, (muslin); d) Keystones are 2' x 4' inches (5.08cm x 10.16cm); e) Stiles are 1' x 3, (2.54cm x 7.62cm); e) Toggle bars are two pieces made of 1' x 3' planks (2.54cm x 7.62cm)

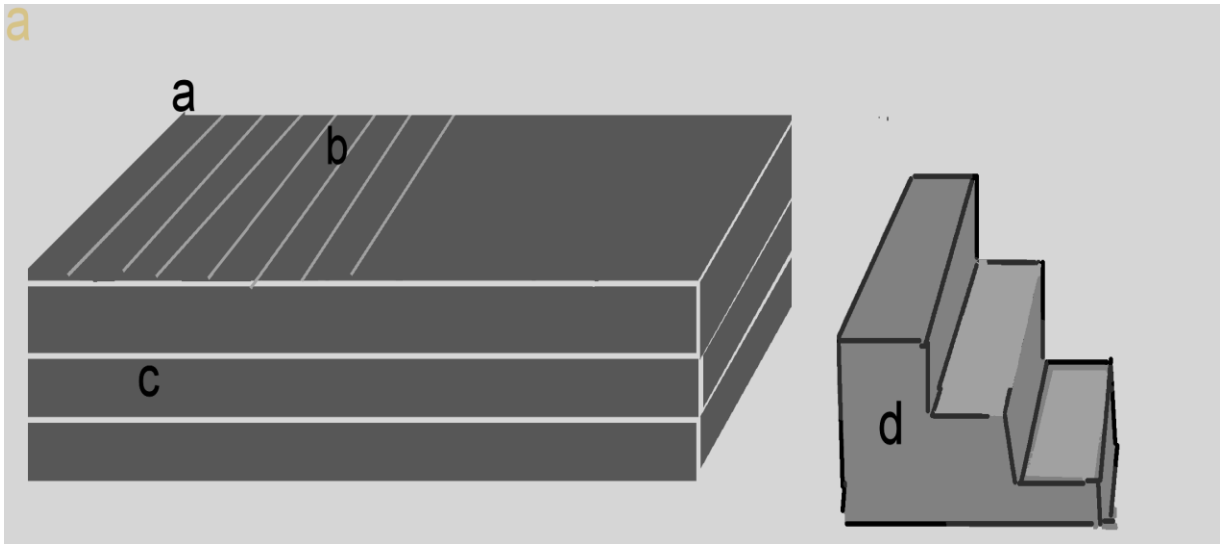


Figure 27: Multiple Platforms and Stair Cases

#### Keys to Figure 27

- a) Strips of planks are in 1' x 4' (2.54cm x 10.16cm) to collectively make up the 4 x 8 platform.
- b) Top platform
- c) Second layer of platform
- d) Independent Stair case. These staircases are attached to the sides or fronts of the major platforms to create a composite unit.

In direct contraposition to the vertical scenery, the platforms and steps constitute the horizontal floor sets, which beyond simply just being sets for sitting and defining movement patterns helped to break the monotony in the verticality of the semi-circular flats. Access stairways have been provided both downstage left and right for easy entrance and exits of performers.

In the set for Attahiru, there are six platforms, each carrying at least two side-steps. While the platforms and steps have helped to both break the monotony of the vertical flats and define actors' movements, they are equally there to create simultaneous acting areas. Each level or platform becomes an acting area with steps on both sides leading off or onto this acting area. This arrangement which conjures up a constructivist atmosphere has created horizontal and vertical linear formations on the floor that has helped to create a sense of rhythm.

#### 4.4.4 Joinery for Set in Attahiru

In this set as in the former nails of different sizes are the principle joining agent. As the major scenery media is wood, edge-to-edge and tenon joinery on white obeche wood are the two basic methods initiated to support the use of nails. These are used in both flats and platforms. However, the joinery methods used here are basically the same used in Trials... and ...Horseman.

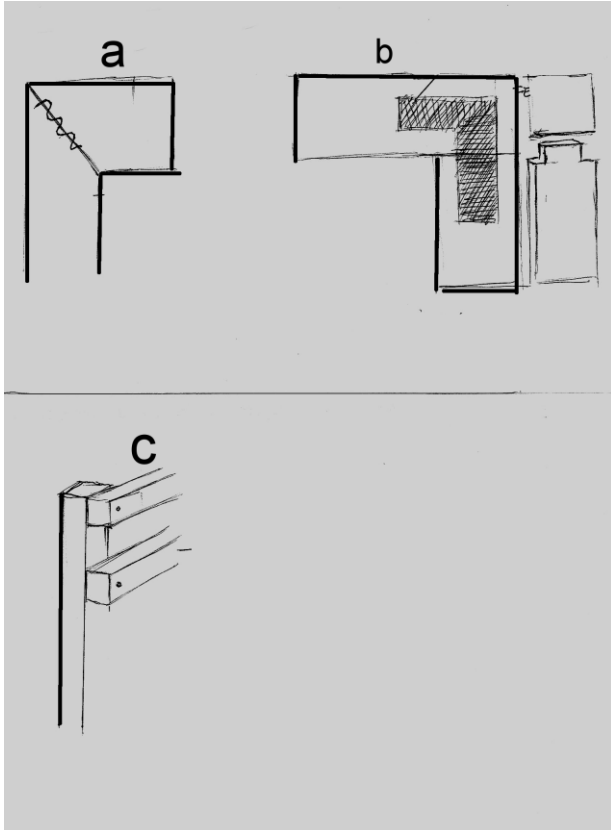


Figure 28: Joinery Methods

Keys to Figure 28

- a) 90° edge joinery
- b) L-brace
- c) Overlap

#### 4.4.5 Set Rigging in Attahiru

As in ...Horseman and The Concubine, two forms of set rigging methods are adopted here to keep both vertical and horizontal scenery in place. Attaching the bottom parts of vertical flats to the flat edges of heavy and bogus platform by nailing is the first method. By this method, the flats are held firmly in place from the back positions of the platforms as is illustrated in figure 29. The other method is a self supporting one: the platforms which are heavy and covering large spaces are positioned on their own on the floor where they assume strength and balance.

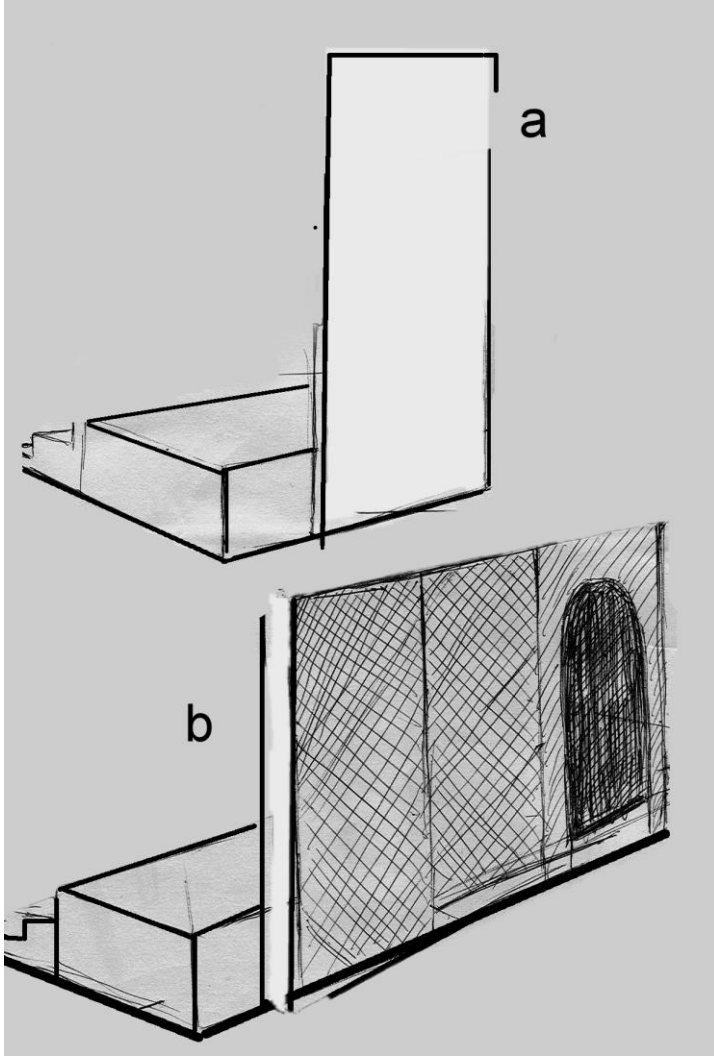


Figure 29: Platforms Edge Supports

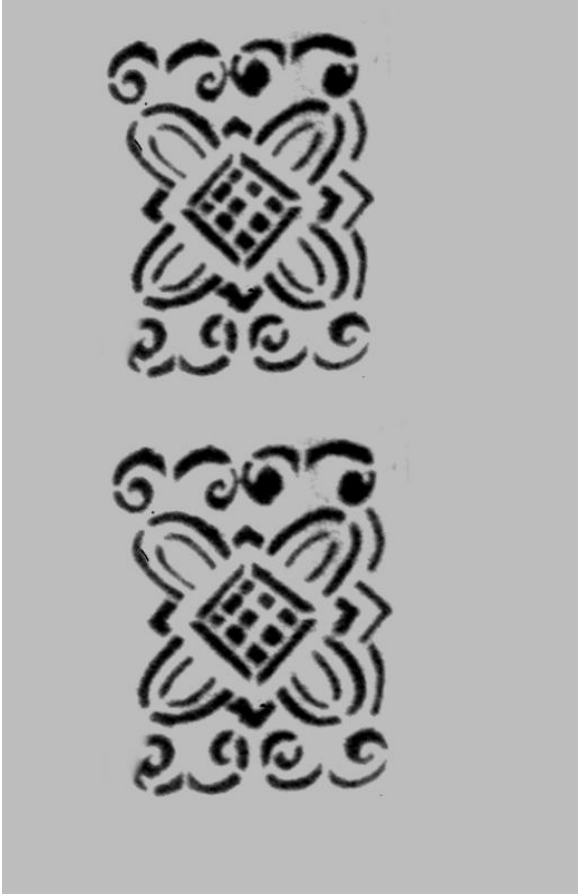


Figure 30: Arewa and Islamic Symbols on Rigged Flats' Surfaces.



#### 4.5. SET DESIGN FOR SONG OF A GOAT.

Song of a goat, written by J.P. Clark, metaphorizes the traditional norms and philosophies of the IZONS of the Niger Delta who hold that it is a man that determines his fate on earth and not the gods. The play expounds on the IZON beliefs that man can change his destiny through consultation with the gods and not confrontation. The disobedience of Zifa and Ebiera and their eventual misery and death are the essential problems around which the plot is constructed. The play which had its command performance in the Muson Centre from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001 was directed by Ahmed Yerima. The play was later staged in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre Complex and had Norbert Young, amongst others, as its major character. The set for the production was designed by Biodun Abe.



Plate VIII: Set Design for Song of a Goat before Performance . Photo by Soibifaa Dokubo



Plate IX: Set Design for Song of a Goat during Performance. Video Capture by Ernest Agoba

#### 4.5.1 Set Listing for Song of a Goat

1. Veranda of a brick pattern house
2. Two mud houses
3. Large upstage backdrops
4. Wooden railings
5. Plantain trees

#### 4.5.2 Design Concept for Song of a Goat

Considering that the major dramatic conflict in this play revolves around two families who have been emotionally and physically distanced from each other, Biodun Abe adopts a design concept that helps to circumvent the need for heavy budgeting on set and connote this emotional and physical distance by creating a yawning space between the two major sets meant for the families of these characters. Because there are no authorial directions to restrict his creative adventure, Biodun Abe's set appears to owe much of its form and concept to a heavy reliance on simplicity and a restricted realism of forms like huts, barn, and trees which can be used as set piece for most plays set against the rural areas. However, a major device used by Abe in the rendition of this set is to rely heavily on symbolism and the tension carried in the use of empty space defined only by theatrical lighting.

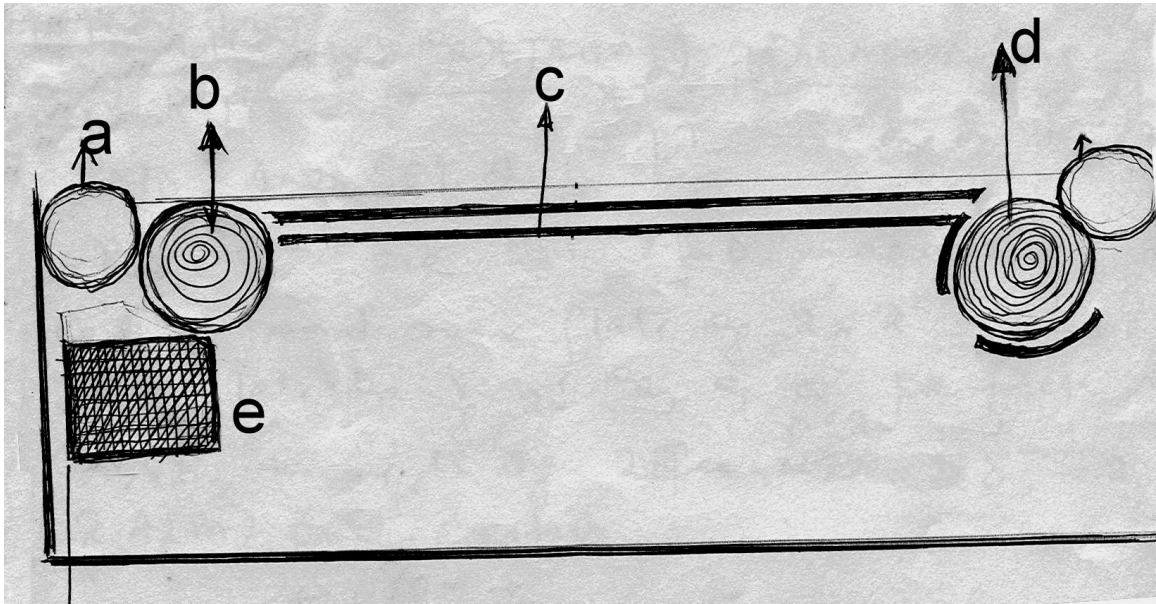


Figure 31: Floor Plan for Song of a Goat Depicting Positions of Sets

Keys to Figure 31

- a) Stage pillar
- b) First mud house
- c) Wooden railings
- d) Second mud house
- e) House with veranda

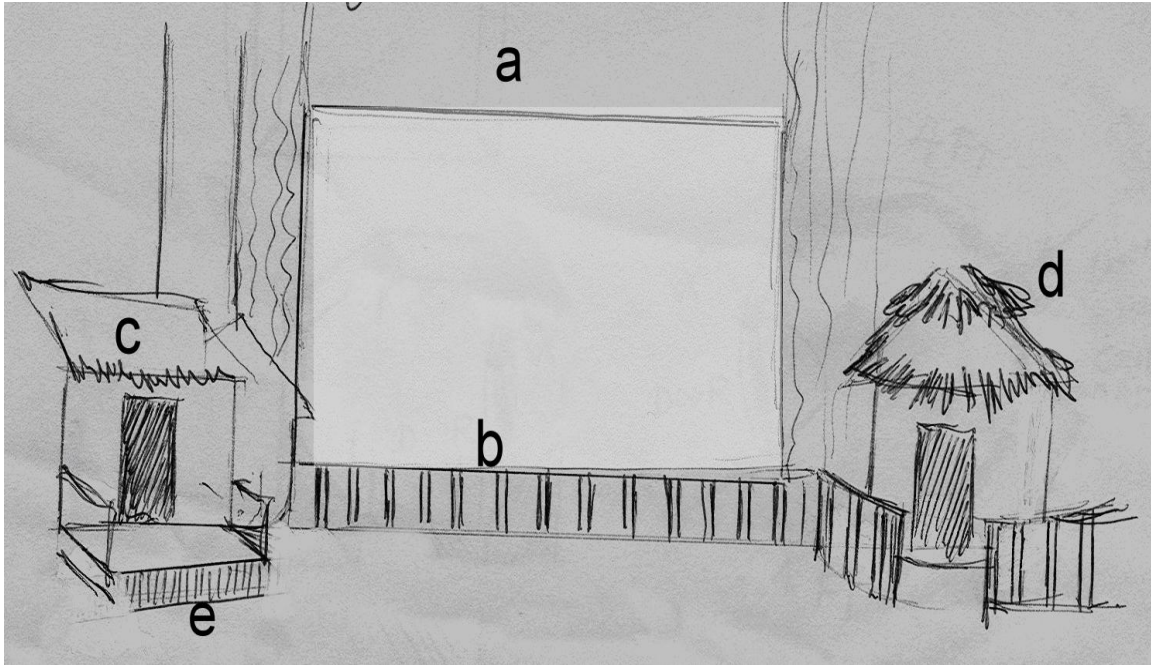


Figure 32: Perspective Projection for Set.

