

UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

“LET US PLAY”

An Inaugural Lecture

By

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fta, fsonta, hsonta, fdgn, fnal

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ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

2.45 pm. Guests are seated

3.00 pm. Academic Procession begins

The Procession shall enter the CBN Centre of Excellence auditorium, University Park, and the Congregation shall stand as the Procession enters the hall in the following order:

Academic Officer

Professors

Deans of Faculties/School

Dean, School of Graduate Studies

Provost, College of Health Sciences

Lecturer

University Librarian

Registrar

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Development

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic

Deputy Vice Chancellor, Administration

Vice Chancellor

After the Vice Chancellor has ascended the dais, the Congregation shall remain standing for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem.

The Congregation shall thereafter resume their seats.

THE VICE CHANCELLOR'S OPENING REMARKS.

The Registrar shall rise, cap, invite the Vice Chancellor to make his opening remarks and introduce the Lecturer.

The Lecturer shall remain standing during the Introduction.

THE INAUGURAL LECTURE

The Lecturer shall step on the rostrum, cap and deliver his Inaugural Lecture. After the lecture, he shall step towards the Vice Chancellor, cap and deliver a copy of the Inaugural Lecture to the Vice Chancellor and resume his seat. The Vice Chancellor shall present the document to the Registrar.

CLOSING

The Registrar shall rise, cap and invite the Vice Chancellor to make his Closing Remarks.

The Vice Chancellor's Closing Remarks.

The Vice Chancellor shall then rise, cap and make his Closing Remarks. The Congregation shall rise for the University of Port Harcourt Anthem and remain standing as the Academic [Honour] Procession retreats in the following order:

Vice Chancellor
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Administration
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Development
Registrar
University Librarian
Lecturer
Provost, College of Health Sciences
Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Deans of Faculties/School
Professors
Academic Officer

PROTOCOL

- ❖ The Vice Chancellor
- ❖ Previous Vice Chancellors
- ❖ Deputy Vice Chancellors [Admin.; Acad.; and R&D]
- ❖ Previous Deputy Vice Chancellors
- ❖ Visiting Vice Chancellors
- ❖ Members of the Governing Council
- ❖ Registrar and other Principal Officers of the University
- ❖ Provost, College of Health Sciences
- ❖ Dean, Graduate School
- ❖ Dean, Faculty of Education
- ❖ Deans of other Faculties
- ❖ Head, Department of Health Promotion, Environmental & Safety Education
- ❖ Heads of other Departments
- ❖ Distinguished Professors
- ❖ Directors of Institutes and Centres
- ❖ Visiting Academics and Colleagues
- ❖ Esteemed Administrative/Technical Staff
- ❖ Captains of Industries
- ❖ Cherished Friends and Guests
- ❖ Unique Students of the University of Port Harcourt
- ❖ Members of the Press
- ❖ Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

DEDICATION

To:

My adorable daughters:

Dr. Victoria Imariaikowa Emasealu
And
Miss. Georgia Ataome Emasealu

The two parrots in my life
Who make noise all the time
Yet, make sense all the time

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God Our Father for leading me on this journey of life. It is to Him that I owe my life itself and the journeys in it, even if some of those journeys have not always been straightforward. May His name be praised both now and forevermore.

I thank the authorities of the University of Port Harcourt for finding me worthy to be employed and for granting me study leave for my Ph.D. programme at the University of Ibadan.

I thank the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Owunari A. Georgewill, and the University management team for the permission to deliver this inaugural lecture, which provides me with an opportunity to introduce myself to our academic community, showcase my research expertise, demonstrate thought leadership, celebrate my academic achievements, and set the tone for my future research endeavour. I thank the Chairman, members and the Secretary of the Inaugural Lectures Screening Committee for their diligence in going through my manuscript and pointing me in the right direction. I am grateful to you, dear audience, for your presence and support at this inaugural lecture.

I thank the Late Professor Ola Rotimi and the Late Prof. Dapo Adelugba, my mentors, for encouraging me to pursue an academic career. When Ola Rotimi served as an External Examiner during my final year in the undergraduate programme at the University of Ibadan, he encouraged me to seek employment at the University of Port Harcourt after completing the Master's programme. I thank my colleagues with whom I have worked for years, for nurturing the young minds entrusted to our care. The list includes Professors John Yeseibo, Julie Umukoro, Clive Krama, Faith Aminikpo, Benjamin Ejiofor, Doctors Ovunda Ihunwo, Edward Imo, Sam Dede, Ikiroma-Owiye, Sunday Edum, Adikiba Boyle, Patrick Agha, Nkem Love Chidi-Ukagu, Chizenum Ohia, Mr. Ken Njoku, and Ms. Margaret

Ukwu. I thank our colleagues who have volunteered to strengthen the University of Port Harcourt's programme by lending a hand in setting up the Department of Film and Multimedia Studies in the Faculty of Communication. They are Professors Femi Shaka, Innocent Uwah, Friday Nwafor, Emily God's presence, and Doctors Nkechi Bature-Uzo and Emeka Ofora.

I thank the awarding institutions for finding me worthy to be a Fellow of the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), a Fellow and Lifetime Achievement Award recipient of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes (SONTA), a foundational fellow of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria (DGN), and a Fellow of the prestigious Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL). I consider these recognitions a testament to my contributions to the theory and practice of theatre arts through teaching, research, and community service.

I am grateful to Ambassador Martin Uhomoibhi, Pastor Steve Shaba, Prof. Alex Asigbo, Prof. and Prof. (Mrs.) Oka Martin Obono, Prof. Duro Oni, Prof. Femi Osofisan, Prof. Desen Mbachaga, Prof. Marcel Okhakhu, Prof. Hyginus Ekwuazi, Prof. and Prof. (Mrs.) Umeozor, Dr. and Dr. (Mrs.) Ezechi Onyerionwu, Garick Mbor, Divine-Favour Chinkata, Taiye and Kehinde Aigbonoga, the Emasealu, Obire and Aigbonoga families, my numerous 'children' Dr. Josiah Hart, Engineer Emeka Abali, "Prof.' Nnaemeka Ezeonye, and Peter Kingsley ('High Chief'), Mr. & Mrs. Nsikak Okon, Precious John Nnanah, Atese Moses Orvesen, Childera Vivian Adigwe, Ebiye Wisdom Ogunu, Ayibapreye Ogunu, and Jessica Leonard, Prof. Budu Eme, and the Associations to which I belong: UIAA, EUNDA, OMD NAS, NANTAP, NAL, SONTA, and DGN. I am grateful to the traditional ruler of Central Uneme, Edo State, for the chieftaincy title conferred on me.

I am eternally grateful to my beloved wife, Professor (Mrs.) Helen Emasealu, for her love, generosity of spirit, and support through the years of my travelling far and near, playing.

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Part One: Introduction

It is a great honour to occupy centre stage, as it were, in the reenactment of the age-long university ritual of delivering inaugural lectures. This ritual is presided over by a “Chief-Priest”, a role “played” by the Vice-Chancellor, and performed by academic shamans who have surmounted many mountains, sailed through seas, and crossed metaphorical swords of contradiction, on that ageless quest for the golden fleece, seeking the meaning of life, in the footsteps of mentors who had dreamt similar dreams before them. So, Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as we commence this ritual on this auspicious evening, I ask that you join me in the early invocation: “Let Us Play.”

There is war in Ukraine, Iran, and Gaza, among others. Human lives and property are lost daily. There is an insurgency in Nigeria. All of this is coming at a huge cost. And I want to shout it on the rooftop and on the mountaintop: LET US PLAY! NOT WAR! Let us play to avert danger, calamity. Let us play to save mankind. LET US PLAY!

Part Two: The Theatre: A Background Statement

2.0 Theatre is not “Mere Entertainment”

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I will begin this inaugural lecture by stating categorically that the theatre is not “mere entertainment” as some people think.