Keys to Figure 32

- a) Over-hanging scenic painting
- b) Wooden railings
- c) House
- d) Hut
- e) Platform to house

#### 4.5.3 Set Construction for Song of a Goat

Standard 4' x 8' (1.21m x 2.42m) plywood of ¼' thicknesses are joined together: a to b and c to d are made up of four plywood joined at the 4 ft. (1.21m) edges to make a total width of 32 ft. (9.69m). The vertical axis of the scenic painting, a to c and b to d are joined at the 8 feet edges to make a total value of 24 ft. (7.27m) high. On the whole, a total of 24 panels of plywood are used to create this broad surface. However, to achieve strength for it, the entire piece which is held together by vertical and horizontal framework of 2' x 2' (5.08 x 5.08) woods is equally held upright by its attachment to the bare wall of the Cinema Hall 2. However the lines of joint which is heavy and easily noticeable are filled with wood dust containing glue. This is later sand-papered after drying. The entire plane is painted with white emulsion paint severally until ready for the rendition of forms in the same emulsion.

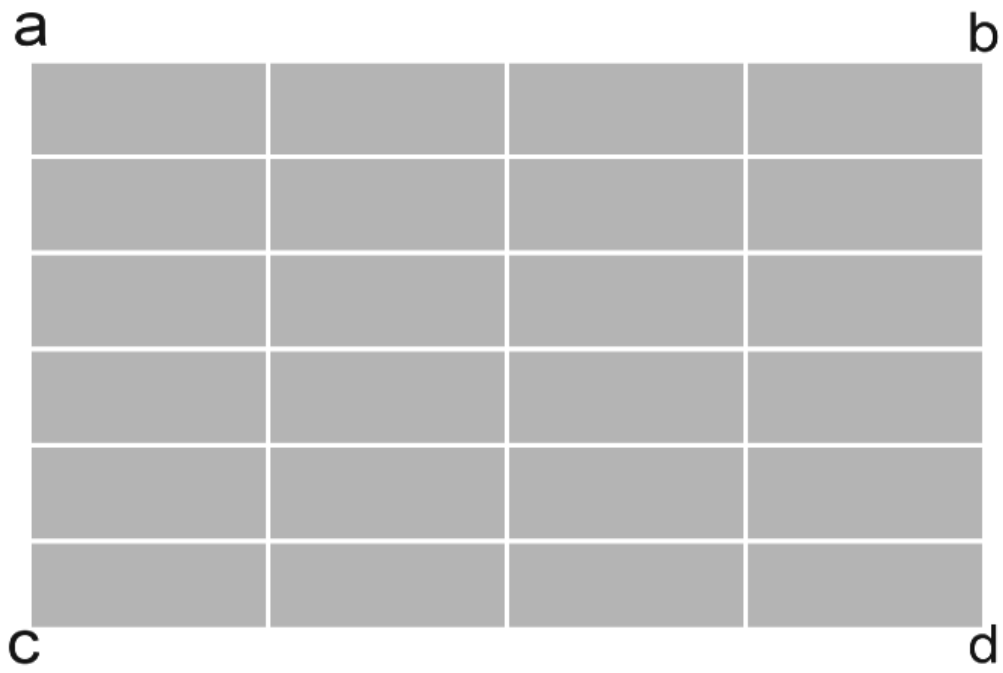


Figure 33: Frame Work of Scenic Painting



**Flat**

The flats used in this production are slightly different from those used in the other productions already studied considering the circularity of some of the objects to which they are put. Besides the brick pattern house seen stage right, the circular objects are the mud huts stage left and stage right. They are made of ceiling board over wooden flat frames of 1x 2 inches. To achieve the regularity of a perfect circle flats of 2.5 feet (0.60m) x 8 feet (2.42m) are created with the usual corner braces, keystones and toggle bars used to achieve strength. However the brick shaped building stage right carries the same dimension of flats seen in Attahiru and ...Horseman.

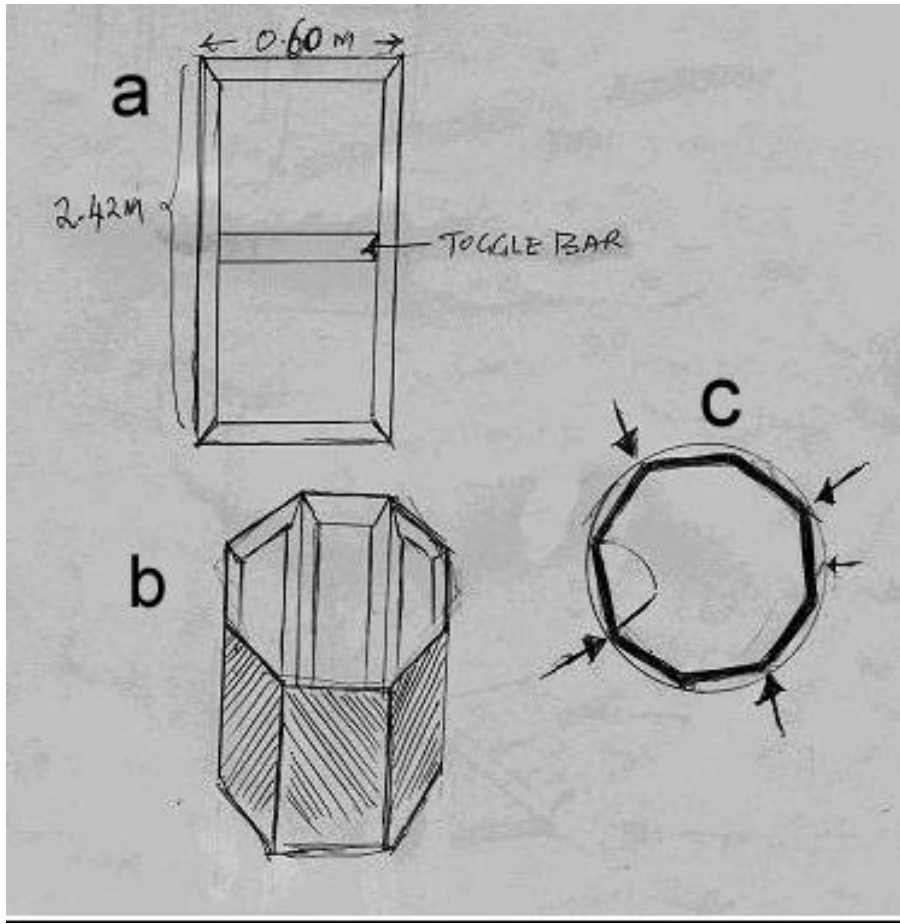


Figure 34: Structure of Flats used for Huts.

Keys to Figure 34

- a) Flats (0.60m x 2.42m)
- b) Circularity of structures
- c) Base of structure on the floor reveals the use of eight flats put together to achieve circularity.

#### 4.5.4 Joinery methods in Song of a Goat

Like the sets in the previous productions, a basic dependence on different sizes of nails for joining wood is equally to be seen here. This is coupled with tenon and mortise joinery for the styles and rails of the flats used. Styles are equally strengthened by vertical toggle bars. The octagonal shape of the mud huts are firmly held together through elongated hinges carried by all the units. The kingpost for the roof structure is achieved with 2' x 2' (5.08cm x 5.08cm) planks. Rafters are achieved with 1' x 2' (2.54cm x 5.08cm) planks. The diagonal rafters meet kingpost of roofs by simple abutment. The horizontal crossings meeting the diagonal rafters are achieved with 1' x 2' (2.54cm x 5.08cm) planks. 3 inches masonry nails are used throughout.

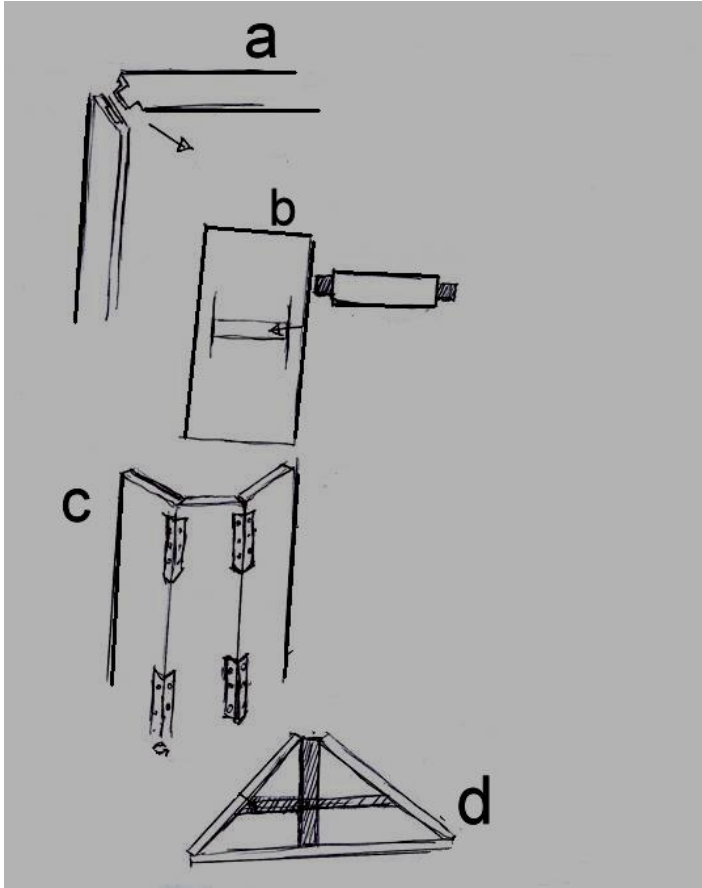


Figure 35: Joinery for Roofs

Keys to Figure 35

- a) Tenon and mortise joinery
- b) Stiles are strengthened by vertical toggle bars
- c) elongated hinges
- d) Kingpost

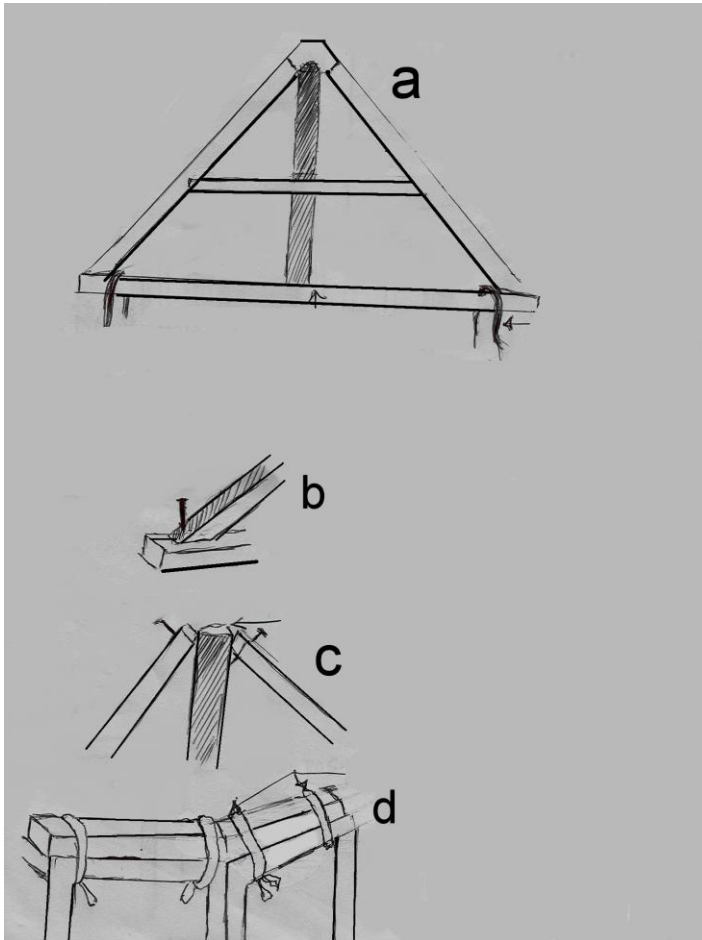


Figure 36: Joinery for Door and Window Flats

Keys to figure 36

- a) Cross section of roof showing rafters and trusses
- b) Diagram showing joinery of rafters to wall plate
- c) Rafters to kingpost joinery is achieved through nudging
- d) This illustrates how the wall plates are joined through fastening by strings to the rafters.

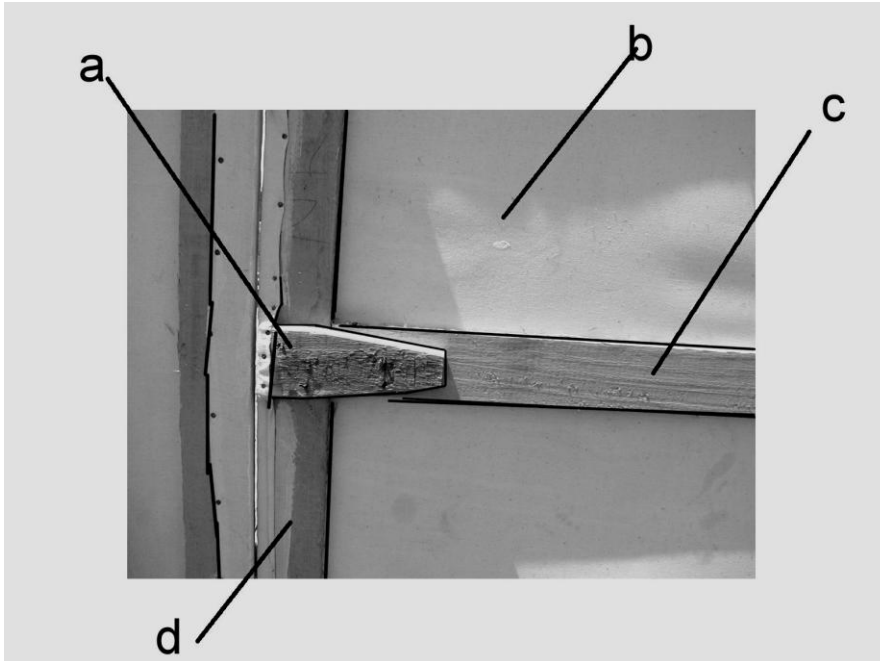


Figure 37: Element of the flat

a) Keystones

b) Ceiling board

c) Toggle bar

d) Stiles

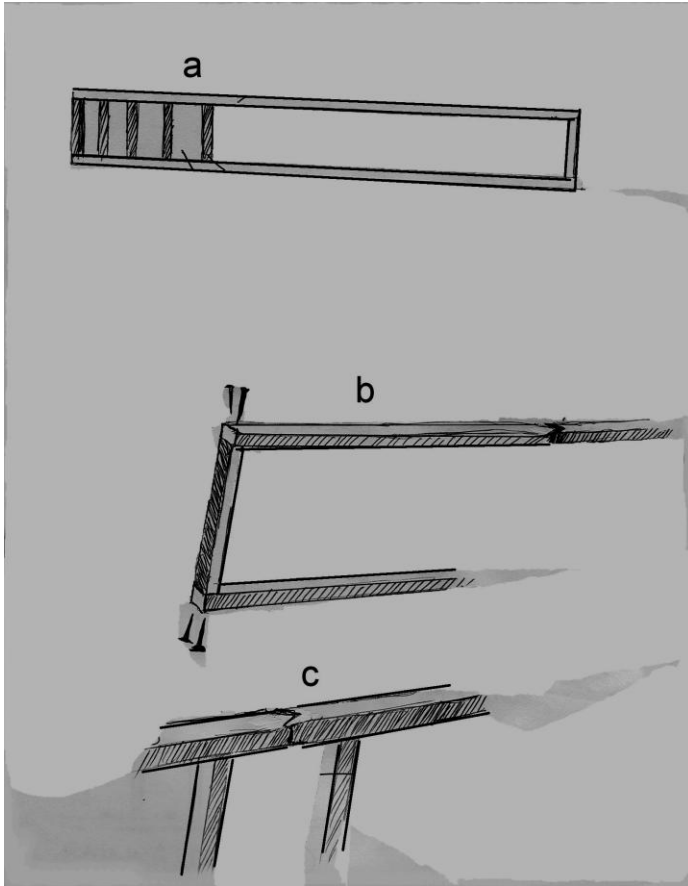


Figure 38: Joinery for Rails

Keys to Figure 38

- a) Wooden rails
- b) Top to bottom joinery
- c) End to end joinery

#### 4.5.5. Set Rigging in Song of a Goat

As in the sets for the previous productions, set rigging has followed the same patterns. A large percent of scenery materials which are wood are either free standing or nailed to the edges of platforms that are laid on the floor. For instance, the mud houses simulated by wooden work are rigged to the floor by 3 inches nails while the other rectangular looking house is left free standing through the support of a broad platform base.



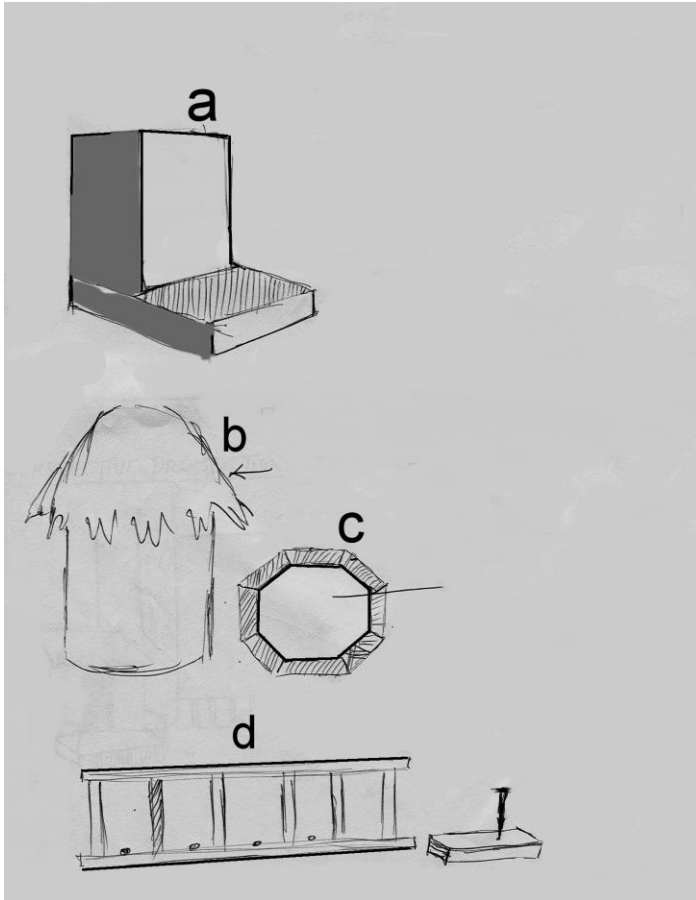


Figure 39: Forms of Set Rigging in Song of a Goat

Keys to Figure 39

- a) Brick pattern building independent and free standing
- b) Mud houses are rigged to the floor by 3 inches nails and with 2' x 3' (5.08 x 7.62) planks in the pattern seen in figure 38:c.
- c) Circular pattern of mud houses
- d) Rails are nailed to the stage floor with 3 inches nails

This concluded chapter concentrated on the presentation of primary data and ends without critical commentary or analysis. However, a critical analysis of the formative elements that gave physical form to these productions will constitute our next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

**ANALYSES OF SCENERIES IN THE CINEMA HALL 2**

In this Chapter, cognizance is taken of the artistic and dramatic variables from which the design forms and concepts are created by the first designer, Biodun Abe, the second, Sunbo Marinho, and the third, Hillary Elemei whose works have been presented in the preceding chapter. The artistic and literary variables by which our analyses are made in this study are:

- 1.) Visualizations through textual references by the playwright.
- 2.) Scenic references through characterization.
- 3.) Scenic references through dramatic dialogues.
- 4.) Thematic and historical denotations.
- 5.) Scenic allusions through character movement, weight and size.

### 5.1 ANALYSIS OF SET IN DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN.

In all the plays listed in this study, the author's directions on what the set should be are carried directly at appropriate instances in the text or as directional allusions, except, perhaps, in Song of a Goat where directions were limited to light. In ...Horseman we are presented with brief stage descriptions like “**A passage through a market**”, “**The Veranda of the district officer's**

**bungalow**” and **“A wide iron barred gate.”** In ...Horseman, cognizance is taken of the grossly skeletal scenic references which may have been intentional to allow for scenic creativity and a wide variety of concepts in actualizing its locale. In the beginning of the play text we are presented with, **“A passage through a market in its closing stages”** (P.12). This rather vague scenic reference appears to allow the designer to ignore the need for a “passage,” opting instead for a concept of set making which would enable complete integration of all the locales into a single one separated technically by the delineating power of light. Rather than see a “passage,” this stage set which is pushed to occupy three quarter of back and centre stage, leaves a barely commodious area for passage, market place, the yard for surrounding the district officers bungalow, the wide iron barred gate etc. In scene 11 of ...Horseman, the author’s reference is equally brief: **“The verandah of the district officer’s bungalow”** (P.23).

Here, it is not particular as to what type of verandah or bungalow. The grandiosity of these structures was equally not mentioned. In scene V of this play, a reference from which a major form in this set was made is conveyed in the scenic direction below:

**“A wide iron barred gate stretching almost the whole width of the cell in which Elesin is imprisoned” (P.61).**

The set for which this reference is made is however a drastic departure from the denotations of the authors reference. Rather than a wide iron gate, what is presented before us is a cell, almost square, and made entirely of bars of wood made to look like iron. In this set, the designer’s imagination which accounts for over eighty percent of the scenic forms has given little attention to the author’s directions. This is clearly observable from his concept of simultaneous staging.

In ...Horseman, the pleasure and bountifulness of life is caught by the set designer’s attempt to create a set which is very realistic, symbolic and evocative. The elegant, graceful and regal character of Elesin which is captured by this set is elucidated upon by Elesin himself:

**Elesin:** Come then. The market is my roost. When I come among the women, I am a chicken with a hundred mothers. I become a monarch whose palace is built with tenderness and beauty (P.10).

Elsewhere the regality and splendour imbued in Elesins character, which his environment is meant to reflect, can be seen in his stage directions and dialogue.

**(Elesin stands resplendent in rich clothes, cap, shawl etc...)**

**Elesin:** The world I know is good

**Women:** We know you will leave it so.

**Elesin:** The world I know is the bounty  
Of hives after bees have swarmed.  
No goodness teems with such open hands  
Even in the dreams of deities.

**Women:** And we know you'll leave it so (P.17).

In the set for ...Horseman a great variety of forms to suggest plentitude and wealth are used to capture Elesin's "good world" and "bounty of wives" as contained in his rhapsody. From the Pilkings's bungalow to the cell into which Elesin is incarcerated, and to the gargantuan backdrop of a village scene, the designer's search for grandeur is manifested both by his combination of scenic concepts as are seen in the strong realism of forms, in the use of steps, platforms and ramps, in such decorative items as flowers, cornices, balustrade and in the soft serene lighting which give luster and freshness to Elesin's environment.

However, scenery in this play can neither be classified as realistic, symbolic, or stylized. The play carries none of the element of an expressionist or naturalist set, thus making it hard to define. However a bold attempt is seen

in Biodun Abe's effort to evoke the spirit of realism from the use of the large painted backdrop of a village scene which is as far as paintings are classified, a realistic work. Considering its overbearing size, the painted vista onto which a soft upstage light is directed fills the entire stage area with a suggestiveness of realism. However this does not get very far as the major three-dimensional scenery used in the construction of the Pilking's apartment, the prison cell, and the mat compartment are rather a representation of skeletal symbols of what they are supposed to be.

The materials with which the three-dimensional scenery is made are basically in wood, with joinery and rigging devices carrying only a negligible percentage of metal. In purely realistic scenery, the scenery materials may have been shared amongst all the major materials of scenery. This tendency which is rather restrictive is equally observable in the proportion of the entire three-dimensional structures which are far from the correct sizes and standard measurements. This makes the set concept for this production purely that of restricted realism. Platforms are equally used in this production for both space occupation and for emphasis of major structures. There are no attempts whatsoever to use them in an abstractive style or for suggesting constructivist scenic style. In constructing the entire forms on stage, the joinery methods used were dependent largely upon different sizes of nails considering the

predominant use of lumber and plywood mainly of ‘obeche’. While this makes it possible for the designer to achieve firmness and strength, the tottery appearance of the cell and office structures suggest a re-assembly of wooden materials which have been used for other productions. The use of wooden platforms on the floor is repeated for all the productions under focus. The dependence on nails and wood has therefore aided in rendering these structures immobile as they are heavy and rigged almost permanently to the floor. From the beginning of the production to its end, these structures remain immobile, unchanging. Scenic Materials used in realizing these forms on stage are, however, mainly wood, with joinery realized from nails and glue. A percentage analysis of media used in constructing the sets in Death and the King’s Horseman is presented overleaf:



**Table 4.** Percentage Analysis of Scenery Materials Used for Death and the King's Horseman

WOOD	70%
METAL	5%
PLASTIC	0%
FABRIC	10%
OTHER MATERIALS (Flowers,Raffia,Footmats, Straw mats )	15%
TOTAL	100%

## 5.2 ANALYSIS OF SET IN THE CONCUBINE

The *Concubine* which is, after all, a novel was not written for the stage. It, however, has a few of the author's directions on sets which are seen in the beginning of chapter 4 of this novel. These directions are seen as explications on a major village known as Omokachi: Omokachi was a small village comprising eleven family groups. Each family group occupied a cluster of compounds, and every compound had a path bursting into the main path running across the village.

Hilary Elemi, the set designer for the production of The Concubine depicts a space with a cluster of sets comprising two major huts: a rounded one, and a squared one showing only their façades. The two huts with thatch roofs are created for the two major families in the play: Emenike's and Madume's. A small wooden barn to the stage right is a shrine which is repeatedly mentioned in most sets depicting traditional environment in Africa. The designer equally created a large space, centre stage left and right, for a market place which is equally repeatedly mentioned in the text. However the effort at properly depicting the locales as described in the text is weak, as the structures of the huts are created without serious commitment to the naturalist forms that appear to be what is desired. The combination of traditional forms as presented in the huts, the barn, and benches are in contraposition with the designer's

introduction of geometric platforms which are diametrically at polarity with the feeble realism carried by the traditional forms. However these are believed to have been used to occupy the oversized space and to pattern the movements of actors within this stage. Overleaf is a table that presents the percentage spread of media used for constructing the sets in The Concubine.

**Table 5.** Percentage Analysis of Scenery Materials Used for The Concubine.

WOOD	80%
METAL	7%
PLASTIC	0%
FABRIC	3%
OTHER MATERIALS (Flowers,Raffia,Footmats, Straw mats )	10%
TOTAL	100%

### 5.3 ANALYSIS OF SET IN TRIALS OF OBA OVONRANWEN

In Trials..., the set, as designed by Biodun Abe, is motivated more by the historical milieu of the play than by obedience to textual directions. However, scenic references by the author are shorter and far less definitive in ...Horseman. Besides the beginning of the play which makes such references as ‘**Dark Stage**’ and ‘**a deck on a yacht**’, the entire play is devoid of any traces of elaborate scenic allusions. From Scene 2 to Scene 7 which marks the end of the play, the reference to palace fills the text making it the only important scenic allusion and metaphor used by the playwright to suggest locales. Inspired by the continuous reference to ‘**palace**’, the designer of this set created a gargantuan set of palace walls that carried the composite picture of a court yard that can be passed for a palace room. Again, here, the staging concept which is simultaneous in form is partly necessitated by the grossly undefined author’s directions amongst other reasons. However, it is equally clear that owing to the author’s presumed position on the need for flexibility and creativity, the austerity in author’s scenic directions has equally propelled the simplicity and directness which is carried in this set concept. This simplicity permits re-usability of sets especially in plays with similar cultural and conjunctive elements.

However, in the set for Trials..., the use of graduating platforms which ascend to the position of Ovonramwen's throne, towering him above his subjects, is the first overriding set concept used to suggest glory. The subject of glory around which his personality is built is summed up by Ovonramwen himself:

**Ovonramwen:** Here I am. Seated in my glory. The once most feared, most respected. Oba Ovonramwen son of Adolo (P.19).

The glory of Ovonramwen which is reflected in his strength is further conjured by his repeated reference to the leopard. The feeling of strength is inbred in the thick high palace walls and the solidity and firmness carried by variegated levels. The scenic concept for Trials... however borrowed more from thematic and historical references than from author, character, and dialogue indices. Overleaf is a table showing percentage analysis of material used in making the sets for Trials of Oba Ovonramwen.

**Table 6.** Percentage Analysis of Scenery Materials Used for Trials of Oba Ovonramwen

WOOD	85%
METAL	5%
PLASTIC	0%
FABRIC	3%
OTHER MATERIALS (Flowers,Hedges, Raffia, Footmats, Straw mats )	7%
TOTAL	100%

#### 5.4 ANALYSIS OF SET IN ATTAHIRU

The set for Attahiru which is conceived with simultaneous staging style is worked to accommodate the ten scenes carried in the play text. The play, Attahiru, is unique and aesthetically significant for the set designer because, beside the reliance on scenery directions by the author, the play text is further laden with almost all the inspirational sources from which design ideas can be extracted. This includes scenic references achievable through characterization, dramatic dialogues, historical milieu and characters movements, actor's weight and numbers. However, the reliance by the designer of this play upon the author's textual direction is heavier than that adopted by any of the other set designers. In the first scene of the play, the author's direction reads thus:

**Dark stage. Spotlight on silhouette as figure of man is seen raising his hand to his ear (P.15).**

In the same scene the author further refers to,

**Big entrance gate to the mosque (P.15).**

In scene 2, he puts it that, "lights come on stage to reveal the palace." The repeated reference to "palace" which preponderates over such other abstract references as "dark stage and bare stage" made it necessary for this set designer to create a heavily adorned palace that spreads from stage-left to stage-right.

Because the author's textual directions for scenery are, in reality, still slight and



not detailed, the set designer adopted a rather integrative approach at making his forms which consist of both realism, caught by the towering walls of the palace and, symbolism, extracted from a myriad of symbols, logos and geometric shapes peculiar to the Northern Nigerian culture. The geometric forms in this set include the arches with which their doors are made and the dome shapes of mosque roofs. The spiritual symbols used are the Arewa symbols and the crest of the moon in conjunction with a star. The symbols on the walls of the palace are heavy and complex, suggesting a strong inclination towards symbolism rather than completely subjecting itself to the author's direction. Overleaf is a table that presents the percentage spread of media used for constructing the sets in Attahiru.

**Table 7.** Percentage Analysis of Scenery Materials Used for Attahiru

WOOD	85%
METAL	5%
PLASTIC	0%
FABRIC	3%
OTHER MATERIALS (Flowers,Raffia, Hedges, Footmats, Straw mats )	7%
TOTAL	100%

### 5.5 ANALYSIS OF SET IN SONG OF A GOAT

In our analysis of the fourth set featured in the production of Song of a Goat J.P. Clark, aware of the importance of the set designer and the disparately wide gamut of scenic visualization open to his creative mind, is more relaxed in his attempt to describe the scenery or set. In fact, in Song of a Goat J.P. Clark abstained entirely from making references to tangible forms or objects. Rather, in the First Movement of the play he directs:

**In half-lit room, Ebiere is lying face up on a mat (P.35).**

In this statement, his reference to only intangible elements suggests his unreadiness to discuss sets or scenic elements of any kind. His rather subtle reference is made only to light. In the second movement of this play, he refers to the quality of light with the word, "Dusk":

**Out in the Concussion, Dusk is thickening (P.47).**

This type of references is repeated in the Third and Final movement where the play ends. In the Third movement we are told:

**A late afternoon, Ebiere is bathing Dode on the verandah (P.57).**

The Final movement which marks the end of this epic play presents us with yet another similar expression:

**Day is breaking and the tall stem of the sky god set up in the front yard is lost in the slowly lifting light (P.65).**

In The Song of a Goat, J.P. Clark is more enthused about the ambience of light with which the locale of his play is rendered than with the forms and concept of set suggested by the locale. This is evident in his consistent reference to the form and quality of light in all Movements in the play. In the First Movement, he puts it as, ‘a half –lit room.’ In the 2<sup>nd</sup> movement, he uses the word “dusk.” In the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement, he evokes the scenery with the simple phrase, “late afternoon.” In the final Movement of the play, his preference for light rather than physical structures is further portrayed in two evocative expressions “day is breaking” and “slowly lifting sky”

Looking critically at the set design for this play by Biodun Abe, one could see a designer who was lost at what to create because no single mention is made of a set piece and a designer exhilarated at the freedom offered in the text. This is evidenced in a set which has no single bearing with authors’ scenic references. Because there are no authorial directions to restrict its creative functions, this set appears to owe much of its form and concept to a heavy reliance on simplicity and a realism of simple 3-dimensional forms like huts,

barn, and trees which can be used as set pieces for most plays set against the rural areas. The use of 2-dimensional scenic backdrops showing a vista of riverine rural area equally portray forms which are representative of the freedom of forms offered from the scenic directions of this play. This scenic painting carries images which cannot be peculiar to this play alone. The wooden rafters which run from extreme stage left to extreme stage right are abstract but non-symbolic. These rafters which are equally reflective of the freedom of forms offered in this play text has been re-used in Yemoja by Ahmed Yerima and staged severally in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre.

However, a major approach used by Biodun Abe in the rendition of this set is to rely heavily on the use of space. The element of space is used to both connote the taciturnity of the playwright and to allow the need for physical structures surrender to the call for light by the playwright. This is illustrated by the yawning space that exists between the two major hut sets, extreme stage left and right. Overleaf is a table showing percentage analysis of material used in making the sets for Song of a Goat.

**Table 8.** Percentage Analysis of Scenery Materials Used for Song of a Goat

WOOD	75%
METAL	5%
PLASTIC	0%
FABRIC	10%
OTHER MATERIALS (Flowers,Raffia, Footmats, Straw mats )	10%
TOTAL	100%

## 5.6 COMPOSITE ANALYSES OF FORMS AND CONCEPTS

The Cinema Hall 2 is a hybrid proscenium stage setting without the traditional teasers, tormentors and stage curtains. Basically, the problem of making productions in the 17.2m x 10.9m x 8.1m space of this hall is first and foremost a product of the permanent features of the hall of which the most obvious is the structurally constraining structure which begs for some kind of adaptableness for different dramatic productions at different times. The Cinema Hall 2 stage structure has been created without the possibility of tempering with the permanent stage features as the hall was built without the notion of professional dramatic performance in mind. However, the designers' efforts at restructuring this basic rectangular shape are not noticeable as the regimental form of this basic stage form does not allow for these adjustments.