Theatre, essentially, is the enactment of an action for an audience, whether on stage or through media such as radio, television, or film. Theatre is a cultural archive of myths, histories, rituals, and identities. Theatre preserves languages, philosophies, worldviews, and values. Theatre educates and enlightens. Theatre explores the human condition by enabling individuals to confront fears, desires, contradictions, and aspirations. Theatre’s emotive power fosters therapeutic release, self-discovery, and emotional intelligence. Theatre helps society feel, think, remember, and question. Theatre

advocates for the marginalised by amplifying voices and fostering action. Theatre has been used to heal divisions and reduce conflict globally. Economically, the theatre is a significant asset. Nollywood, rooted in theatrical traditions, employs over one million people and drives cultural diplomacy and national branding. The theatre is not “mere entertainment.”

2.1 Can Theatre Be Abused?

The answer is, yes. The theatre is a double-edged tool whose persuasive power can enlighten or mislead society. Theatre ceases to be good art when it promotes harmful ideologies or normalises destructive behaviour. Productions that romanticise racism, sexism, misogyny, intolerance, authoritarianism, slavery, colonialism, or discrimination against persons with disabilities undermine theatre’s ethical mission. The same applies to works that trivialise trauma, glamorise violence, encourage hate, promote corruption, or normalise toxic relationships. Theatre becomes harmful when it promotes ignorance over inquiry, deception over truth, and prejudice over empathy.

Theatre is abused when used to legitimise injustice or oppressive power structures. Performances that glorify dictatorships, justify domination, or incite hostility against minorities distort the theatre’s ethical role. It is an abuse when theatre is used to sanitise the image of corrupt politicians by presenting them as heroes. Without critique, theatre becomes propaganda rather than a medium of reflection.

The theatre becomes complicit in exploitation when used to promote consumer products with the intent to deceive or when its narratives or endorsements manipulate rather than inform, especially for harmful products.

The theatre is reduced to empty spectacle when productions rely on sensationalism, shock value, vulgarity or violence for attention rather than meaning. A theatre that spreads misinformation or

pseudo-history deepens ignorance rather than providing reflection. The theatre's integrity is compromised when directors subject actors, especially vulnerable ones, to unsafe or harmful conditions. A creative process must not justify exploitation.

Theatre may explore dark themes, flawed characters, and moral ambiguity. However, its purpose must be to provoke reflection, deepen understanding, and illuminate the human condition. When works glorify unethical conduct or manipulate and oppress, the theatre betrays its social responsibility. "Bad theatre" emerges when insensitivity replaces responsibility, and spectacle replaces meaning. The ethical vitality of theatre lies in both what it shows and the moral consciousness behind it. In all cases, the ethical value of theatre must be maintained, as when its ethical purpose is violated, the institution itself is abused.

2.2 Theatre: A Multidisciplinary Field

The creative, intellectual, and social functions of theatre enable it to intersect with diverse disciplines. Theatre and philosophy both explore human existence, truth, morality, justice, and freedom. While philosophy uses abstract reasoning, theatre dramatises these issues in action.

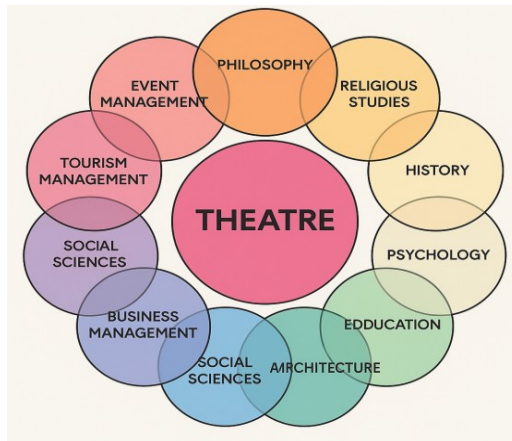


Fig. 1: Theatre: The Heart of the Matter

Religion and theatre are historically intertwined. In Africa, rituals, festivals, and spiritual ceremonies form the foundations of performance. Theatre is closely linked to psychology as it engages emotions, cognition, motivations, and behaviour. Characters are grounded in psychological principles, inviting audiences to explore their inner lives. Theatre shares a strong bond with the visual arts. Scenography, costume, props, and makeup use visual-art principles to create atmosphere, symbolism, and coherence. Theatre and education are inseparable. Theatre fosters creativity, communication, teamwork, empathy, and critical thinking. It is used in schools, community programmes, and adult education for experiential learning. Theatre's link to medicine is evident in therapeutic theatre, which combines performance with psychological practices. Roleplay, improvisation, and storytelling help process trauma, grief, and distress. Victims of rape, war, insurgency, or deformities find healing through performance.

Architecture is indispensable to theatre. Performance spaces such as the proscenium, thrust, arena and site-specific require structural, acoustic, and aesthetic design. Theatre and engineering intersect through stage machinery, lighting, sound, rigging, automation, set construction, and effects. Mechanical engineering enables movable platforms; electrical and computer engineering powers lighting and digital scenography; civil engineering ensures structural support and safety. Contemporary theatre increasingly relies on mechatronics, robotics, and computational design for immersive experiences. Science connects to theatre. Physics governs illumination, optics, colour temperature, and phenomena such as thunder, rain, and fire. Chemistry involves the safe use of makeup, prosthetic materials, paint, fog, and effects. Science enables theatre to combine realism, illusion, and safety. Theatre and business management intertwine as theatre is a product for audiences. Budgeting, marketing, branding, ticketing, logistics, intellectual property, and stakeholder management are key components of production. From Hubert Ogunde's commercial theatre to the

Lagos Theatre Festival, theatre has shaped Nigeria's creative economy. The social sciences (sociology, political science, and economics) share strong links with theatre. Many plays critique class struggle, power relations, and social structures. Theatre and tourism form a mutually beneficial partnership. Festivals, heritage performances, and rituals attract tourists and sustain cultural diplomacy. Event management and hospitality share theatrical principles of storytelling, spectacle, rhythm, and engagement. Major ceremonies like the Olympic or World Cup openings use choreography, scenography, and narrative sequencing to create global spectacles.

Theatre and law converge in narrative, persuasion, and performance. The relationship between theatre and libraries is foundational. Theatre is ephemeral; libraries preserve it. Archives, collections, promptbooks, notes, sketches, photographs, and recordings enable study, revival, and reinterpretation. Digital repositories, metadata, oral histories, and makerspaces expand this partnership. Libraries validate scholarship, support research integrity, teach information literacy, and preserve cultural memory. Theatre provides content; libraries ensure continuity and longevity. While many disciplines address challenges independently, theatre is a unique multidisciplinary catalyst. It mobilises individuals, institutions, and communities, offering creative, intellectual, and emotional solutions. Theatre reflects human existence across social, political, economic, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Its ability to synthesise diverse knowledge makes theatre a powerful tool for addressing complex societal problems.

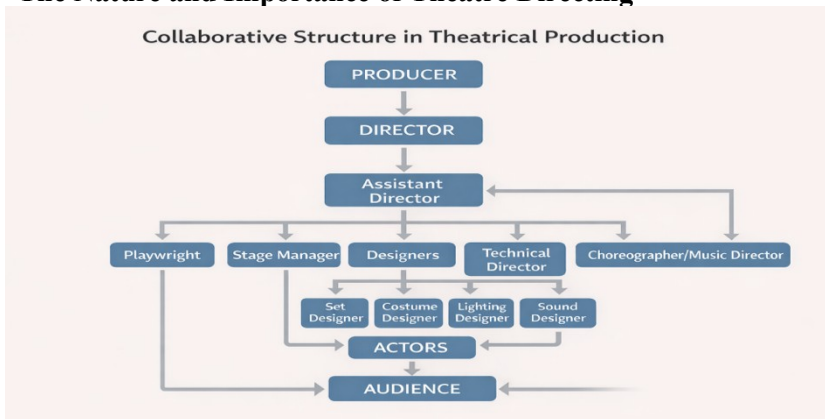
2.3 The Spirit of True Theatre

True theatre provokes thought, nurtures empathy, and inspires action. True theatre deepens emotional intelligence, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal understanding. True theatre speaks truth to power, amplifies the voices of the marginalised, and fosters dialogue on urgent issues. True theatre reveals truths that endure

long after the performance ends. Understanding theatre is key to appreciating its role in human development and nation-building. Theatre engages reality rather than escaping it. Theatre is a developmental force and contributor to national wealth. Theatre is a profound cultural, social, economic, and philosophical enterprise. Theatre is a mirror, a teacher, an advocate, an archive, a healer, and a catalyst for transformation. This is why theatre is my forte. And I urge you all to engage with theatre as participants or spectators.