This unfortunate structural defect has made productions and the possibility of easing the difficulties associated with manifesting design concepts a knotty problem. However, the inability of the set designers to circumvent this problem through ingenious means has betrayed their artistic and creative weaknesses. This is because this problem made the productions in the Cinema Hall 2 to carry the fixed unchanging environment projected by its Fourth Wall. This is further worsened by its permanent rectangularity emphasized by the roomage seen in its stage space and badly constructed stage flats. The concept of

restricted realism carried in fragmentary and simultaneous staging concept can be seen as the general concept adopted.

Though there is a frantic effort at portraying realism in all the sets, there is yet no strong adherence to the established codes laid down by theatrical or dramatic schools. The sets in all the sceneries are a feeble attempt at portraying Realism or Naturalism. Realism according to the American Heritage Dictionary is an artistic representation or treatment that aims or is felt to be usually accurate. In all the sets, as much as the designers had attempted to portray realism, realism yet remains far from being achieved as most objects and forms presented by all the designers still look either distorted, misrepresented or badly presented. In ...Horseman, the major scenic form, the backdrop of a village, carries faulty perspective vistas in, for instance, the huts which appear to be bigger than their proportionate sizes as they are viewed in the distance. In this same scenic painting, the rendition of turquoise blue with tints of red is betraying of what a sky line must carry. Another major fault in the making of this scenic painting was to have applied a heavy layer of domestic oil paint in a mixed blend with dye paint. This has, during the production, made lights falling from the battens and edges of the stage to create reflections that slightly obliterate the total composition. The attempt at imitating reality by using a 2-dimensional backdrop is further affected by the strong illusionism carried by



this 2-dimensional painting in a space that is essentially meant to be 3 dimensional and paraded by 3-dimensional actors. The Pilkings' flat and Elesin's cell which are two major 3-dimensional set in this space appear to be neither realist, symbolist, nor constructivist in form. To qualify these as realist would see the design principle of proportion rearing up its face as the bungalow looks more like a cigarette kiosk than a real bungalow. For the cell, the structure is equally guilty of the laws of proportion. While these sets can be said to distance themselves from any globally recognized design trend, they could equally be said to embrace an integrative approach where all the trends are either important or unimportant thereby giving credence to the belief that there may not have been the desire by any of these set designers to imitate, typify or reproduce forms peculiar to the design codes of any theatrical conventions.

The other problem noticeable in all the production sets studied is expressed in the unchanging choice of materials with which these sets are constructed. Wood that constitutes a large percentage of the construction medium and materials used did not help in enhancing the general design forms and concepts. This is because the construction techniques necessitated by the use of wood, leaves large crevices between each flat thereby making them remain as sheets of plywood put together rather than simulating the appearance of walls. There were equally swells from repainting, tottery joints resulting

from weak hinge joints and cracks resulting from re nailing the same points. These wooden flats which are often used to suggest realist settings stand far from the picturesque clarity and exactitude seen in truly realist sets. True realism, however, requires adequate finances needed for form details and accuracy brought about by the employment of specialized skills. This would have meant employing the services of painters or artisans, interior decorators, welders or fabricators etc. in order to ensure accuracy and finesse. Rather than see realism or naturalism, what is presented are fragmentary sets that are midway between abstraction and realism, and therefore, half representational. The set by Hilary Elemi is guilty of these problems. Beside the sets in the productions mentioned in this thesis, these anomalies are equally noticeable in Ahmed Yerima's The Silent Gods (1998), Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1998), and Wale Ogunyemi's Langbodo (1998) all designed by him and staged in the Cinema Hall 2. These shortcomings are equally contained in the design of Sunbo Marinho whose set in Trial of Oba Ovonramwen resembles that in Attahiru designed by Hilary Elemi.

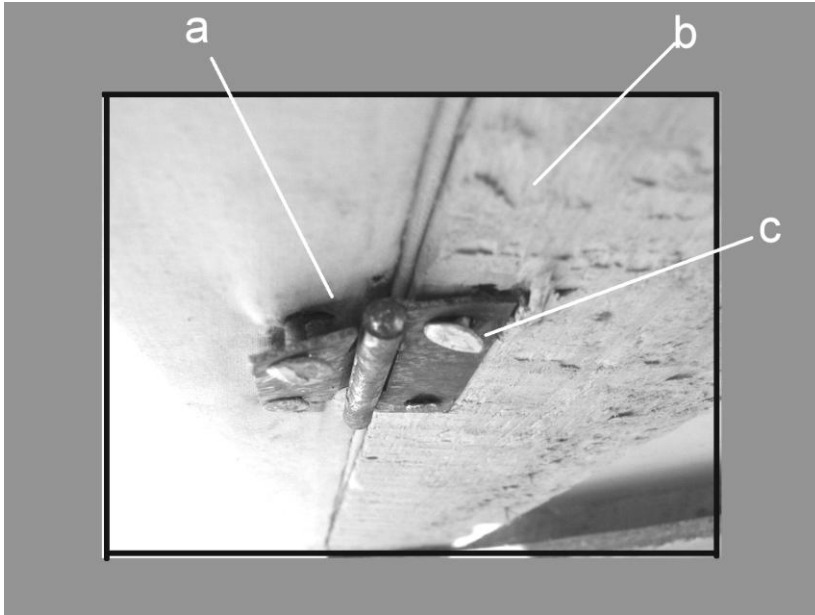


Figure 40: View of a Weak Hinge Joint

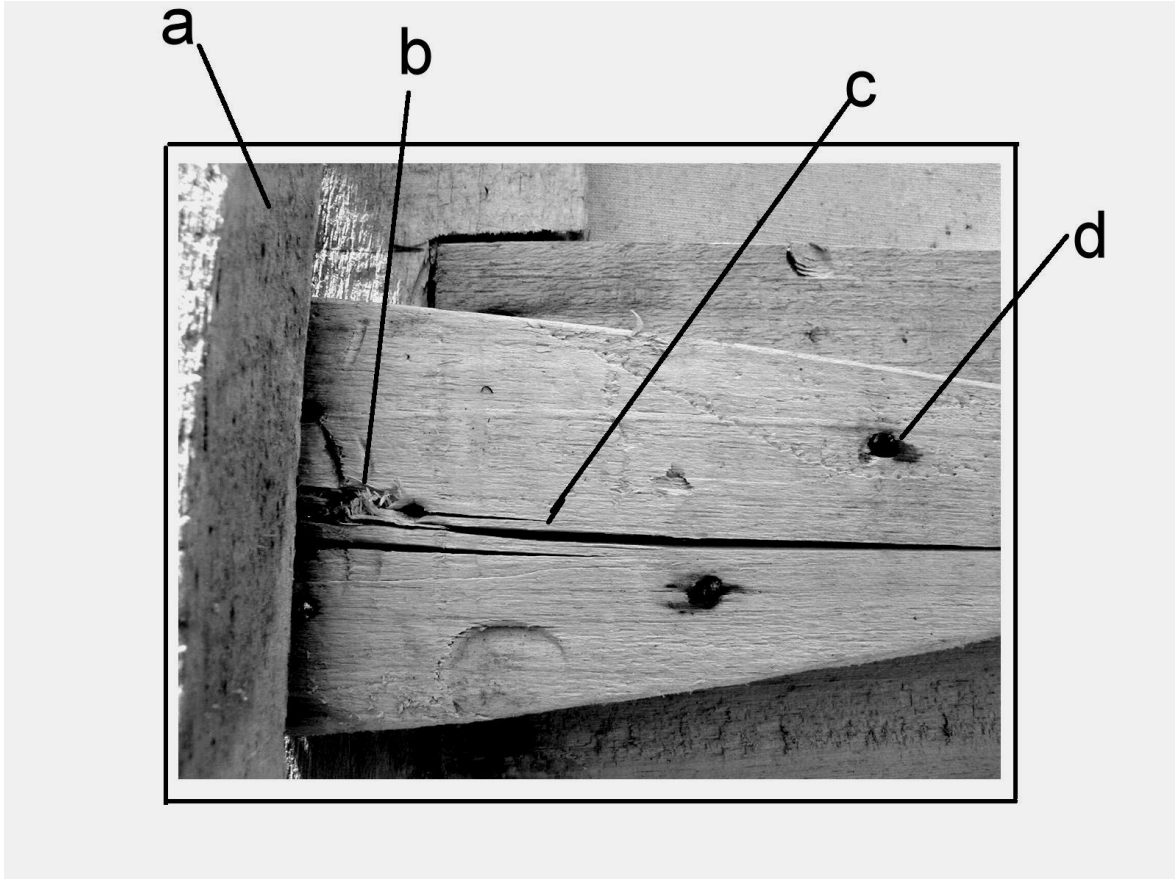


Figure 41: Infirmary from Splitting Wood

Keys to Figure 41

a) Additional but unnecessary support for keystone. b) Keystone carrying a heavy crack at point of joinery with this wooden support. c) Split points as a result of nailing. d) Nail hole is wider as a result of re-nailing.

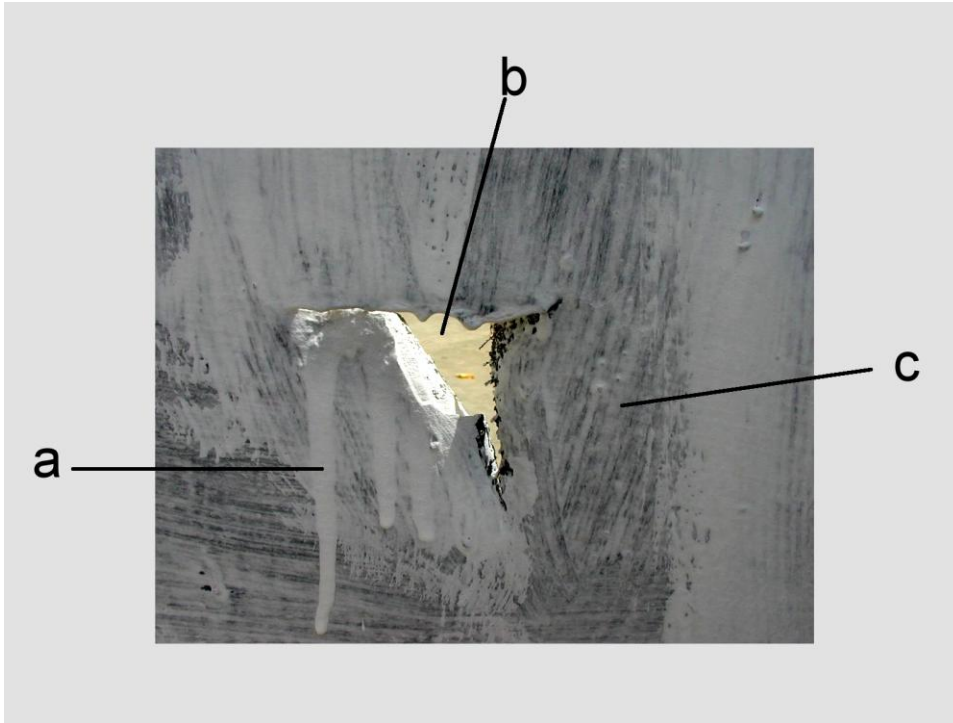


Figure 42: Paint Drips from Heavy Layers.

Keys to Figure 42:

a) Paint drips. b) Accident permitted by weakness of wood fibre. c) Undercoat cannot be effectively removed.

However, Biodun Abe, whose works are not featured as much as Hilary Elemi's, equally reflects these problems in his design works particularly with reference to the works produced in the Cinema Hall 2 alone. A typical case in reference is his rendering of Song of a Goat which is almost a repetition of the set elements seen in Yemoja by Ahmed Yerima in the same Cinema Hall 2. However to be fair to Biodun Abe, his set concept as is exemplified in Death and the King's Horseman carrying a large backdrop of a painted scene, connotes his refusal to be affected by this unchanging traditions and his relentless resistance to be cowed by the constrictions of the Cinema Hall 2 stage architecture. Despite his undaunted efforts at fashioning a peculiar design concept for his sets, the design rendition for Song of a Goat and Death and the King's Horseman, both enacted in the Cinema Hall 2, suffer yet from syndromes which are peculiar to all plays produced in this hall. The dynamic and experimental urge carried by Biodun Abe is illustrated in his other sets designed for other productions. These include the (NIB) sponsored theatre production of Langbodo (1994) which featured multi-functional scenic elements that were mainly 3-dimensional free-standing geometric structures and The Bridge (1998) by Don Pedro Obaseki which featured a constructivist network of wooden parapet set. However, from Hilary Elemi to Sunbo Marinho and Biodun Abe, the quest and desire for experimentation in the Cinema Hall 2

is weak as from one production to the other production the creative zeal and quest for more workable concepts and styles to set production may have been strongly subdued. This is without regard to production cost and directorial ineptitude seen in these unfolding design problems. The feeling often struck by the sets in these productions is that of unchangeableness produced in the expression, "We are yet again in the Cinema Hall 2". The entire productions reveal set pieces which are not movable and which are placed on an unmovable stage floor considering the "fixatedness" of the floor and the unavailability of scene changing devices.

With every scene that is ended and with every other that is to come, the need for space management necessitated by the peculiar structural problems in this hall has lent support to the general inclination towards the concept of simultaneous scenery which is largely the design concept adopted by all the scenic designers. In simultaneous staging, different scenes are laid out on a stage that has the capacity to accommodate up to three, four or five independent settings that are lit separately and progressively in time to suggest continuity without having to strike or move them. The adoption of simultaneous staging in all the sets under study suggests, to a large extent, an almost complete dependence on this concept. Other major productions that have utilized this concept include Yemoja and The Silent Gods both by Ahmed Yerima, and The

Strong Breed by Wole Soyinka. The simultaneous staging concept has equally stimulated the “Lights Out” technique which either gradually reduces the light intensity until it is completely dark or instantaneously puts out the light for the purpose of changing the scene by redirecting the audience to other sets on stage. However, these concepts are not without their shortcomings. In simultaneous staging, lights which are not often as dark enough as to completely conceal simultaneous sets not immediately in use leave such sets still within certain degree of visibility thereby creating a visual clash. This concept which was equally used for a production like The Silent Gods in this same stage structure was, however, crude and unsatisfactory, as delays were recorded and shadowy figures seen as they made in and out to remove set pieces from the stage. However the major unmovable large scale sets whose overwhelming presence were still seen in the dark part of the stage made this simultaneous staging concept rather faulty and confusing. These large-scale sets that were never changing remained vaguely noticeable because of their base positions and owing, too, to their large and heavy nature. In attempting to manage these problems and the evolving design concepts inspired by these problems, these large-scale sets which have been used by these designers as part of the total visual components to capture spaces have assisted in dislocating the sense of mobility and time necessary for all dramatic actions. The only means by which



the feeling of transition can be realized is to create visual changes to the eyes. These changes are however only possible where the constituent design elements (lines, shapes, forms, space, texture and colours) are subtly muted as the dramatic actions unfold. This is where this concept as adopted by all the designers has revealed some weaknesses.

A close up on the associated concepts used by the three designers whose works are under scrutiny reveals that materials of scenery being no less than 80% of wood are the same for all of them. In a similar vein, construction techniques and rigging patterns are the same. In the simultaneous staging concept which is peculiar to all their sets, light which illuminates and helps to define the set and whose potentials are revealed in the word, 'scenery' is not properly harnessed and has thus aided in creating what can be conveniently referred to as a clutter of forms on the stage. These syndromes in their entirety may have adversely affected the dramatic productions these sets are meant to animate. This can be seen in the set design inability to promote apparent location differences, aid visual transition and encourage make belief on the side of the audience. Rather than enhance the productions, this concept has the potential of dislocating the sense of time and movement and inviting confusion in forms seen both in individual productions and in most productions presented in the Cinema Hall 2.

## 5.7 RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. There are no vibrant scenic trends that completely surrender to the precepts of known and established theatrical movements in design from the scenic forms and concepts in the Cinema Hall 2 and under the period of study.
2. Rendered sets in most productions are generally poor in aesthetics, affected by the architectural limitations of the venue of performance.
3. The entire sets under study are highly representative of set-making patterns in the Nigerian Theatre in English from where it borrowed much of its form.
4. The technical drawbacks identified in our problems of study have been largely reflected in the scenic practices seen in the Cinema Hall 2 and performed by the National Troupe of Nigeria.
5. The scenic traditions in the Cinema Hall 2 are neither naturalist nor realist. The design constituents that are required to fully simulate naturalist and realist set design concepts have not been achieved. There is, however, an admixture of realist, symbolism, and suggestivist elements of scenery epitomized in the fragmentary use of sets on a staging style that is largely simultaneous in approach.