Part Three: Theatre Directing: My Forté

3.0 The Nature and Importance of Theatre Directing



Theatre, as shown in the above diagram, is inherently collaborative. The playwright provides the dramatic structure, the actors embody the characters, and the designers shape the visual and sonic environment. But acting, design, sound, lighting, props, and management contribute to performance and become theatre only when organised into a coherent whole. As a director, I stand at the intersection of text, performance, design, and audience by translating dramatic potential into visible, audible, and affective form. I analyse the text to determine its inner pulse, shape, and rhythm, guide actors in effective characterisation, and collaborate with designers to ensure that each theatrical sign contributes to

unified communication. I interpret, align, and synthesise these contributions into a coherent event. This is my attraction to directing.

Directing requires artistic imagination, intellectual discipline, leadership, and cultural sensitivity. It moves from script analysis to rehearsal, from composition to audience response, and from concept to performance. Directing is both interpretive and compositional, and it demands full engagement with the entire production process. This integrative task defines the importance of directing. Indeed, my specialisation in directing arises from this conviction that it is the central organising force of theatre.

My attraction to directing also lies in its cultural function. Theatre is a public act mediating between performance and society. As a director, I shape how theatre engages social tensions, memory, ethics, and communal aspirations.

3.1 An Overview of Western Directorial Approaches

Modern directing is often traced to George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, who established unified production (Brockett, 1991; Gassner, 1941; Cole and Chinoy, 1963; Dukore, 1974; Roberts, 1974). The Meiningen tradition emphasised ensemble discipline, historical accuracy, and intensive rehearsal. This shift established the director as the coordinator of the theatrical whole. From this foundation, twentieth-century theatre developed diverse directorial traditions.

Constantin Stanislavski shifted focus from external realism to the actor's inner life. His focus on objectives, the super-objective, relaxation, communion, adaptation, and believable motivation made directing both compositional and psychological. (His system foregrounds the actor as a living instrument rather than decoration (Stanislavski, 2008).

If Stanislavski refined realism, Meyerhold challenged it. Through biomechanics and constructivism, he emphasised the actor's body, rhythm, and movement. He treated performance as kinetic and spatial rather than imitative. His approach expanded directing beyond naturalism to abstraction and physicality. Brecht reconceived directing as a tool of social criticism. Through epic theatre and alienation, he sought to provoke critical reflection rather than passive emotion. For Brecht, theatre should sharpen political and intellectual awareness (Brecht, 1964). Directing becomes the art of making social relations visible and critical.

Artaud shifted focus from text to performance energy. His theatre of cruelty emphasised sensory and spatial impact to reveal deeper truths (Artaud, 1958). Jerzy Grotowski radicalised this movement further through poor theatre, arguing that the essence of theatre lies in the encounter between actor and audience, stripped of unnecessary spectacle (Grotowski, 1968). Peter Brook sought an “immediate theatre” that transcends conventions (Brook, 1968).

Together, these Western approaches show directing as an evolving experimental practice, with emphases varying across realism, physicality, politics, ritual, and austerity. They show directing as a mode of thought—organising bodies, space, time, and spectatorship to produce meaning.

3.2 African Directorial Approaches

While Western theatre offers experimental vocabulary, African theatre provides equally profound performance intelligence. Its roots did not begin with the modern literary stage but lie in ritual, festival, storytelling, masquerade, music, dance, and communal performance. These forms demonstrate that performance in Africa has long been total, participatory, and socially embedded (Clark, 1980; Enekwe, 1978; Nwoko, 1981; Nzewi, 1981; Ogunba, 1981; Ogunbiyi, 1981; Ukala, 1996, 2000; Uwatt, 1988, 2007).

The challenge emerged with colonial modernity (Ekpo, 1995). Colonial education encouraged imitation of Western dramatic models. Thus, Nigerian theatre often adopted Euro-American forms despite its African content. This created tension: Nigerian content with foreign structure and performance logic.

Scholars like Nwoko, Nzewi, Enekwe, and Ukala have opposed imitation that suppresses indigenous performance intelligence and called for a culturally grounded Nigerian theatre, not a theatre of intercultural exchange. In their view, a truly Nigerian theatre must draw on indigenous resources, music, dance, chant, movement, oral tradition, and communal energy, not just borrowed forms. These scholars show that traditional theatre contains directorial functions even without the title “director.” Ritual leaders, drummers, storytellers, and organisers perform directing roles by shaping rhythm, flow, participation, and space. Thus, the African directorial impulse is historically present, though differently structured.

In my earlier work (Oga, 1998), I argued that African directing operates within the layered influences of indigenous traditions, colonial disruptions, training models, and global aesthetics. Ola Rotimi exemplifies productive synthesis of these influences. This explains Rotimi’s importance on the Nigerian stage. He shows how Western discipline and African aesthetics can be harmonised without imitation (Rotimi, 1992). His theatre integrates music, dance, chant, storytelling, and ensemble work in culturally resonant forms. Thus, Rotimi offers a model where African resources are foundational, not decorative. The challenge is neither rejecting global traditions nor embracing African performance tradition with an uncritical purist attitude. Instead, the task is adaptation, indigenisation, and synthesis. This is what I have practised as a director: balance global awareness with local expressive traditions. I refer to it as a *critical synthesis approach* to directing.

The advantages of the approach are the integration of global and indigenous aesthetics, cultural relevance and audience connection, avoidance of cultural imitation, promotion of African performance identity, enhanced communicative clarity, expanded directorial vocabulary, holistic performance composition, strengthening ensemble performance, flexibility across performance spaces, encouragement of innovation and experimentation, improved audience participation and engagement, contribution to decolonising theatre practice, promotion of intercultural dialogue, strengthening theatrical authenticity, development of a modern African directorial framework, support for total theatre experience, adaptability to contemporary theatre and film practice, encouragement of social and cultural reflection, enhancement of visual and rhythmic composition, and contribution to sustainable theatre practice. By utilising local cultural resources, the critical synthesis approach supports cost-effective and sustainable production models.

3.3 Let Us Play: My Directorial Philosophy and Manifesto

My directorial philosophy begins with a simple premise: human beings are wired to play. In my paper, “The Significance of Directing in the Process of the Production of a Dramatic Play” (Emasealu, 2012), I argue that play is a human impulse to enact and imagine, while directing shapes this impulse into coherent public meaning. Across cultures, especially in Africa, play is not leisure only but a medium of learning, socialisation, ritual, and discovery. Theatre is the most organised expression of this instinct. From this emerges my manifesto: Let Us Play. This phrase is deliberate. It affirms play as serious cultural work and directing as the craft that transforms energy into theatrical form.

Performance does not simply happen. It is selected, arranged, rehearsed, refined, and made communicable. The director enables this transformation. In my practice, I recognise two worlds. The first is Western theatre, rooted in Aristotelian elements: plot,

character, diction, thought, music, and spectacle. It relies largely on verbal expression. The second is African theatre, rooted in festival traditions and characterised by song, music, dance, chant, and mime. This is beneficial to the audience because what the audience cannot grasp through verbal expression, due to poor language comprehension on his part or poor speech elocution by the actor, can be made up for through these indices of African theatre. Indeed, these indices suggest locale, evoke atmosphere, communicate themes, support characterisation, and sustain audience interest. My position is for a critical synthesis between Western traditions and African festival theatre for effective communication.