6. The basic materials of scenery in the productions of NTN are wood made from Obeche and consisting of about 80% of the total materials of scenery used.
7. The standard practice is to convert new production sets into stock sets used for most productions in the Cinema Hall 2.
8. Physical scene changes are carried out on small scale sets by stage hands. This method is often delaying, boring and grossly ineffective because modern set changing mechanisms are absent. This further corroborates their dependence on the concept of simultaneous staging.
9. The dependence on the plays' texts and imageries for scenic concepts is inconsequential to forms and concepts of most sets seen on the stage of Cinema Hall 2.
10. The directors' major inputs may have been found on the drama and not the sets. Thus a regimented form of sets seen in the tall wooden flats and backdrop painting are brought about by the desire to have these forms re-used over and over and not necessarily to depict the scenic symbologies of the plays. This attitude adopted by the set designers is further worsened by the high degree of freedom permitted by both the playwrights and the directors who may not be unaware of the cumbersome financial

requirements of experimenting with newer forms and materials in making theatre sets. The major reason why there appears to be a stalemate in experimenting with newer materials is attributable to grossly insufficient finances for scenery. The second factor is that of the Cinema Hall 2 with its regimented structure. The third is that of the designers who may not have sharpened his skills in the discipline of fine arts, architecture and general design to be aware of the theatrical advantages of making bold adventures.

12. For all the NTN productions analyzed in this study, there are no distinct peculiarities with regards to the forms and concepts used by the three set designers

## CHAPTER SIX

### DISCUSSION

#### 6.1 CONCEPT MULTIPLICITY AND INDETERMINACY OF FORMS

In the entire world today, there has been a startling new outburst of experimentations and artistic manifestoes leading to new discoveries and manifestations in both science and technology and the arts to which theatre as a discipline belongs. The confusion and amazement this has brought about is evident in the apparent procrastination and complete bewilderment that precipitate comprehension and choice. In this state of overwhelming plenitude, the urge to manage only a few of these manifestoes has interestingly enough become reduced, compelling us to sometimes adopt the avid attitude of ‘accept them all’ or the complacent ‘stand-away’ posture seen in a withdrawal tendency brought about from the apprehension of time and cost involved in plunging into the secrets and requirements of these manifestoes to effectively project their forms. While the ‘accept them all’ attitude appears to usher in complicity, banality and confusion in forms, the withdrawal syndrome propagated by the ‘stand-away’ posture as an alternative appears to be infectious and enervating.

For the Nigerian theatre, it is this double-faced scenario that has accounted for what seems like a gradual collapse of theatrical design norms. This is because the Nigerian theatre designer has stood in stupefaction and

confusion, distancing himself from serious attachment with any scenic conventions as he watches this infinite diversification of forms and disentangled constellation of ideas in the theatre. In this quiescence, an inaction which gradually degenerates into complete passivity is soon realized. For the Nigerian theatre designer, this first face of reality seriously reflects his state and being. This is true of most of the scenery seen in the dramatic productions of NTN where restricted realism, a style which only emphasizes essential details of naturalism, is intermixed with stylisation, a concept which major concern is to extract the realistic elements and through simplification utilize them as a design rather than as a replica of the original form. Expressionistic elements seen in the distortion of forms used as expressive rather than representational devices are equally mixed with imperfect naturalistic forms. For all the forms seen in the set designs by Abe, Elemi, Marinho, their collaborators, there is a striking similarity carried by this indeterminacy in forms and superficiality in rendition in their effort to embrace concepts in scenic trends and aesthetic principles. This is probably as a result of what we can identify as a contemplative attitude. In these forms, a sense of passivity and inertia is experienced as the set designers appear to be apprehensive of the deep commitment needed to actualise these divergent concepts in design and the inherent virulence associated with staying with a particular school of scenic design.

The other scenario is, however, no less worse than the aforementioned. In the designer's hunger for experimentation and change, he concedes to the 'accept-them- all' rather than the contemplative option. In the dark uncertain tides of scenic manifestoes, and in his over zeal and excitement, he sinks in the sludge for absence of a base on which his feet can take support. This 'accept-them-all' scenario is equally reasoned to be a cause for which a motley of confusing concepts are embraced by the Nigerian scenic designer in his attempt to visually compliment the spoken words. However, the saddest development in his design quest is in the constantly repeated use of sets in almost all plays considering the difficulty involved in constructing or even reconstructing his set stocks to meet the scenic needs of productions and the divergent design style he embraces. However from this repetitiveness, a stereotypic pattern that has been wrongly associated with the functional concept of flexibility is generated. By this repetitiveness a feeling of immobility and inelasticity is often struck. The illusion of time and movement are seriously destroyed. These repetitive and stereotypic tendencies are the major problems borne by the philosophical antecedents of the 'accept-them-all' or 'stand-away' syndromes.

Two reasons are responsible for this: the indeterminacy brought about by the startling new outburst of experimentations and artistic manifestoes and the unavailability of funds to actualise these. Gross inadequate financial inputs, in

the opinion of Hilary Elemi, the resident set designer of NTN, has strongly limited his total creative output. In his strongly worded expressions, “Concepts, manifestoes or even personal scenic inventions are incapable of realisation where you are provided with capital only good enough for making cupboards” (Interview on Elemi: 2006).

From the 1995 NTN production book for Death and the King’s Horseman, the total 100% budget for this production was expended on six major categories, with percentage allocation thus:

1. Actors Fees	-	50%
2. Publicity	-	15%
3. Costumes & Make-Up	-	15%
4. Set & Light	-	10%
5. Entertainment	-	5%
6. Contingencies	-	5%
Total	-	100%



From yet another production which shares the same cost distribution pattern with Death and the King's Horseman, the 2001 NTN production book for Song of a Goat, gives the total 100% budget for the production as:

1. Actors Fees	-	60%
2. Publicity	-	10%
3. Costumes & Make-Up	-	10%
4. Set & Light	-	10%
5. Entertainment	-	5%
6. Contingencies	-	5%
Total	-	100%

In the first category, with actors' fees and publicity taking the bulk of the money, costumes and make-up are ironically seen to take more allocation than scenery. For the two productions of ...Horseman and Song of a Goat, the total budget for scenery that accounts for the 10% is no more than a hundred thousand Naira each. This, it was hoped, will cater for buying the different category of woods for making flats that would occupy the 12.72 metres that constitute the width of cinema Hall 2, create full-fledge house set, make platforms, remunerate the technical team of carpenters, painters, welders, electricians and helps.

Given the seemingly harmful effect the recent volcano of ideas and concepts may have had on the works of contemporary Nigerian scenic designers, this, in many other quarters, is considered differently to be prophylactic and stimulatory rather than enervating. Rene Haunax recounts that this explosion, this infinite multiplicity of possibilities that at first glance may seem a confusion of efforts, but on the contrary allows us to gain the open space , is perhaps the most extra-ordinary phenomenon of our time (7).

Rather than see this explosion of concepts as a motivation, the Nigerian set designer has allowed it to become a disadvantage in his refusal to dare. According to Cameroon and Gillespie, technology avoids old solution and chances failure (45).

The refusal by the Nigerian set designer to dare shows his unreadiness to equate, in visual terms, the adventure which he sees in the myriad of ideas and concepts presently prevalent as part of our global orientations in learning. This explosion in learning and experimentation, and this infinite multiplicity of possibilities, must be seen in the field of theatrical design as a clarion call for the Nigerian set designer to recover from the artistic and intellectual lethargy into which set design has slipped because, “the path leading to the theatre are numerous and varied” (Parker and Smith, 3). While the experimental attitude motivated by the new wave of ideas must be propagated, and while Parker and

Smith's view is true of theatre and of theatre design, the factors of finance, of storage space, and of adequate design education cannot allow the wide scale form of experimentation that is desirable in the Nigerian theatrical scene to be manifest. Considering the wide variety of scenic materials available for scene construction and experimentations, the Nigerian set designer is inclined to further err or become even more negatively affected by the 'accept-them-all' and 'stand -away' syndromes which are capable of further exacerbating his problems. The need to re-assess his major scenic material – wood - and move almost completely away from it is, therefore, his first panacea. Presently, wood which accounts for about 70% of his scene-building materials has not helped him to experiment with forms and concepts in the theatre in tandem with the new waves of ideas in the theatre.

To assist in pulling the scenic designer away from his doldrums, the alternative of different scenic materials that can permit effective re-use in order to reduce both financial problems and the issue of storage must be sought. These alternatives must be sought in both metal and plastic - preferably plastics. However, plastic that is most convenient in terms of lightness, durability, malleability and cost effectiveness is the least used in Nigerian theatre. Every household and pharmaceutical items, car accessories, etc. are presently made with plastics because of its fine and dependable qualities.

Metal is usually used in reduced quantity in scene building. Beside the use of metals as joinery materials, its use on stage is not popular because of its relative scarcity and weight. This view on metal, however, can be faulted as lightweight metals which are firm and durable are definitely a better choice than wood and almost as good a choice as plastics.

Metal can be melted or fused, hammered into thin sheets, or drawn into wires. Metals are elastic, malleable, ductile and are resistant to fracture or deformation and do not exhibit the limitations and difficulty seen in the high resin content carried by wood. Of the three forms of plastics (thermosets, elastomers and thermoplastics) thermoplastics is more adaptable to stage use because of its plasticity, re-usability and relative lightness. Thermoplastics which consist of polymers and monomers and can withstand many heating and cooling cycles are often most suitable for recycling.

Metal and Plastics are better materials where the method of re-use is to be adopted creatively, and where cost is to be reduced, without yet revealing the problems associated with construction and re-use. The other advantages inherent in these two media are seen in their ability to reduce the need for storage spaces and the problems associated with joinery, rigging and scenery painting. The method of 'creative re-use' coined by this study is known as polymorphism - a design heuristics that permits the adoption of media (metal or

plastic) by scenic designers in order to achieve geometric forms on the stage; forms that can be disengaged with ease and repositioned to denote other geometric scenic configurations. Though metal is considered to be equally adoptable in creating polymorphic set pieces, the better choice is plastic and is recommended for use in effectively explaining this concept.

## 6.2 POLYMORPHISM AND ASSOCIATED DESIGN CONCEPTS

The use of geometric shapes creatively is not peculiar to our concept on polymorphism. Theatrical conventions in the theatre have borrowed largely from trends in the Fine Arts where movements like Cubism and Constructivism are seen to break Naturalist forms into simple geometric shapes in order to emphasize the sensory properties of the arts over its imitative functions. While Russian born artist, Wassily Kandinsky, who is credited with producing the first purely abstract painting, was seen to have created several theatre pieces following geometric concepts, other early Russian Futurists and Suprematists produced stage settings reflecting modern machine culture and emphasizing, consistently, geometric forms and fragments of typography. In using flexible media, a simulation of basic shapes observable from external and internal environment is developed by breaking down small, medium and large objects into simple geometric shapes. In this approach that is tagged ‘polymorphic,’

pure forms, carried by simple geometric shapes as are visited in the Formalist theory of aesthetics and as are intrinsically contained in the varied but similar concepts of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde artists, are used to both convey external structures, fictive locales and abstract forms that are both suggestive and connotative of emotions. This approach is equally functional for the purpose of making body rests, supports, and definition of actors' movements and as purely aesthetic objects. When pure forms, seen in abstract geometric shapes, are used as set elements and pieces, our eyes and brains gets conditioned to the use to which they are put as the play unwinds. A chair, for instance, which consist of rectangular planes for back rest and weight-bearing while sitting, is equally composed of four thick vertical lines at adjacent positions to each other, positioned to achieve balance both for its structure and the weight it is bearing. Any other embellishment on this structure does not make it less a chair but rather particularizes its identity and reduces its suggestiveness for other uses. A table is much the same except for its broader or wider configurations. The stage wings, borders, cycloramas, and other stage elements like the flats, are objects which can be given simple geometric configurations as can be achieved with a chair, a settee, a cupboard, chest drawers, rails and balustrades, and large set objects like houses, trees and mountains. Geometric forms, when used in unfamiliar manner to create familiar forms or symbols, are attached with

domestic practical functions like assisting in sitting, moving, crouching or in holding or suspending items on stage. These functions on stage are readily accepted as temporary for the transient period the play is expected to last. These are accepted in these illusory periods as real whether or not they are recognised as belonging to objects to which their senses are familiar in the outside world. For the naturalist and realist designers, the look-alike approach which has globally been adopted is like a food which is over cooked and rubbed off of its enzymatic elements. It is in this respect that a theatre critic like Rose Collins is prompted to say that the constructivist setting which is an antithesis of the naturalist and realist setting refuses to display any decorative effects that would merely please the eyes (74). Realist and naturalistic scenery have led to excessive clutter of archaeologically authentic details on stage, and rather than conveying the true spirit of the play, they have provided mere superficial dressings. While these can be accepted for real life forms and real life situations outside of the theatre, these may not be accepted on the stages of our theatres which enshrine and project the arts. These, if done, would amount to sheer waste of time in Nigeria where so little is budgeted for the theatre and for set making. These would equally amount to an overt 'sentimentalization' of forms. Realism and naturalism are not acceptable because, like the action they complement, the set is equally a compressed representation of the actual thing.

The set design for Nigerian theatrical productions must suggest this compression carried by pure forms or basic geometric shapes. The additional advantage over any other concept of staging is seen in the fact that they are easy to construct, easy to use, and easy to dismantle and re-use. On stage, the most important use to which these will be put is seen in their ability to properly demarcate stage areas, mask unwanted elements away, define movement, and dominate or populate space as against being used predominantly as elements of aesthetic enjoyment. In the set for a play like Jesus Christ, Superstar, the set designer, John McAllister, skilfully creates horizontal levels which carry a completely linear and abstract rendition (artslynx Homepage) The supremacy of God is suggested by graduating levels of adroitly arranged levels of platforms which are further emphasized and 'hollified' by streaks and patterns of shadows cast on the stage. The set is a series of steps and platforms on a turntable. Downstage on either side is scaffolding towers that supports lighting and follow spots used on the actors. The first person on stage- Judas- is captured in the 'God' light on the top of the platforms. This is demonstrated by the two plates overleaf:





Plate X: Jesus Superstar - The modular integer in this set is made up of squares, rectangles, and triangles placed side by side so as to make interesting geometric meanings.

Source: [www.artslynx.com](http://www.artslynx.com)



Plate XI: Second view of Jesus Superstar: Set forms and appearance are altered by means of turn- tables that enhance the illusion of mobility in this production. Source: [www.artslynx.com](http://www.artslynx.com)

### 6.3 THE MODULAR CONCEPT OF POLYMORPHISM AND ITS APPLICABILITY ON THE THEATRE STAGE

Modular concepts have overt connections with geometry. A modular concept can be defined variously, but generally, a module or a modulus may be considered to be a component of a larger system, that operates within that system independently. Theories in modular concepts have been propounded in different fields of learning: in the computer sciences, modularism is a concept that has applications particularly in programming as well as the cognitive sciences in investigating the structure of mind. In computer engineering, theories bordering on modularism are responsible for the separate and distinct units of hardware and software that are used as components in a system. In electronics, modularism is captured by hardware sound generators. In algebra and in mathematics, modular concepts are used in defining vector spaces. On the World Wide Web, it is the major reference point behind the simplicity, workability, and speed carried by successful web pages. Today, we are not unaware of the fact that manufactured or factory built homes, made from pre-fabricated structures, are realized from concepts propelled by the flexibility offered in modularism. In the communications industries, theories of modularism have equally shown up in the production of newspapers, magazines and books. Modularity in architecture, as in any other field, is envisioned as a

standard unit of measurement: the part of a structure used as a standard by which the rest is proportioned; a self-contained part of something that can function on its own. Something is said to be modular when it is made of plug-in units which can be added together to make the system larger, improve the capabilities, or expand its size. The basis of constructive solid geometry is the description of complex shapes as a combination of simpler ones. Therefore, the fundamental requirements of modules are: a set of primitive shapes, and a method of describing the relationships between them. The primitives, such as square, circle, triangles rectangle are the revolutions that give solid and complex shapes.

The impact of the modular theory on the theatre stage has, however, not been felt as it has in both science and the applied sciences because, the stage set, like the dramatic action, has always existed to imitate things. However, theatre design concepts cannot be left out in the scientific push towards modularizing forms for ease of production, set handling and management as the advantages involved in unitizing an integer as this concept advocates cannot be overemphasized. Since the word ‘modular’ appears to have been over-used in design generally, the modular theory of the stage set as is envisioned in this study, is, for the convenience of this research, coined, “The Polymorphic Theory of Set Design”.

The word, ‘polymorphism’ as used in the context of this work is a term which consists of a prefix-‘poly’ and a suffix-‘morph’. ‘Poly’ presupposes that there are numerous parts with which a stage set can be constructed. The suffix ‘morph’ which suggest the process of changing shape, requires that these numerous simple parts which should be identified, must be capable of being joined creatively to create new complex shapes and forms on the stage. However, in the sciences this word denotes slightly different meanings: In biology, it suggests animal or plant with many forms. In chemistry, it is a chemical compound that has several crystalline forms. In biology, it is white blood cell whose nucleus is segmented into lobes. Polymorphism equally has other references to DNA and genetic sciences.