Leonard Cabell Pronko observes that traditional Asian theatre, which is similar to African theatre, may be understood through three defining principles: the “total,” the “participative,” and the “stylised” (Pronko, 73). Totality means integrated performance elements. Participation engages audiences beyond passive observation. Stylisation uses gesture, rhythm, image, and symbol beyond naturalism. These principles inform my directing practice. My directing framework rests on four commitments. First, cultural rootedness. Directing must reflect its social and performative context. In Africa, this involves indigenous resources such as music, dance, chant, and communal performance. Second, openness to global practice. Global traditions enrich theatre and must be engaged. They must be adapted, not imitated. Third, ensemble collaboration. Theatre is collective. The director orchestrates rather than dominates. Rehearsal is a collaborative laboratory. Fourth, social relevance.

Directing is not aesthetic self-display. Each production is a public dialogue for reflection and change. Play selection is ethical, interpretation mediates culture, and space shapes meaning. Thus, directing is neither imitation nor nostalgia but a culturally grounded, open practice. *Let Us Play* affirms a philosophy that is

African, global, collaborative, and socially engaged. This defines directing as a vocation, specialisation, and craft. Thus, Let Us Play is both philosophy and manifesto. It defines directing as the organisation of communal imagination. To direct is to play seriously, making theatre a mode of thought and social reflection. Directing is my forte because it lies at the centre of theatrical meaning-making. It unites interpretation, composition, creativity, discipline, and leadership.

Part Four: My Directorial Processes and Production Ecology

4.0 Plays I have Directed

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am a cross-spectrum theatre artist specialising in theatre directing. My directing practice begins not with rehearsal or spectacle but with a defining decision: the choice of play. This is because play selection is the foundation of the entire production.

I chose Ebrahim N. Hussein's *Kinjeketile* because it dramatises how colonial oppression and famine have provoked collective resistance. The play traces the rise of a spiritually inspired uprising, whose initial unity and hope, anchored in Kinjeketile's promise of invincible "maji" water, gradually collapse under doubt, internal conflict, and overreliance on prophecy as the people march toward a tragic, ill-prepared war against German colonial power. I chose to direct the play because of its nationalistic undertone, which should appeal to an African audience.

In 1990, I chose to direct *Woza Albert!* by Barney Simon, Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa because the play imagines the second coming of Christ in apartheid South Africa, using humour, multi-role performance, and workshop theatre techniques to expose and critique racial oppression as black characters react to Morena's arrival, the state's violent response, and the symbolic resurrection of anti-apartheid leaders such as Albert Luthuli. I chose to direct

Waza Albert! to bring the damning consequences of the apartheid regime in South Africa to a Nigerian audience.

In 1991, I directed Obi Egbuna's *Wind Versus Polygamy* because the play celebrates the African institution of polygamy, a value frowned upon in Western rationality. The play is set in a fictional "New Africa" and centres on Chief Ozuomba, a polygamist with thirty wives whose attempt to marry a young girl sparks a landmark trial in which he defends polygamy against a new law favouring monogamy, with the case unfolding through vivid figurative storytelling.

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again, written by Ola Rotimi, satirically follows Lekoja-Brown, a vain former military Major who ventures into contemporary African politics he barely understands, and whose political ambitions and polygamous life unravel comically when his American-educated wife discovers his two other marriages and turns domestic conflict into a critique of ambition, opportunism, and the absurdity of power. I chose to direct the play because it exposes the opportunistic tendencies of some Nigerian politicians who see politics as an avenue to wealth.

Love's Unlike Lading by Femi Osofisan is a farcical adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* that uses humour and satirical re-visioning of the classic plot to expose and critique political, judicial, social, and cultural dysfunctions in contemporary Nigerian society. The appeal of directing the play stems from its lampooning of opportunistic Nigerian politicians.

Some of the other plays I have directed for the same reasons of their relevance and audience consideration are *The Divorce* by Wale Ogunyemi, *The Gardeners* by Emmanuel Oga, *"Floods Against the Crown,"* by Benjamin Ejiofor, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, *Closed Doors* by Julie Okoh, *Woman of Calabar* by Elechi Amadi, *The Wives' Revolt* by J.P. Clark, *Bargain Hunting* by Adinoyi Ojo Onukaba and *Grit* by Obari Gomba.



Plate 1: Dress and Technical Rehearsal of *Grit*



Plate 2: The Scene of Dr. Okote's Election Victory in *Grit*



Plate 3: The Emotionally Charged Final Scene of Conflict Resolution in *Grit*



Plate 4: A Section of the Audience in *Grit* Performance

In selecting these plays, I assess their social relevance, cultural context, ethical purpose, staging potential, and audience's experiences and expectations. Some texts may be intellectually rich but theatrically weak, while others are visually strong but conceptually shallow. To select texts with both depth and vitality, I assess the text's thematic depth, ethical undertone, and performative potential. I balance relevance, interpretive depth, and performative potential to shape audience perception and social understanding. I choose plays that are topical, contemporary, and audience-centred.

4.1 The Box-Office Theatre Method as My Pedagogical Tool

The box-office theatre method is widely used as a teaching tool in Nigerian universities. I have used it to teach students the basics of production at the University of Port Harcourt 'The CRAB Arts Theatre' where I have taught for over three decades. Prominent Uniport-trained directors are Daniel Kpodoh, Lancelot Imasuen, Ejike Asiegbu, Francis Duru, Basione Tariah (Jnr.), Bob Udokwu, Uche Ogbonna, Soala Lawson-Jack, Yibo Koko, Ovunda Ihunwo, Joseph Osademe, Florence Kalio and Sunday Edum.

The box-office method emphasises entertainment and high production standards by featuring polished actors, elaborate sets, costumes, and lighting. It is impactful because of the high revenue it generates from an audience that expects high-quality performances in plays, musicals, comedies, and other genres of entertainment. Indeed, the revenue generated through the box-office theatre tradition ensures the sustainability of theatre practice.

In 2022, Broadway grossed over \$1.5 billion with over 10 million attendees. London's West End productions like *The Phantom of the Opera* and *Hamilton* attract millions annually. In Nigeria, venues such as the National Theatre and TerraKulture host events that fetch prodigious sums and support local theatre development. Some of the productions I have directed from 'The CRAB Arts Theatre' box-office background were funded by Uniport, Rivers State Government, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Rainbow Book Club, and Jos Repertory Theatre.

4.2 My Short, Feature and Documentary Film Credits

Short, feature, and documentary films are powerful media for storytelling in education, advocacy, and transformation. In 2014, I directed a short film titled *What's Going On?* It was a component of my film directing training at the Colorado Film School to deepen my expertise and earn a certificate. My film credits are listed in Appendix 2.



Plate 5: Giving Instructions to the Cameraman on the set of *What's Going On?* in Colorado Film School, Colorado, USA.



Plate 6: I Check for Shot Composition



Plate 7: I Instruct My Actors on Spatial Relationships



Plate 8: Observing A Dry Run As I Call the Shot on Set



Plate 9: I Confirm Camera Angle to Complement Monitor Output

In 2017, I did my sabbatical with UNAMID in Sudan and produced news stories and documentaries. I served as director, concept developer, scriptwriter, cameraman, voiceover artist, and photographer. The news stories include *World Radio Day*, *JSR Visits Sector East*, *International Day of UN Peacekeepers*, *World Environment Day*, *United Nations Police in the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur*, and *UNAMID Closes Eleven Team Sites in Darfur*. The documentaries are *Signs and Times in Abu Shouk IDP Camp* and *Drumming for Peace in Darfur*.

These works use interviews, reenactments, and authentic visuals to address education, community development, and social justice in Darfur. They amplified marginalised voices and fostered dialogue among warring groups. They highlight the resilience of Darfuris and preserve the vibrant Darfur cultural traditions for future generations in music, dance, rituals, and festivals. The list and YouTube links to these works are provided in Appendix 3.

My other documentary works are *Cashiering and You* (1983), which focuses on the role of a cashier in the banking sector, and *The Workingman's Death* (2005), where I served as Assistant to the Director. This documentary used the Trans Amadi abattoir in Port Harcourt as a reference point to spotlight the inherent health challenges in the Nigerian abattoir system.