However, the polymorphic component as is envisioned in this study is akin to modular theories on design. Polymorphic components which are used in making a table for instance can be disengaged without any damage and be used for making a bed or a cupboard. A pillar for a house can be re-adapted to suit a balustrade for the same house. Conversely, polymorphic stage components which have been used in creating what appears like a Thrust Stage can be modulated to simulate a semi-circular stage. With proposed set making materials in plastic, this design concept which at first glance appears complex and difficult to actualize can be modularized in particular numbers, shapes and

measurements to ease comprehension and practicability. To a large extent, **the difference between modularity of forms and polymorphism in forms in this study is that modular elements are often composed to create similar integer while unit components in a complex polymorphic form can be used to recompose an entirely new integer.**

In the prototype design carried by the polymorphic stage, any stage meant for dramatic or non-dramatic performances is designed to carry a limitless amount of units of geometric shapes that can be morphed together to create a wide spectrum of scenic composition. In this proposition, there can be different stage sizes. For the convenience of this work, this can be standardized as three, each with different volumes or mass of objects on stage. The three basic different stage sizes can be categorized into small scale stages suited for very small theatres, children theatres and itinerant theatres where weight and bulk are a problem; relatively big theatres where performers' numbers create the necessity for extended sizes of the floor, and very big or professional theatres where very large spaces are required for performances and where a wide variety of forms are needed for serious design experimentations and possibilities. In these models, the four modules of geometric shapes adoptable are Squares (Cubes), Rectangles (Cuboids), Triangles (Wedges), and Circles (Cylinders). These are considered to be the most common and basic of all

geometric shapes that when used together, can generate complex and interesting forms. However, the most primitive of these four modules are the squares and the triangles which can join to equally create rectangles and circles and a large number of complex shapes. Overleaf are a set of simple modules which are morphed together to create interesting shapes.

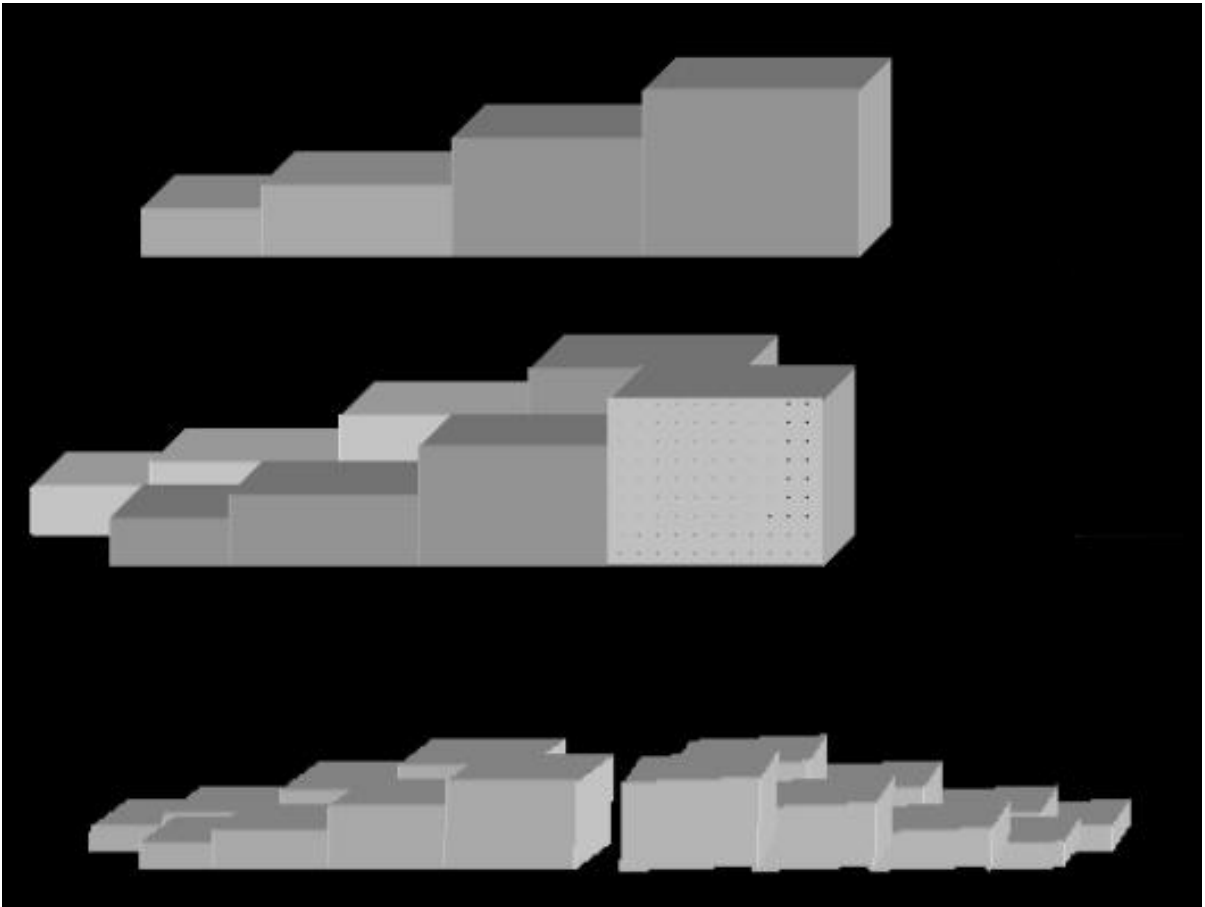


Figure 43. Cuboid Geometric Shapes: This illustration shows the combined rendering of ‘Cuboid’ geometric shapes from simple combinations to integrated and complex combinations from the uppermost module to the lowest.



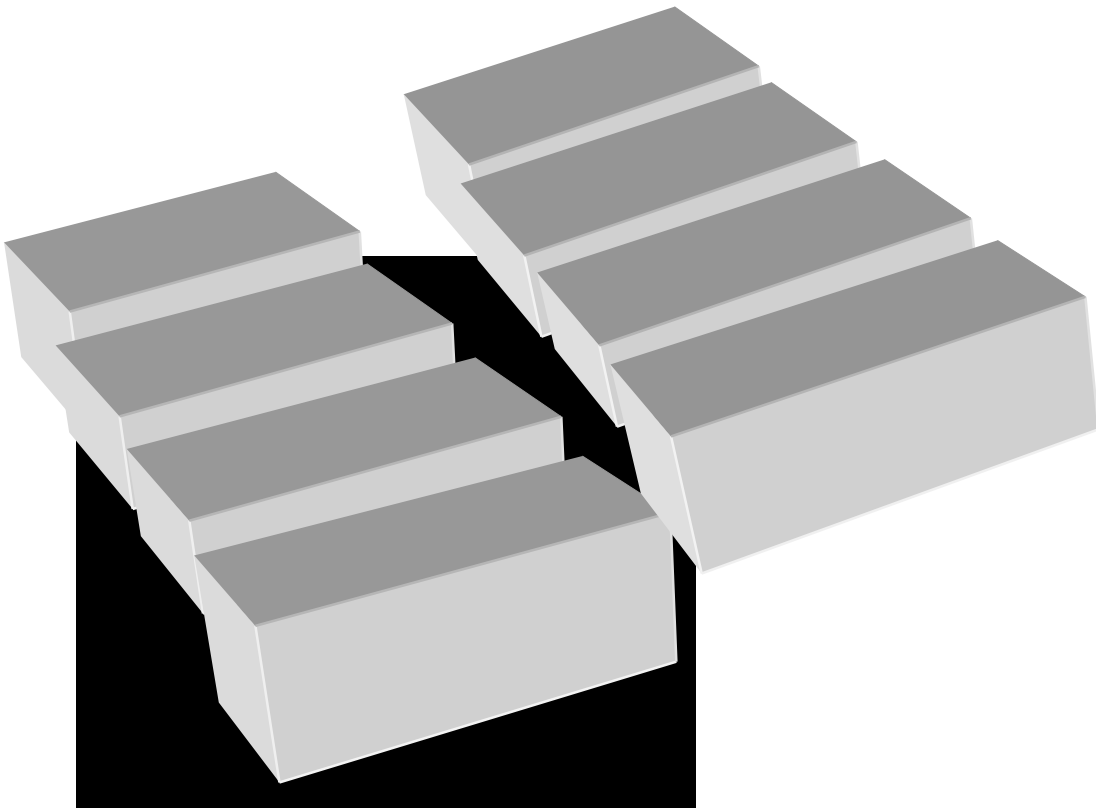


Figure 44: Rectangular Modules: Two or more sets of rectangle modules can be morphed together to create a stage floor.

Joinery method for the units of modules can be of grooved gutters along the edges of the components, cast in a manner as to allow two components of the same characteristics to be connected by slight pressure when joinery is required to create a horizontal side increment. The other option is to create interlocking structures underneath all components that can equally permit them holding firmly unto each other when joinery is required to create vertical increment in height. Where additional firmness is required because of excessive stage movement, the grooves can be deeper and the interlocking protrusions made longer. The other option is to devise a means of screwing the units together by means of metal bolts and nuts. These components, held together by these joinery components, can be formed in single moulds of plastics which are painted, cleaned and repainted over and over again with either oil based or water-based paint without affecting the structures and strength of the base plastic. With this form of joinery envisioned, cost and time problems encountered during construction can be drastically reduced. Equally connected to the solution for joinery is that of set rigging, set striking and disengagement and of weight storage and maintenance which are readily resolved.

To achieve certain subjective peculiarities in form and design, the base forms of the Polymorphic modules can be altered by rendering their surfaces with fabric or texture creating particles like sand and saw-dust.

#### 6.4 RECAST OF PRODUCTIONS IN POLYMORPHIC SCENERY

In considering the appropriate set forms for polymorphic concept of scenery, the set in ...Horseman is re-listed, appropriately categorised, and re-rendered. Using the minimalist approach to design, the classification made below is necessary in order to remove elements which are considered extraneous. These extraneous elements are considered “decorations” which are inconsequential to effective design activities and are thus dropped from the listing. By this action the set for ...Horseman is stripped down to its essential elements in ensuring that “more is achieved with less” In order to free the new scenery of ...Horseman from the ballasts of objectivity, certain other areas of its former set which revealed easily recognisable or realistic forms are re-rendered as simple geometric shapes. In this new approach to design, the constructivist elements like steps and platforms are even more emphasized. These elements are meant for variegation of stage levels, population of stage spaces, and directions to actors’ movements. Recognisable elements like Pilkings apartment and the painting used for the backstage wall is fragmented geometrically into what is regarded as modularly structured sets morphed together to create partition between the stage and back stage. What is noteworthy and exciting about this

polymorphic design, as is illustrated below, is that each unit of geometric component or module represented by for instance a cuboid or rectangle is used for constructing what is traditionally represented by wooden flats through a simple process of impermanent and detachable joinery from interlocking ends on its sides, tops or frontispiece. The concept of futurism, suprematism, minimalism and constructivism are brought to bear upon an evolving concept, here, which depends more on creativity, originality and intuition than simple replication.

While a single geometric module like rectangles (cuboid) can be used exclusively on its own, as is seen in the new set for ...Horseman, it can be equally combined with say, Triangles (wedges), to achieve more complex forms. The entire rectangular components can be ungrouped and regrouped differently to produce a modified set for any of the other productions. The first illustration below is a ground plan for ...Horseman which is further developed in 3 dimensionality as are captured by successive illustrations.

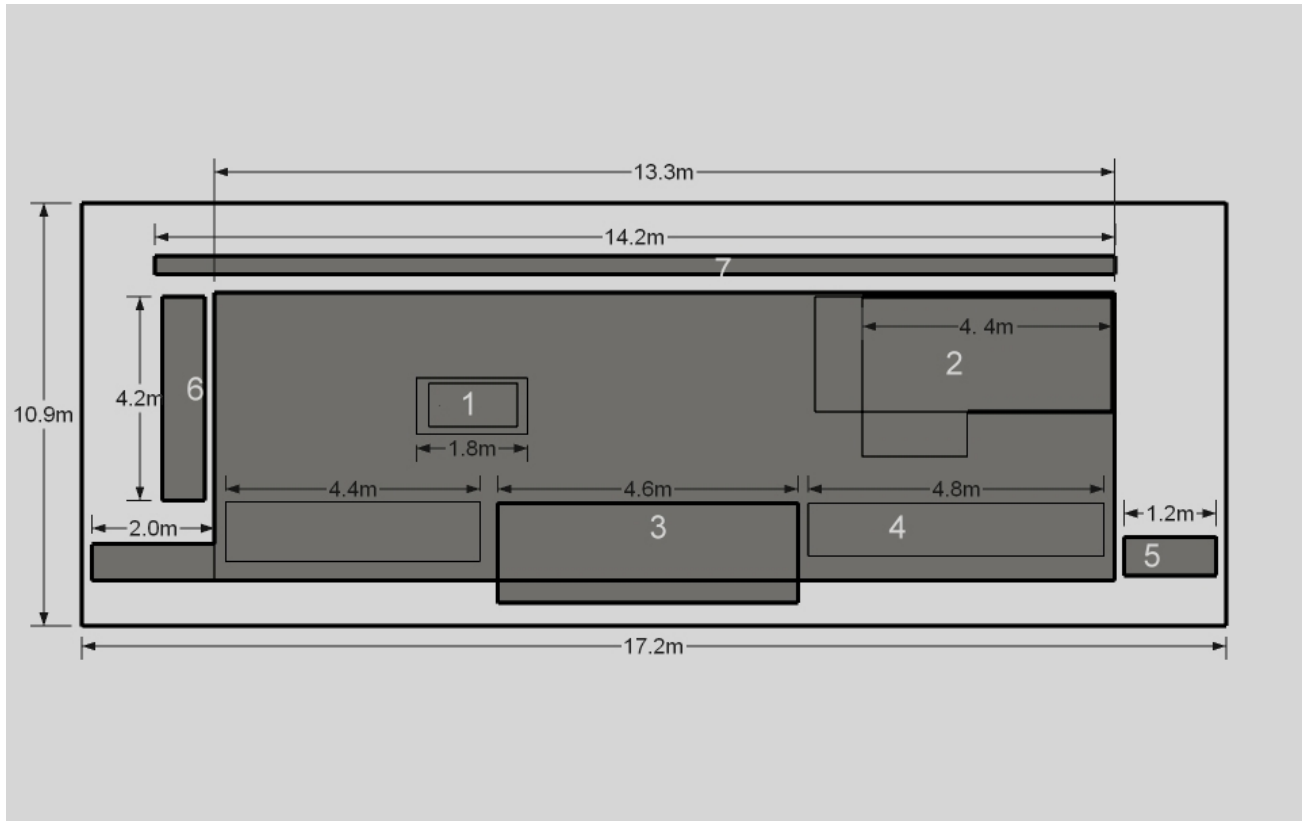


Figure 45: New Ground Plan for ...Horseman

Keys to Figure 45

1. Elesin Oba's prison
2. Pilking's apartment
3. Platform
4. platform
5. Steps
6. Cubicle

## 7. Back stage wall

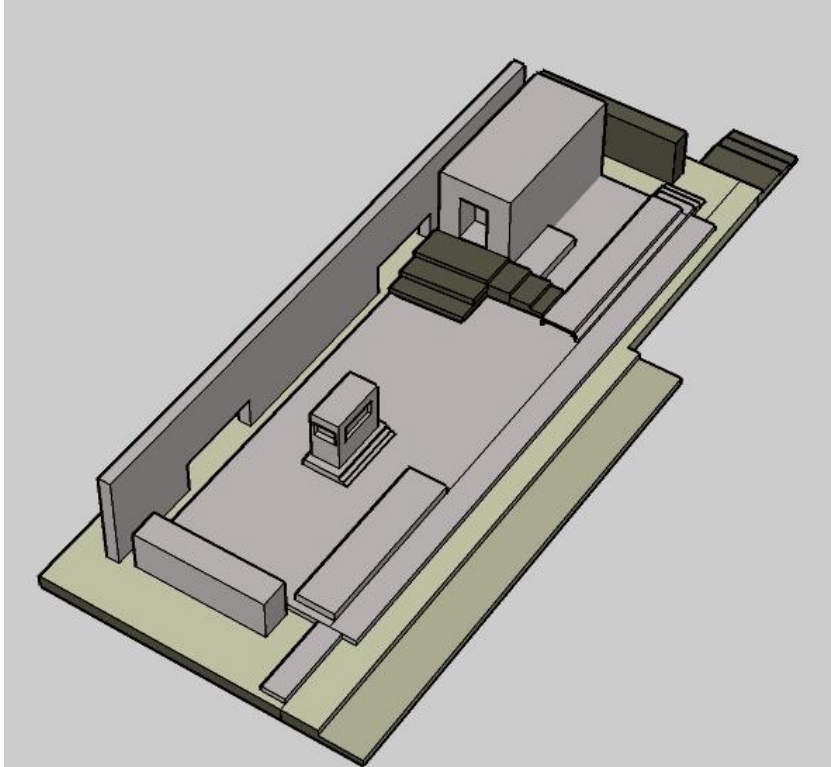


Figure 46: 3D Projection: Bird's Eye View

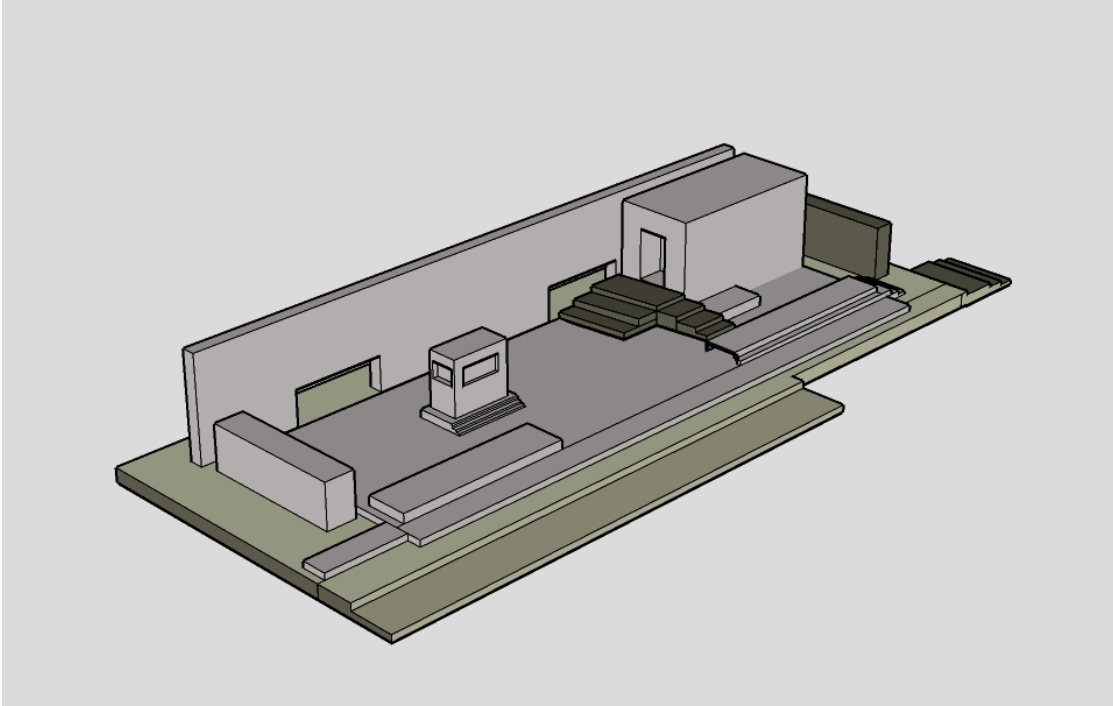


Figure 47: 3D projection from Left Side Axonometric View

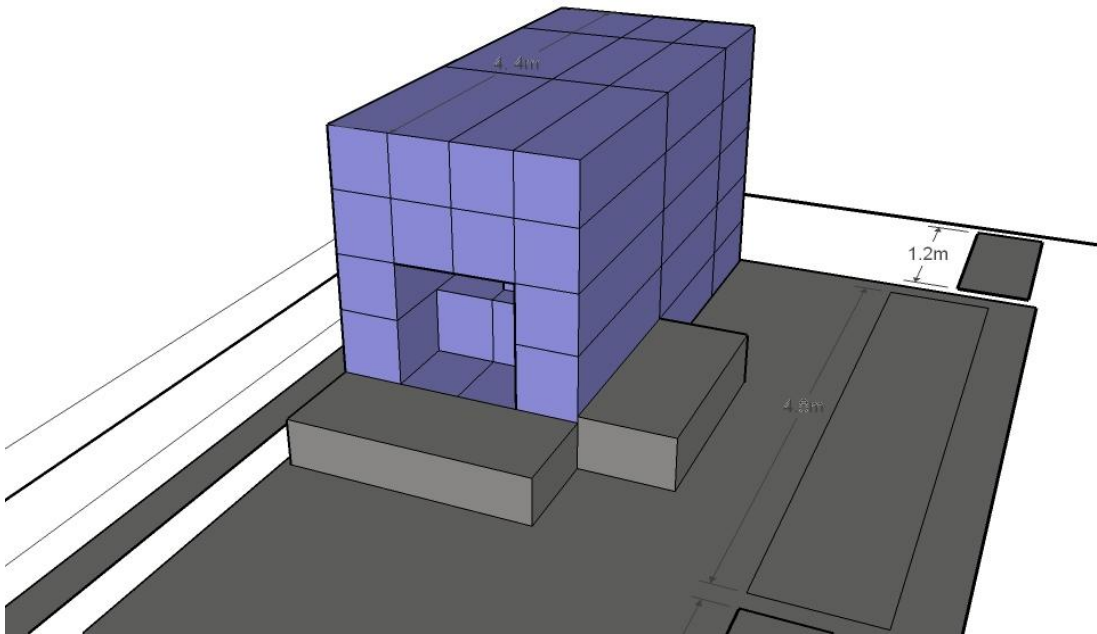


Figure 48: Illustration of Polymorphic Forms for Pilking's Apartment. This illustration shows the Pilking's apartment in perspective projection from upstage left of the ground plan. The entire integer with which this modular structure is made is achieved from a combination of a single unit of rectangular blocks from its vertical and horizontal axes.



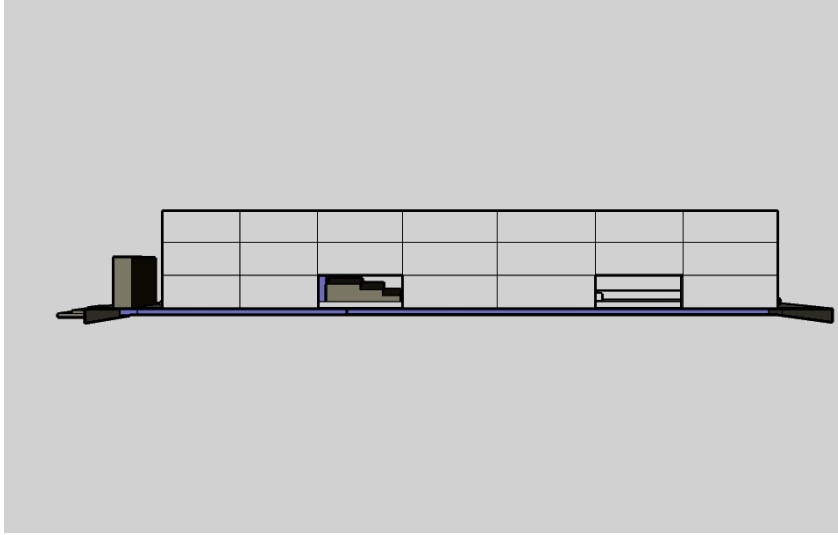


Figure 49: Back side Elevation - This elevation shows the back stage walls built with series of modular units of rectangular plastic blocks. When these blocks are 8ft wide by 4ft high for instance, the height of this backstage wall will be 12ft (3.6m) using 3 units and multiplying by 3. The entire length will be 84ft. (25.4m) using 7 units and multiplying by 7.

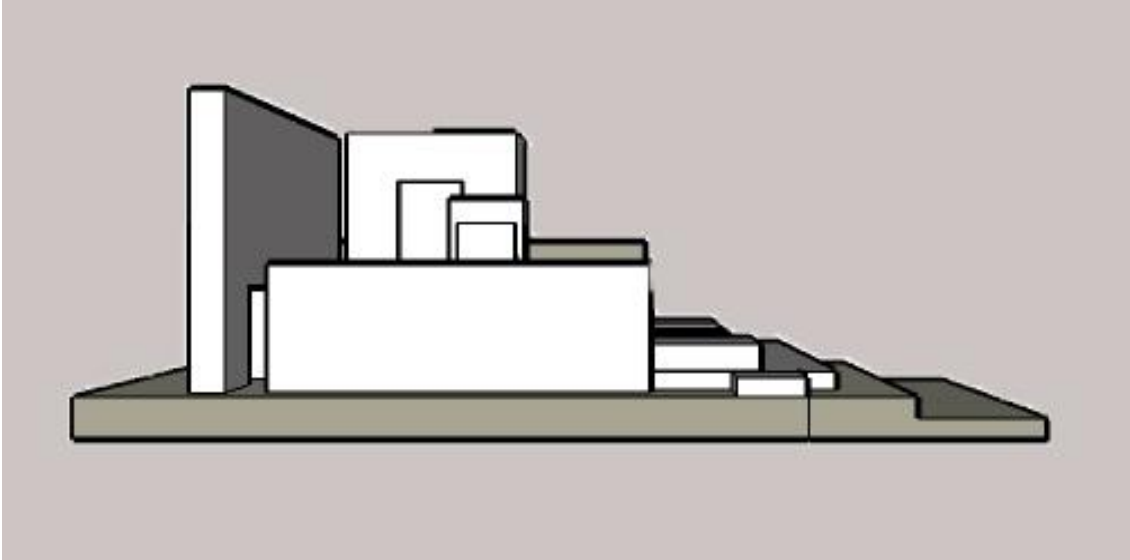


Figure 50: Left Side Elevation of Set for...Horseman

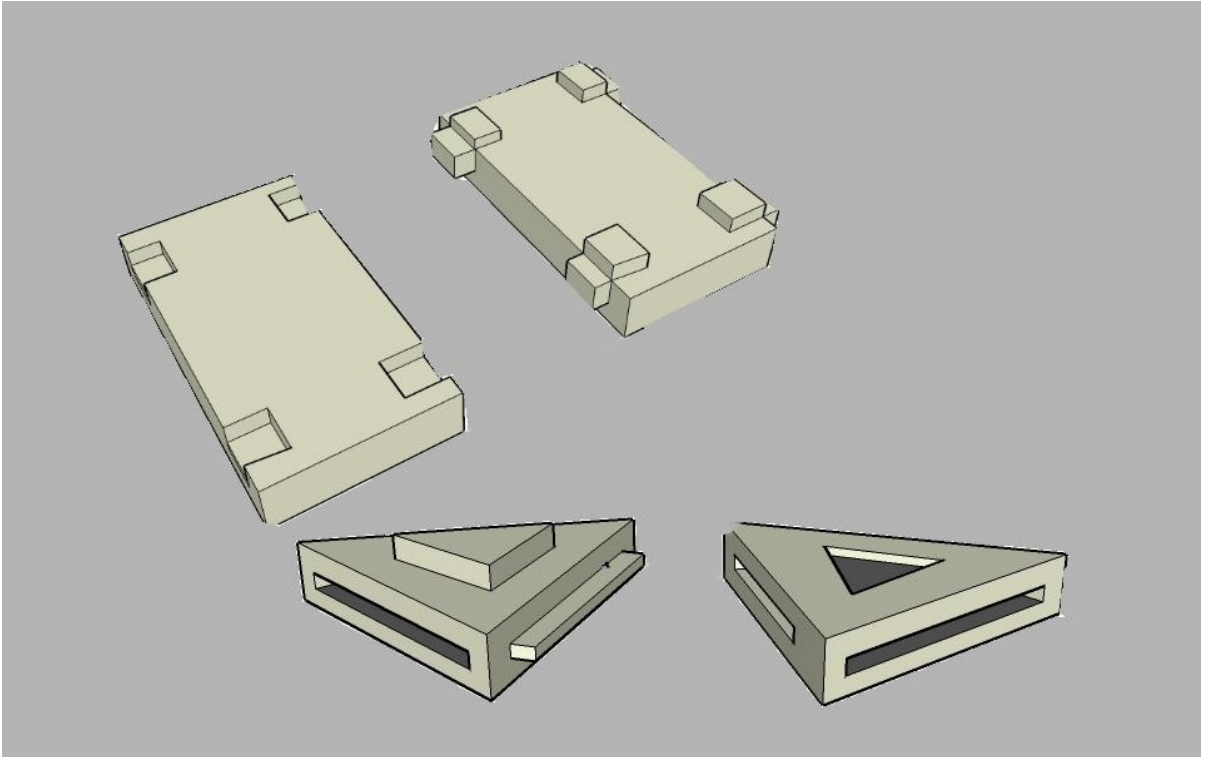


Figure 51: Joinery Formats in Polymorphic Sets (Cuboids and Wedges)

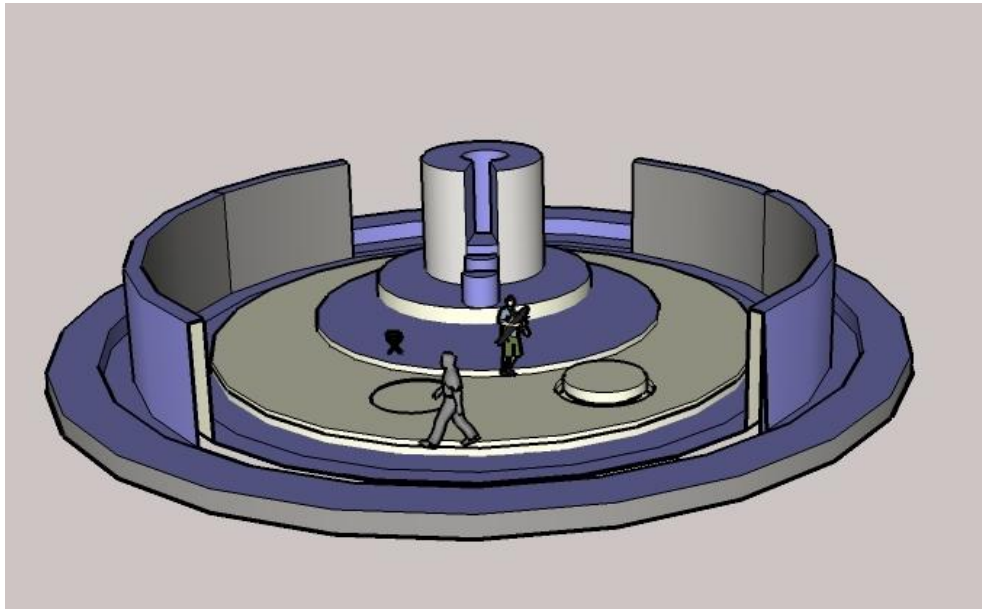


Figure 52: Polymorphic Concept with Circular Modules. (Cylinder)

## CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION

## 7.1 SUMMARY OF THESIS

Modern contemporary set design culture in the Nigerian theatre has been greatly affected by the inherent technical inadequacies carried from the antecedent university set design conventions. A major term associated with these problems surfaces itself in ‘stereotypism’: a trend that results from continuously re-using the same stage set stocks for different productions. A major factor responsible for this problem is the use of a medium, wood, that suffers atmospheric and joinery problems. Narrowing itself into the areas of scenery, this thesis studies the scenic conventions in contemporary Nigerian theatres as are seen in the set design forms and concepts in the Cinema Hall 2 of the National Theatre of Nigeria from 1995 - 2001. This thesis uses the historical research methodology and adopts for critical study, five plays of the National Troupe of Nigeria, namely, Death and the King’s Horseman, The Concubine, Trials of Oba Ovonramwen, Attahiru and Song of a Goat .

Chapter Two is designed to review literature in the area of design and technical theatre: Design refers to planned and organized artistic use of the elements and principles of art to bring about some predetermined visual statements from

which there may also be accidental or unexpected results. This is what informs Kenneth Cameron and Patti Gillespie definition of design when they contend that, “Good design is daring: it tries new technologies, avoids old solutions, and chances failure.” Whatever the type of design dispensation, however, to reach good design requires that the designer uses the visual language of design in creating his design works.

However, design works are equally seen in the theatre and in different performance arts which consider design as an indispensable arm of performance and entertainment productions. Theatre design and technology in the world today, by a foundation of traditional theatre aesthetics, cover the art, technique, craft and mechanics of stage scenography and technology. This definition falls under what could be divided into scenery, properties, lighting, costume and make-up, theatre sound and, in fact, theatre architecture. Parker and Smith define scene design as the area in the modern theatre which is primarily concerned with the total visual effect of a dramatic performance.

A major school of thought that has influenced modern theatre, today, is known as constructivism. The creative liberty envisioned in constructivism prevents the scenic artist from the arduous task of creating stage sets exclusively for particular plays and periods, but rather nurtures concepts that assist in creating forms and structures that can permit their permutation as

set stocks that can be adapted for use in any production. The constructivist designer in the theatre fashions his scenic solids after images that make them part of permanent stage machinery, adaptable through manipulations by him. The constructivist concept is largely complemented by the two most important theoreticians and designers of the non-illusionist movement, Adolph Appia and Edward Gordon Craig.

Designers and design concepts in the theatre have been largely influenced by different aesthetic schools and theories. Graham Woodruff regards Craig as the most influential advocate of symbolism, while Simonson thinks Appia freed the theatre's creative possibilities from the outward bonds of realism. While Craig's and Appia's theatres connote the aesthetics of the formalist school where abstract outlines, forms, colours, and lighting are a means of conveying atmosphere, the contemporary American, Richard Finkelstein appears to believe in what David Belasco's concept evokes: photographic realism. What, therefore, are these aesthetic theories and how do they approximate the design concepts carried by designers in the theatre? While the Imitationalist school is particularly insistent on verisimilitude, the Expressionist school is interested in ensuring that the mind of the artist or designer is effectively expressed while the Formalist aesthetic criteria insist on 'significant form' which is contained in the formal elements of art. While all the Schools are tended towards similar and

overlapping goals, their most important concern is seen in their strong desire for the principles: Harmony, Rhythm and Symmetry.