My feature film credits include directing *The War of the Roses* (1995) and serving as Assistant Director in *Obidike: The Last Warrior* (1994) and *King Jaja of Opobo* (1998). I have worked as an actor in the following feature films: *Hunted*, *Babysitters*, *Eye of Life*, *Omen of Love*, *Rampage*, and *The Visitors* (13 TV Episodes).

4.3 My Directorial Concept and Approach

After selecting a play, my next step is to develop a guiding directorial concept. This is the interpretive framework that unifies performance, design, and audience response, grounded in the text's logic. To shape the production's concept, I ask: What is the central idea? What tensions drive the action? How do characters embody these tensions? A strong, coherent, communicable, and collaborative concept emerges from deep engagement, not imposition.

In a directorial approach, I interrogate the text's themes, characters, structure, and context to uncover its layered meanings. The following Table presents the directorial concept and approach to some of the plays I have directed.

Table 1: Directorial Concept and Vision in My Plays

S/No	Title of Play	Directorial Concept	Directorial Vision
1.	<i>Kinjeketile</i> By Ebrahim N. Hussein	A ritual-political tragedy that juxtaposes spiritual faith with the harsh realities of colonial violence, framing the “maji” myth as both a unifying force and a fatal illusion.	To stage the play as a visually symbolic African resistance narrative, using music, chant, and ensemble movement to evoke collective hope while progressively exposing the fragility of blind faith in the face of imperial power.
2.	<i>Woza Albert!</i> By Mbogeni Ngema & Percy Mtwa	A satirical, minimalist, and actor-driven re-imagining of apartheid through multi-role performance and improvisational energy.	To create a dynamic, fast-paced performance that uses humour, physical theatre, and direct audience engagement to expose systemic injustice while making the narrative immediate and relatable to Nigerian audiences.
3.	<i>Wind Versus Polygamy</i> By Obi Benue (Egbuna)	A courtroom-ritual drama that interrogates the clash between indigenous African values and imposed Western legal systems.	To foreground storytelling, symbolism, and performative rhetoric in a stylised trial setting that celebrates African cultural logic while provoking critical reflection on evolving social norms.
4.	<i>Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again</i> By Ola Rotimi	A political farce that exposes the absurdity of power through exaggerated characterisation and comic domestic conflict.	To emphasise satire through sharp pacing, physical comedy, and vibrant staging, highlighting the intersection of politics, patriarchy, and opportunism in contemporary Nigerian society.
5.	<i>Love’s Unlike Lading</i> By Femi Osofisan	A satirical adaptation that retools a classical narrative to critique modern socio-political dysfunctions through humour and irony.	To employ a playful yet incisive performance style, blending music, caricature, and stylisation to expose corruption and moral contradictions within the judiciary and political systems.
6	<i>The Divorce</i> By	A socio-cultural drama that interrogates marital conflict	To present an emotionally grounded and character-driven

	Wale Ogunyemi	within the tension between tradition and modernity.	production that highlights the human cost of shifting values in African family structures.
7	The Gardeners By Emmanuel Oga	An allegorical narrative that uses simple characters and situations to explore deeper social and moral questions.	To adopt a restrained and symbolic staging that allows metaphor and performance nuance to communicate layered meanings.
8	<i>Floods Against the Crown</i> By Benjamin Ejiofor	A political allegory that examines resistance against oppressive authority.	To create a visually compelling production that contrasts power and rebellion through spatial dynamics, choral movement, and symbolic imagery.
9.	<i>Closed Doors</i> By Julie Okoh	A psychological-social drama that reveals hidden tensions within domestic and societal spaces.	To emphasise intimacy, tension, and emotional realism through controlled staging and nuanced performances.
10.	<i>Woman of Calabar</i> By Elechi Amadi	A culturally rooted narrative that explores identity, gender, and societal expectations within a traditional setting.	To foreground cultural aesthetics, costume, music, and movement while maintaining a strong emotional connection to the protagonist's journey.
11.	<i>The Wives' Revolt</i> By J.P. Clark	A socio-political satire that dramatises collective female resistance against patriarchal and economic injustice.	To stage the play with energetic ensemble performance, highlighting solidarity, resistance, and humour as tools of protest.
12.	<i>Bargain Hunting</i> By Adnoyi Ojo Onukaba	A social satire that critiques materialism and opportunistic behaviour in contemporary society.	To employ a lively, fast-paced staging that amplifies irony and exposes the absurdity of human greed.
	<i>Grit</i> By Obari Gomba	A political family drama that explores rivalry, ambition, and reconciliation within the context of electoral conflict.	To balance emotional intensity with political commentary, using strong character contrasts and deliberate pacing to culminate in a resolution that affirms unity over division.

4.4 Interpreting and Reappraising the Text

Textual interpretation, the intellectual engine of rehearsal, is central to my practice because subjective readings by actors and collaborators can distort a playwright's intention and weaken the communicative power of a production. I reject the notion that any text is sacrosanct because plays travel across time and place, and meanings shift with changing audiences and cultural contexts. I consider cuts and edits necessary but handled ethically, guided by sensitivity, purpose, and artistic discipline, not convenience or excess.

At the commencement of rehearsals, I read the text repeatedly with my cast and crew to bring out its emotional and intellectual substance. I identify the central conflict, the forces that sustain it, and the plot's trajectory from exposition through tension and suspense to resolution. I analyse characters in terms of desire and obstruction. Finally, I entertain questions because interpretation must be clarified, negotiated, and collectively owned.

Vice-Chancellor, sir, you will recall that after watching *Grit*, Professor Obari Gomba's NLNG award-winning play, staged as a command performance during the 34th University of Port Harcourt Convocation Ceremony, you openly declared that you read the play text a few times but could not fully decipher its meaning. But after watching the play on stage as directed by me, you fully understood its message. With the playwright's permission, I redirected the play away from endless acrimony between two brothers who are political rivals toward a relationship of reconciliation. Vice-Chancellor, sir, that is the power of textual interpretation and reappraisal in directing.

In 2000, I was invited alongside a few others to reappraise Wole Soyinka's latest play, *King Baabu*, during the Festival of the Arts in Verbier, Switzerland. We critiqued the form, structure, characterisation and the language of the play. Based on its success,

the play acquired a new meaning in form and technique and toured South Africa and Lesotho in 2002, and I played the role of Potipoo.

These two footprints underscore the importance of reappraising a text. As a director, I do not merely stage words; I negotiate meaning. It is through this negotiation that play becomes purposeful, intelligible, and worth offering to an audience. I see interpretation as the moral compass, and reappraisal as its adaptive intelligence because meaning must be constructed, clarified, and responsibly shared. I reinterpret the text using symbols, language, and performance conventions to resonate with my audience. This involves integrating music, dance, and ritual to enrich performance and enhance audience engagement.

4.5 Casting Actors and Recruiting Crew: Building the Human Architecture of My Production

The recruitment of cast and crew, a process of constructing the *human architecture* of a production, is critical because a brilliant script or good directorial vision will fail on stage if the wrong human resources are engaged. In a paper titled “Casting a Play: The Approaches of Three Nigerian Directors”(Oga, 2000), I have examined the merits and demerits of a wide range of casting traditions, both Western and Nigerian, including audience-based selection, stock-character or assignment casting, traditional and oracle-based methods, volunteer casting, the use of known actors, pictorial casting, deferred casting, and balance casting.

In this paper and in my directorial practice, I advocate the three-point audition model used in the following ascending order of expending energy, with each segment lasting approximately sixty seconds:

1. Singing: I assess singing without electronic amplification to judge natural vocal quality, range, and projection.
2. Acting: I test the actor through both prepared pieces by the candidates and prescribed monologues given to them shortly

- before the audition, which allows me to evaluate imagination, adaptability, and responsiveness to direction.
3. Dancing: I examine their dance, focusing primarily on African forms, to assess rhythm, coordination, stamina, and musical sensitivity.