In designing, the scenic designer utilizes two basic types of units: standing units, ground row, and hanging units. The basic standing unit is the flat, made of light wood over which either plywood, canvas or muslin has been stretched. Griffith affirms that flats are the most fundamental unit of scenery in the theatre accounting for about three quarter of constructed scenery. The different types of flats include the door flat, the window flat, and arch flats. There are basically two types of scenery: 2-dimensional and 3-dimensional scenery. What, therefore, are the materials by which these sceneries are made?

Millet and Storey consider wood to be the most adaptable and versatile of materials that have long and honorable history in the service of mankind. Today, in spite of technological advancement and competition from metals, plastics, cement, and other materials, wood maintains a place in most of its traditional roles, and its serviceability is expanding through new uses. Metals are chemical elements that usually have shiny surfaces and generally a good conductor of heat and electricity. They can be melted or fused, hammered into thin sheets, or drawn into wires.

Plastics are the third major materials used by modern designers today. They are materials that are capable of being modeled or shaped. Plastics are



usually divided into thermosets, elastomers and thermoplastics. Thermoplastics constitute an important class of synthetic material used increasingly in a variety of applications including the theatre.

Chapter Three is titled, “The National Theatre of Nigeria, The National Troupe of Nigeria and The Cinema Hall 2”. The functions of the National Theatre as a parastatal are carried in The National Theatre of Nigeria and The National Troupe of Nigeria Board Act, CAP. 80; Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The National Troupe of Nigeria came into being with Nigeria launching its own cultural policy in 1988. The National Troupe was created to help project Nigeria’s image abroad, celebrate Nigeria's Cultural heritage and help achieve the practical fulfillment of the signed Cultural exchange agreement between Nigeria and other countries and to achieve high artistic productions specifically designed for national and international tours.

The Cinema Hall 2 is the traditional place of performance of the National Troupe of Nigeria. The hall is a hybrid proscenium setting originally meant for non-dramatic entertainment activities. It was later adapted for the National Troupe’s performance following the problems associated with the usage of the Main Bowl

In chapter Four, works of three Nigerian set designers are featured and analyzed. They are, namely:

1. Death and the King's Horseman (1995). Set, designed by Biodun Abe.
2. The Concubine (1998). Set, designed by Hilary Elemi.
3. The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen (2000). Set, designed by Sunbo Marinho.

4. Attahiru (2000). Set was designed by Hilary Elemi.

5. Song of a Goat (2001). Set , designed by Biodun Abe.

Each of the productions' design media, design concepts, construction techniques, joinery methods and surface renderings are presented for analyses in Chapter Five.

In Chapter Five, cognizance is taken of the artistic and dramatic variables from which the design forms and concepts are created by the first designer, Biodun Abe, the second, Sunbo Marinho, and the third, Hillary Elemi, whose works are presented in chapter Four. From our analysis it is discovered that the technical drawbacks identified in our problems of study have been largely reflected in the scenic practices put up in the Cinema Hall 2.

Chapter Six is titled, 'Discussion.' This chapter presents and studies the implications from our analysis and findings in the previous chapter. Though

wooden flats can still be used to satisfactorily produce sets for effectively funded dramatic productions, there is still the need to avert certain problems associated with its use by embracing a new material of scenery, plastics, and a new design concept carried in modular design heuristics. In the prototype design heuristics carried by 'polymorphism', any stage meant for dramatic or non-dramatic performances is designed to carry a limitless amount of units of geometric shapes that can be morphed together to create a wide spectrum of scenic composition.

The last chapter of this thesis is titled, "Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation". It concludes on the overall importance of the medium of plastic and the need to adopt a paradigm shift - The advantages involved with designing using plastics in Nigeria, however, far outweigh the disadvantages. As for the design approach, the postulations carried in the polymorphic concept of set design is predicated on both abstract theories of art, on constructivist concepts and on particularly, formalist theory of aesthetics.

## 7.2 OBSERVATIONS

Despite the seemingly overwhelming advantages that the polymorphic set, built with plastics, might have over other forms of sets in the theatre, there are certain problems that might arise from its use:

1. Construction with plastics usually requires both manual and industrial processes in the actualisation of solid components for set. The plastic company which has grown very large in Europe and America is still at its seedling stage in Nigeria. While there are about 6,000 plastic companies in the United States alone, Nigeria can only boast of not more than thirty. While the theatre profession cannot afford to embark on using manual means in producing plastic set components for the stage because of the burden of work involved, finesse and precision will equally not be achieved. Resorting to industrial production will however mean commercial considerations which require the creation and use of mechanized processes such as Compression Molding, Transfer Molding, Injection and Blow Molding. This will equally require the complimentary mechanized processes seen in extruders, laminators and coaters which are only necessarily used in producing end products that are of commercial quantities and therefore profitable. This is where the problem lies in creating moulds for scenery in the Nigerian theatre where adequate budgeting for set is still considered as unnecessary. Another problem envisaged in a thermoplastic set

carried by polymorphic design heuristics is the impossibility of creating amorphous forms on the stage because of its geometric nature. For instance, these structures cannot replace the function of fabrics on stage, hence its disadvantage in creating a scenic structure like cycloramas and curtains. It cannot effectively create certain mould structures like mountains with all their topography, trees, hedges and grasses.

**Table 9.** Major Plastic Companies in Nigeria

NAMES	ADDRESSES
Dynamic Industries Ltd.	6, Obasa Rd. Ikeja, Lagos.
Edema Petrochemical Company.	Ubeji, Warri
Eleme Petrochemical Company Ltd.	Port Harcourt
Geepee Industries Ltd.	38 Abeokuta Motor Road, Otta.
Cell Plast Industries Ltd.	27a Fatai Atere Way, Matori Industries Estate, Lagos
Boulos Enterprises Ltd.	Plot 10, Block D, Ogba Industrial Scheme, Acme Road, Ikeja Lagos

Despite all its geometric compositeness, a highly personal and adaptive approach is necessary in including certain other components which are equally considered to be complimentary to the basic components. These include smaller structural components like doors, arches and windows. However, in the polymorphic design heuristics, these are considered to be details that are extraneous and inconsequential to set that are abstract, suggestive, or even symbolic. To achieve subjective peculiarities in these abstract forms, the geometric components can be slightly altered, as are aforementioned, by rendering their surfaces with fabric or any texture creating particles.

The entire position carried by the polymorphic concept of set design is therefore predicated on both abstract theories of art, on the constructivist theory of set making and on particularly the formalist theory of aesthetics that weave their theoretical and technical constructs around the generic, pervasive and universal qualities inherent in the emotion carrying properties of lines, shapes, forms, space and colour. This is because these elements which are considered to be ‘significant forms’ have quality common to all works of visual arts. In corroborating this very important statement we must, here, recall again the urgent statement by Clive Bell that it is the mark of great art that its appeal is universal and eternal. In the purely geometric abstract set as in the polymorphic set, Bell believes in his metaphysical hypothesis of art and aesthetics, that

instead of recognising the accidental or conditioned importance of the imitationalist form, we become aware of its essential reality, of the God in everything, of the universal in the particular and of the all pervading rhythm (9). This equally brings to mind the declaration by Satre when he posits that a work of art is a symbol which does not symbolise anything other than itself but which produces in its own structural form the structure or pattern of feeling or emotion (19).

To a large extent, these qualities aforementioned above are amply demonstrated by the polymorphic staging forms. The polymorphic staging structures go beyond the commonality of stereotypes and seek after the manifold modularity of a computer. Like the computer of today, the polymorphic Stage is expandable, adaptable, and mutable. The physical look of this staging form can only be imagined from what is evoked by the squares, cubes, rectangles, ramp, and the abstract mechanical structures of a constructivist set. It can be seen to be a complex assemblage of units of geometric boxes structured together to assume a complexity of shapes by their analogous adjoining elements. The structures of the Polymorphic Stage can be manipulated to create a semblance of the Picture Frame and the Thrust in any varied or adapted manner. The stage floor consists of units of grafted squares, boxes or cubes arranged together, re-constructible to assume a circular, semi-



circular or rectangular shape. It can be arranged curvilinear or rectilinearly in a horizontal or vertical manner. Because of its fluid re-constructible character, this contemplated form of staging will not be christened, African, European, Oriental or American. It can rather be used to achieve staging forms associated with different cultures. This very flexible staging approach can be envisioned in the Revolving Stage, The Wagon stage, The Sliding Stage, and The Trestle Stage.

Though the polymorphic Stage stands far from any staging conventions or dramatic schools, it can equally at will lend support to any of these as its structured but flexible elements can be used to create or suggest any dramatic or production style. It can go beyond this dimension to create peculiar locales for different plays. The Polymorphic Stage has the singular and rare capability of creating a multifarious staging form never mentioned before. Woodruff opines on this: “Designers work nowadays on a wide variety of production, from the dramatic to operatic and ballet repertoire; and each show demands a fresh and original approach” (107). The instrument of the Polymorphic Stage concerns itself with the stage rather than with the play “as no matter whether the play is comedy, tragedy, satire, or fantasy, the designer is supposed to bring into the stage, the result of careful research...” (Woodruff, 107).

## 7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.2.1 Merchandising the Theatre

A major drawback for modern theatre in contemporary Nigeria is the overt intellectualism that occasions drama making. In the National Troupe of Nigeria and State Councils where sustenance of drama is maintained by the government, the need to infuse the spirit of commercialisation into their management setup is lacking because, as it were, dramatic activities which are mainly woven around dance and mime are geared towards entertaining government officials and visitors. The recent move by the Nigerian Government to commercialize this theatre is borne out of the necessity to give limbs to the theatre by infusing the spirit of commerce into it. The idea of subsidizing the theatre is not appealing as what we appear to have been concerned about is ‘subsidizing’ when the Nigerian government should be ‘investing’ in it. When we subsidize something, we give it money to get it sustained; when we invest, we give it money to grow. The arts and theatre in particular cannot afford to take a backseat position in the scramble by different specialisation for recognition and financial power. Financial power can only therefore be gotten through proper merchandising rather than continuous dependence on the government for sustenance. Today, the electronic media of radio, television and film are amongst the biggest money spinning areas in the world, impacting

significantly on the communication, entertainment and advertising industries. The stage gave birth to television and to film and video. If the stage must continue to exist, it must make itself more relevant, like the movie industry in today's bustling commercial world. While theatre houses must be established by every state and local government, the federal government must equally create a theatre in every state to compliment the National Theatre at the centre. However the justification for their existence must equally be predicated on their ability to bring financial returns needed for advancing rather than sustaining themselves. These theatres must be allowed to prove their marketability and viability in a world where services are offered based on intensive research, advertisement and structured marketing. It is the opinion of this researcher that the stage play, if researched, packaged, advertised and properly marketed, will become more relevant and self sustaining than it is today.

With the hope of commercial theatres thriving, and with profit making in mind, the problem of effective scenery funding and experimentation will not be a problem. While it is suggested that the abstract set, as is envisioned in the polymorphic concept, will suite any theatre form, commercializing our theatres could equally make it possible for any form of set to be realised when the constant problem of funding is effaced by the new penchant and drive for profit making. Contemporary Nigerian theatres have the capabilities and potential for

money making as theatre possesses a certain magic, a certain rare quality that is incapable of realisation in the electronic media. It is with the recapitulation of these profound qualities of theatre in mind and the need for merchandising it, that the succinct expression by Jones is carried: “the only theatre worth saving, the only theatre worth having is a theatre motion picture cannot touch” (Jones, 32).

### 7.2.2 Adequate Technical Training

Considering that the scenic background is the largest and most obvious visual element that supports the spoken word in the theatre, and considering that the onus of creating this total visual effect is in the hand of the scenic designer, the need to ensure proper and adequate technical and artistic training cannot be over-emphasized. To be a creative artist in the theatre the set designer must be talented and articulate in the knowledge and manipulation of line, colour and form so as to be able to bring meaning and visual significance to the stage picture. Borrowing from the strong recommendation of Parker and Smith, “the designer can only achieve this through his imaginative or creative qualities, backed by training in design, drawing or painting techniques.” In ensuring that this is achieved, there is the need to re-visit theatre arts curriculum in our

tertiary institution. This is necessary to ensure that the course prerequisites needed for extensive design skill acquisition are effectively taught.

### 7.2.3 Cinema Hall 2 Restructuring

For proper space management considerations, the width of the Cinema Hall 2 which is rather too large for effective dramatic performances should be reduced from the wings or sides to give a little more emphasis to sets and to enable their presence be of more importance than they presently are. Considering that true realism or naturalism on stage is difficult to achieve, a reduction of this space from the sides will mean a reduction in the total number of sets often needed to populate the acting stage space and avoid the feeling of emptiness, poverty and agoraphobia normally brought about by large spaces with very few or no structures.

A reduction in the width of the Cinema Hall 2 must give way to the creation of masked stage spaces necessary for keeping sets not immediately in use for the purpose of wheeling them onto the acting spaces or of wheeling used and unneeded ones out of sight. However, when the width of the stage is reduced the rectangularity is equally reduced. This can be aided by the extension of the down stage area by creating an apron that will help to accommodate the concept of a turn table stage by which sets, which are

definitely light, can be changed through rotation, by manual or mechanised means. This will mean that the designers in the Cinema Hall 2 must seek means by which visible forms, like the actors on stage, are seen to mutate into other forms. This implies that the set designers generally in Nigeria, as with other developed countries, must grab the opportunities offered by technology and allow their forms and concepts in set design heuristics be affected by this technology.

## 7.4 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

1.) This study has contributed to knowledge in several ways listed below:

It has given credence to the manifestoes of the constructivist approach to set design, thereby strengthening the apperceptions carried by stage designers on constructivist staging and the abstract set in general.

2.) This work goes beyond the shores of constructivism to evolve a new concept in set design heuristics called polymorphism. The striking similarity of the concept with Constructivism is not to be seen to weaken the strength of this work and its contribution to knowledge. This is because different discoveries in the world and particularly in the creative arts are equally made from other people's discoveries as are evidenced from the overt similarities in form and ideation. On set designing, for instance, the Revolving Stage, credited to Piscator, derives from the use of three-dimensional sets by Jessner. The concept of constructivism on stage discovered by Meyerhold got much of its ideas from Picasso's Cubism which was in turn a regurgitation of African spiritual consciousness manifest in her three-dimensional art objects. In the field of acting, Brecht's insistence on the actor demonstrating through the physical disposition of the body toward what is happening is a derivative of Meyerhold's acting techniques. The clearest of Brecht's alienation devices - the projection of captions, derives from Piscator's jotter screens and film captions. This

researcher has adopted the constructivist concept of Meyerhold, Tairov, Pevsner, Gabo, and of proponents like Craig, Appia, Wolfe, Simonson and Sean Kenny to advocate for a more flexible dimension for this concept and a better material for representing it.

3.) This research work has found relevance in the area of plastics on which it emphasizes its increased usefulness and indispensability for making sets and reducing problems associated with its construction in our Nigerian theatres. However the polymorphic concept in set making distinguishes itself from the constructivist practices where permanent joineries are made on set pieces by advocating the adoption of joinery methods that are not nail and glue dependent but yet strong and reliable, through the use of male and female interlocking ends, or bolts and nuts.

4.) A major research in the area of set design has never been carried out on NTN and other contemporary Nigerian productions as stage design is grossly under researched and relatively unpracticed in Nigeria. Through this research work, knowledge is made of the status of set design in contemporary Nigerian theatres: knowledge which has, hitherto, been obfuscated with guesswork.



## 7.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As recommendations against the problems involved with production set media and design concepts, this researcher has endorsed plastic media and a paradigm shift to modular design theories, but has, however, not been able to pursue a modus-operadi for effectively demonstrating this and for use in instructional purposes. In this direction, areas for further research are proposed in two areas immediately related to it, and, in the area of light which is not so distant from it:

1. Plastics and Modular Design Set Productions for the African Theatre – Mechanics of Adaptability. (How can this design concept be realized on stage and what will be the methodology for creating and teaching it?)

2. Stage Machines and Kinetic Elements for the Polymorphic Stage Set.

(Today, it is utterly unthinkable to envision a theatre culture that is not open to science in an age of adventure and experiment. In order to initiate movement of and in the polymorphic components, whether in a single unit, a closely fitted group of module, or in a complex integer, how can small and large stage remotely controlled machines be integrated into these elements in order to initiate slow or swift movements for scene changes, object mutations, or for special effects?)

3. Adopting Solar Lighting in Nigerian University Theatres: A case for Daytime Drama Productions. (Considering that acting workshops and production courses are meant to be taught alongside their technical counterparts, set, light and costume, and usually in daytime, how can these exercises be effectively achieved in precarious electric power situations as are found in Africa?)

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