The three-point audition technique allows for a holistic assessment and evaluation of an actor's performance skills, natural vocal quality, acting versatility, physical expressiveness and rhythm, balanced performance profiling, comparative evaluation, enhanced ensemble building, improved casting accuracy, promotion of African performance aesthetics, encouragement of discipline and preparedness, support for directorial vision, reduction of bias and subjectivity, integration of performance intelligence, and the provision of a foundation for professional casting ethics. The three-point audition model reinforces the principle that casting decisions should be based on merit, suitability, and ensemble balance rather than sentiment or external influence.

I have used the three-point audition model in my practice, including *Grit*, the last play I directed, where I cast Clarkson Chika Okah as Okote because of his physical suitability for the role. He is tall, and his physiognomy reveals sharp and remarkable features. In contrast, Donatus Akande, whom I cast as Oyesllo, although not as tall as Clarkson, has an unmistakable stage presence through his gait and vocal delivery. They both have ensemble balance, vocal strength and clarity, movement and rhythm, discipline, good attitude, openness to correction, and intelligence and imagination.

In the same play, *Grit*, I cast Olivia Chikwendu Onyeji as Bulu for her commanding stage presence and verbal eloquence. For their vocal clarity and ability to resonate with the audience through mimesis, Precious Onome Okuro was cast as Pa Nyimenu, Akoko Ezekiel Digha as Pa Baatom, Charles Chukwuji as White-Eye, and John-Paul Christopher as Yashuo.

I do not cast for star display, sentiment, or convenience. I cast to build a collective instrument through which the play can speak clearly and truthfully. I consider the relationships of the actors/characters, how voices blend, how physical types contrast, and how energies balance across the ensemble. I am careful not to miscast a weak protagonist opposite a strong antagonist, as this can redirect audience sympathy. In addition, I supplement audition results with verified information about reliability, work ethic, and collaborative spirit because theatre is sustained not only by talent but also by trust. I consider the demands of the script, the production's purpose, the performance space, the budget, and the quality of available talent. Even musicians and technical hands are auditioned or assessed for competence, discipline, and teamwork.

In casting, I do not allow external influence, such as the executive producer choosing the cast for me, simply because he is the piper who must dictate the tune. To allow this is unprofessional and could compromise the artistic integrity of the production. Indeed, casting and crew recruitment are creative and ethical acts at the heart of directing. They are not administrative preliminaries but foundational decisions. My auditions are recorded to allow for careful review and comparison beyond first impressions. Thereafter, I publish the cast list.

4.6 Rehearsals: My Creative Laboratory and Pedagogy of Performance

Rehearsals are central to directing. They are not mere repetitive exercises but the creative laboratories for developing ideas, testing concepts and realising the production. My rehearsal approach is structured yet flexible. I begin with table work, analysing the text with the cast for the play's structure, themes, motivations, and relationships. We then move to blocking and physical exploration. Actors actively contribute to the creative process by exploring movement, gesture, and space to translate concepts into physical action. Rehearsals are collaborative, and they involve continuous feedback and adjustment as I observe, evaluate, and guide actors

toward stronger choices. Rehearsals foster ownership and commitment among the cast.

The terms and conditions that govern my rehearsals are as follows:

i. The actor should not be afraid of making mistakes. Mistakes are not feared but valued because it is from trial and error that meaning is discovered. Through repetition, adjustment, and correction, the production gains clarity, and performers gain confidence.

ii. Script analysis runs continuously through my rehearsals because I treat script analysis not as a mere academic exercise, but as a living guide to performance, clarifying theme, conflict, character relationships, given circumstances, atmosphere, and rhythm. I make my actors interrogate dialogue, explore what is spoken and what is withheld, and examine how sound, music, movement, and spectacle contribute to meaning. In this way, rehearsal becomes pedagogical as actors do not merely memorise lines but also learn how meaning is constructed.

iii. I give blockings to organise the actor's relationship to space, to other bodies, and to design elements. Without it, performance becomes chaotic and visually incoherent. Through careful blocking, I ensure that every entrance, exit, pause, and gesture supports the emotional logic of the scene and the production's overall rhythm.

iv. I use rehearsal as a space for mental, physical, and emotional conditioning. Warm-ups, vocal work, physical exercises, and concentration drills are integral to this process because they help the actor to sharpen focus, awaken the body, and unlock emotional availability.

v. In my rehearsal, timing is crucial. Therefore, I rehearse entrances, reactions, overlaps, and silences until they serve the play's narrative pulse.

vi. Actors learn not only their own cues, but the energy and timing of others. This shared attentiveness builds trust, ensemble cohesion, and a performance that feels alive rather than mechanical. Now and then, I deliberately expose actors to pressure during rehearsal so they can respond calmly to unforeseen challenges on stage, such as missed lines, technical glitches, or unexpected audience reactions.

Ultimately, my rehearsal is where private talent is shaped into public meaning. It is where theatre becomes precise without losing vitality and structured without losing spontaneity. For me, rehearsal is both an artistic workshop and a classroom. It is a space where discipline, patience, adaptability, and ensemble responsibility are learned alongside performance. Rehearsal is not merely preparation. It is the very heart of directing and of *letting us play* responsibly.

4.7 Working with the Actor

The actor, the primary medium of my directorial vision, is central to directing because a performance ultimately comes alive through the actor's body, voice, imagination, and psychological presence.

In working with the actor, I adopt what I refer to as '*The Bottom-line Role Interpretation Technique*'. This relies on Constantin Stanislavski's technique of helping the actor to identify a character's unit objectives, intentions, desires, and motivations that drive every moment. These unit objectives collectively form the super-objective, the unifying goal that shapes the actor's entire performance. Through this process, acting becomes purposeful and organic rather than mechanical (Stanislavsky, 2008a). I also use Stanislavski's concept of relaxation, which enables the actor's body

to function freely and respond truthfully without sliding into passivity.

I rely on Stanislavski's technique of communion, which is the actor's ability to relate to fellow performers, stage objects, and the evolving performance environment. This, Richard Hornby (Hornby, 1977) observes, should extend to even the smallest details such as inflections, gestures, or visual stimuli, ensuring that performance remains alive and responsive.

I also use Stanislavski's adaptation technique (Stanislavsky, 2008b), which encourages actors to respond creatively to unexpected changes during performance. This flexibility ensures continuity and sustains the illusion of reality. Stanislavski's emotional memory, or affective recall, technique proposes that actors draw on personal experiences to generate authentic emotional responses. While acknowledging the usefulness of this technique, I reserve it for rehearsals only so that it does not interfere adversely when applied during a performance.

Using Stanislavski's techniques, I spend quality time guiding actors to discover their characters rather than imposing rigid interpretations. This involves clarifying objectives, motivations, and relationships. I give clear, constructive, and supportive guidance. I treat communication as essential. I give feedback to guide, not discourage, because ultimately the goal is truthful, engaging performances aligned with the production's vision.

bottom-line role interpretation technique.

4.8 Design as Meaning: Space, Costume, Make-up, Lighting, and Props as Suggestive Arts in My Directorial Practice

In my directorial practice, design is not decorative but central to meaning. Therefore, I treat design as an extension of the directorial concept. Stage orientation is not a neutral architectural condition or just a container. It is an active dramaturgical force, an interpretive

system, through which meaning is organised, revealed, and experienced. Stage orientation structures perception, regulates performance energy, and mediates the relationship between actor and audience.

In a paper titled “Set Design and Lighting as Artistic Means of Communication: The Paradigm of a Celebrated Nigerian Theatre Practitioner” (Oga, 2003), I have noted that stage configurations, such as the proscenium, thrust, and arena stages, shape actor interaction and audience perception. The proscenium enables controlled, illusionistic composition; the thrust provides balance and relational immediacy; and the arena, which is resonant with indigenous African performance traditions in which storytelling, ritual, and audience participation are intertwined, fosters integration and communal presence between the performer and the audience. Although the frontal separation of the proscenium stage introduces psychological and spatial distance between the actor and the audience, I compensate by heightening vocal projection, deliberately articulating gestures, and emphasising a clear narrative to sustain engagement across this divide.

As a director, I treat stage configurations as indispensable because they are a spatial art in which meaning emerges not only from text and performance but from the dynamic interplay between bodies, space, and spectatorship. I translate architectural conditions into communicative logic, ensuring that movement, focus, and design cohere into a readable and compelling performance.

In two papers titled “Costume and Make-up as Expressive Arts: A Case Study of the Plays of Ola Rotimi” and “Set Design and Lighting as Artistic Means of Communication: The Paradigm of a Celebrated Nigerian Theatre Practitioner,” I have expressed that costume, set design, make-up, lighting, and properties are not mere additions to a performance. They are part of how the theatre speaks to the audience. Very often, before an actor says a word, these

elements have already told the audience who the character is, the kind of world they inhabit, and what emotional temperature governs the scene.

In *If... In A Tragedy of the Ruled* and *Grit*, I used Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, and Riverine costumes to depict the Nigerian cultural world of the plays and to identify the different characters' social class, age, profession, moral disposition, and even inner conflicts. The cramped, multi-tenanted structure used in *Grit* suggests poverty and forced intimacy. Make-up is a silent storyteller. Therefore, I use make-up to depict the age and historical antecedence of the characters in my plays.

Lighting is one of the most expressive tools in my directorial practice. I use lighting to delineate playing areas, demarcate scenes, and achieve swift transitions between segments. I also use lighting to signify time, day or night, enhance verbal meaning, create special effects, and reflect both the emotional atmosphere of a scene and the psychological states of characters. In my theatre practice, lighting functions not merely as illumination but as an active narrative and expressive force. In my plays, I have used bright illumination to suggest warmth, celebration, openness, clarity, and public life, while low-intensity or shadowed spaces evoke secrecy, danger, or introspection. I employ spotlights to isolate characters and foreground inner conflict or nostalgia.

I use properties as semiotic instruments that communicate ideas, contexts, and character information beyond spoken dialogue. I use props, such as a walking stick, prayer beads, a book, a mobile phone, a ceremonial staff, or even a simple comb, to situate the play in a specific historical period, convey information about characters' aspirations and desires, and illuminate the progression of dramatic action. Through careful selection and deployment, stage properties help me construct a believable theatrical world and guide audience interpretation.

I use sets, costumes, make-up, lighting, and props to shape the production's visual language. Costume defines character, status, and transformation. Set design establishes a physical and symbolic environment. Lighting shapes mood, focus, and time. Props support action and meaning. Each element must align with the play's thematic and emotional core. I collaborate with my designers to ensure that design emerges from the production's interpretive framework because coherent, integrated design enhances understanding and engagement.

4.9 Sound as Interpretation: Music, Soundscape, Effects, and Silence

Sound is a powerful but often underestimated element. In *Grit* production, I used music, accompanied by energetic dance, to introduce the three political parties and their rival flagbearers: Oyesllo, Okote and Yasuo. I also used music here as an opening glee to welcome the audience.

Song 1: Na who we want o? Oyesllo.

Song 2: Yasuo dey come o. Yasuo na him be de man.

Song 3: Okote, you do well for us.

Pa Nyimenu's birthday, the redirection of the youth away from thuggery and violence, the announcement of Dr. Okote as the winner of the election, and the closing glee are all accompanied by music. Indeed, I use music in all my directorial works to guide emotion, create atmosphere, accentuate themes and clarify meaning.

In my directorial practice, I treat sound as an interpretive tool rather than background. I use sound to establish atmosphere, emotion, and themes. I use music to signal cultural context, historical period, and emotional tone. I integrate sound, performance and visuals because sound deepens sensory and emotional experience. Poor sound

integration can disrupt coherence. Music, effects, and silence shape the auditory dimension in my work as a director.

4.10 Closure and Continuity Come After Every Performance: Strike, Documentation, Legacy

The end of a performance does not mark the end of the directing process because closure and continuity are essential. After each production, I ensure that a strike, which involves dismantling the set and restoring the space, is done efficiently and responsibly. I have examined the importance and safe handling of set pieces in a paper titled “Set Design and Lighting as Artistic Means of Communication: The Paradigm of a Celebrated Nigerian Theatre Practitioner” (Oga, 2003).

As a director, I advocate the use of the technique I call *The Strike Checklist Application*. It is a systematic, well-coordinated effort that requires careful attention to inventory, as materials must be returned, repurposed, or safely stored for future productions. *The Strike Checklist Application* technique involves multiple personnel, including the stage manager, technical director, department heads, carpenters and electricians, and stagehands and designers. In a meeting with these production personnel, responsibilities are assigned, safety protocols are discussed, and a timeline is established to outline the strike process, which involves cleaning the stage and restoring the stage and backstage areas to their preproduction condition and readying them for future use. This is an essential part of my directorial practice. It requires coordination, care, and professionalism because the improper handling of props, costumes, and set pieces during a strike can lead to costly damage, especially if items are rented or borrowed. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to ensure that materials are handled delicately and stored correctly.

Documentation is essential because every successful production leaves behind not only memories but also insights, skills, and artistic growth among participants. Therefore, I ensure that photos, recordings, promptbooks, and notes used to document the production are properly preserved to support future study, reflection, and revival. Indeed, legacy is the enduring impact of a production.

Part Five: My Engagement with Other Aspects of Theatre

5.0 My Three Approaches in Theatre for Young People: Creative Dramatics, Educational Theatre and Children's Theatre

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am a cross-spectrum theatre artist who has engaged with various aspects of theatre. These are theatre for young people, which encompasses creative dramatics, educational theatre, and children's theatre; theatre for development (TfD); evangelical theatre; theatre in a war situation; theatre as therapy; and documentaries, features, and short films.

i. Creative Dramatics

In 1989, I established the Uniport Children's Theatre (UCT) programme. It brings together children from different ethnic, social, and educational backgrounds (largely from UDPS and UDSS), across age groups, weekly (on Saturdays), to practice creative dramatics, a participatory form of theatre that emphasises improvisation and role-play by children. The goals of the UCT programme are as follows:

1. Enhance personal development and self-confidence for children because creative dramatics provides a safe space for free expression. Shy participants gain confidence through performance, while others develop discipline, resilience, and adaptability. The stage is a space for children's self-discovery and emotional growth.

2. Foster cultural awareness and social openness by exposing the children to diverse ways of thinking and living so that they appreciate differences in language, customs, and perspectives through dramatic play and collaborative activities. This early encounter with diversity nurtures openness, tolerance, and an emerging sense of belonging to a broader human community.

3. Through dramatised situations and games, the children learn that peace and cooperation are activities that encourage empathy, dialogue, and mutual respect. They also learn that peaceful coexistence must be consciously cultivated by exploring fairness, conflict resolution, and cooperation.

4. UCT nurtures leadership and teamwork skills. As a collaborative art, creative dramatics teaches children to plan, improvise, and perform together. They learned to listen, respect decisions, and assume leadership roles. These experiences prepare them for effective participation in groups and communities.

5. Creative dramatics strengthens communication skills. Through storytelling and performance, children learn to express themselves clearly and confidently. They also develop attentive listening, verbal expression, body language, and emotional intelligence simultaneously.

6. Foster lasting friendships and networks. Creative dramatics fosters bonds beyond the theatre space. These friendships provide a sense of belonging and social connection.

7. The programme fosters responsible citizenship. Through participation, children learn fairness, inclusion, and respect. They understand their roles within families, schools, and society.

Vice-Chancellor, if you permit me to ask five members of our distinguished audience here in this auditorium to name seven prominent African rivers, some may struggle. But those who were exposed to collaborative improvisational play, such as creative dramatics, would easily recall them through a song.

Song:

This is the way we brush our teeth, brush our teeth, brush our teeth,
This is the way we brush our teeth, early in the morning.

What about the difficult spelling of the name of that massive and stubborn animal, Hippopotamus?

Song:

Hippopotamus. H-i-p for the Hip, for the Hipopo, Po-po for the Hippoppo and T-a-m-u-s for Hippopotamus.

Songs:

Rain, rain go away, little children want to play.
If you are happy and you know it clap your hands

All of this is to build the child through theatre.

Through improvisation and collaboration, children learn to think, interact, and grow responsibly. The American Psychological Association APA reports that creative dramatics improves self-confidence and communication skills by 50% among participants aged 8–15.

I am the Chairman of PACE Expressions Arts Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Port Harcourt that uses the arts to develop the cognitive abilities of children especially at the grassroots level. This organisation, founded in 2022 by Perfecta Eze-Puls, my student and mentee, has trained over two thousand children in drama, dance, music, and spoken words. In a “catch them young manner,” the organization is currently teaching children publishing skills.

I must acknowledge the late Dr Ndubuisi Nwafor-Ejelinma, Director of the Saturday Theatre for Young People (STYP), to whom I served as Assistant Director during my undergraduate and

graduate days at the University of Ibadan. In 1982, I extended this engagement by leading four Nigerian children to Spain for a CISV programme, a programme which has reinforced my belief that creative dramatics is a powerful tool for shaping young minds.

I am delighted that Professors Julie Umukoro and Faith Ken-Aminikpo are working hard to sustain the UCT programme.

ii. Educational Theatre

Educational (curriculum) theatre is the second approach in my engagement with young people. As a director, I integrate theatre into school curricula as a teaching tool. This enhances understanding across subjects, from literature and history to social sciences and mathematics. By dramatising lessons, it makes learning engaging, memorable, and relatable. In educational theatre, children watch or perform works illustrating concepts or historical events. For example, reenacting historical events helps students understand the context, motivations, and impact of the events. It fosters active learning, critical thinking, and collaboration. A 2020 UNESCO report shows that curriculum theatre improves retention by 40% over traditional teaching.

Some moments can be unnerving. But the theatre handler must be resilient. In 1984, we cast STYP children to dramatise the story of Mary and Joseph for pupils studying Christian Religious Knowledge at the University of Ibadan. Parents were also present. Demola (12 years old) played Joseph, while Jumoke (11 years old) played Mary. The cast worked well during rehearsals. However, during the performance, Demola refused to come on stage for the second scene. What was wrong? He said that he saw his parents giggling in the audience about him being married. He insisted he was not married. We explained and pleaded that it was acting, but he refused. He would not return to the stage. The end. The performance ended abruptly. We filled the rest of the session with songs, dance, and sketches. Such challenges occur, but practitioners

must not be discouraged. A week later, after the discussion, Demola performed the role successfully.

iii. Children's Theatre

Having participated in the STYP programme at the University of Ibadan, I introduced Children's Theatre at the University of Port Harcourt in 1989 with children of Uniport staff. This form targets young audiences. It entertains, educates, and inspires through stories that reflect children's experiences and imagination. Productions are interactive, using music, puppetry, costumes, and dynamic characters to engage children. Children's theatre supports early development by fostering creativity, empathy, and critical thinking. Participants have benefited and are thriving in society.

5.1 Theatre for Development (TfD)

Theatre for Development (TfD) is a community-based tool for social change and advocacy. It engages communities in creating plays addressing issues such as health, education, gender equality, and empowerment. Its goal is to raise awareness, stimulate dialogue, and promote collective action. TfD enables audiences to interrogate socio-economic issues and propose solutions. Practitioners work with marginalised communities, empowering them to express their perspectives. The process is participatory, with community members creating and performing. TfD highlights theatre's transformative potential to give voice and inspire change.

Early in my career, I worked with UNICEF (1989) to conduct village research, workshops, and performances in village squares, addressing local issues. We focused on early girl-child marriage in Ndufu Igbudu, Ebonyi State, alongside women's health and community initiatives. In Ikwo LGA, elderly men married teenage girls. We used the Homestead Integrated Method (HIM) and lived among villagers to conduct direct investigations. Within days, we discovered that our host, who denied the practice, had married a teenage girl two weeks earlier. Also with UNICEF, I directed TfD plays in the Echealike community, Anambra State, where all

members were believed to be related by blood. Intermarriage was therefore considered incestuous and forbidden. Children from such unions were called ‘nwelete.’ It was considered an abomination. Men had to seek wives outside the community. Our mandate was to challenge this belief through Tfd.

I also worked on Living Earth Foundation projects in Bayelsa, involving villagers as co-creators of plays on environmental and health issues and performing in public places. This led to increased awareness and community-driven solutions. (Emasealu, 2005). Postproduction evaluations by UNICEF and the Living Earth Foundation showed behavioural change. These projects show that when communities see their realities on stage, theatre becomes a catalyst for education and change.

5.2 Evangelical Theatre

Evangelical theatre is a performance form that conveys Christian doctrines through drama for moral instruction, reflection, and evangelism. Unlike secular theatre, it promotes faith, repentance, and spiritual awakening. It combines drama, music, dance, and visual elements to engage audiences emotionally and spiritually.

In my paper, “*A Study of the Evangelical Genre in Nollywood: Ugo Ugbor’s 40 Days in the Wilderness and Ifeanyi Ogbonna’s Years in Rome as Case Study*” (Emasealu, 2008), I argue that both films are firmly situated within the Christian evangelical film tradition, as they foreground religious themes, spiritual instruction, and moral edification. These films exemplify Nollywood’s didactic impulse, in which cinema serves as a medium for faith-based teaching and ethical reflection.

40 Days in the Wilderness is the more overtly biblical of the two, drawing directly from the Christological narrative of temptation. Its strength lies in its doctrinal clarity and symbolic construction. The film effectively communicates themes of fasting, spiritual discipline, and triumph over temptation, thereby serving as a tool

for religious instruction. Its use of the desert landscape and isolation reinforces the motifs of testing and divine encounter, while its narrative structure maintains a clear moral polarity between good and evil. The dialogue and tone further sustain a reflective and reverential spiritual atmosphere, enhancing its evangelical purpose.

However, these strengths are tempered by notable technical limitations. The film suffers from minimal production design, with sparse settings that limit visual richness. The representation of supernatural elements is constrained by underdeveloped special effects, particularly in the temptation sequences. Its contemplative structure results in slow pacing, while performances often lean toward declamatory, stage-like delivery rather than screen naturalism. Cinematography remains largely static, with limited camera variation, and the sound design lacks depth in its layering of effects and ambient audio.

Similarly, *Years in Rome* demonstrates significant strengths rooted in its thematic and institutional focus. The film explores priesthood, vocation, and spiritual formation within the Catholic tradition, offering rare insight into ecclesiastical life. Its narrative engages deeply with questions of discipline, sacrifice, and moral responsibility, while its character-centred approach enhances emotional engagement. The film's dialogic emphasis on theological and philosophical issues contributes to its intellectual depth and cultural relevance, particularly for audiences familiar with religious institutions.

Nonetheless, *Years in Rome* is also constrained by technical challenges. Its heavy reliance on interior locations such as seminaries and chapels creates **visual monotony**, limiting cinematic variety. The dialogue-driven structure reduces narrative dynamism and affects pacing. Editing lacks fluidity, with weak transitions and continuity lapses. Cinematographic techniques remain basic, with minimal exploration of framing, lighting contrast, and camera movement. Additionally, inconsistent sound

quality in interior scenes undermines auditory clarity, while the film's theological density may restrict accessibility for non-religious audiences.

In sum, both films exemplify the ideological commitment of evangelical Nollywood cinema, in which the primacy of the message often supersedes aesthetic sophistication. While they succeed in delivering moral and spiritual instruction, they also reveal the technical constraints characteristic of early Nollywood low-budget productions, particularly in cinematography, sound design, pacing, and visual effects. These works thus occupy a significant position within Nollywood's evangelical genre, balancing strong didactic intent with evolving cinematic form.

5.3 Theatre in a War Situation

Theatre in war emerges in conflict zones to provide relief, solidarity, advocacy, and hope. It addresses trauma, offering creative outlets for processing experiences. It provides psychological support for individuals and communities.

In 2017, while serving with UNAMID, I used theatre to promote peace in conflict-ravaged Darfur, where communities were deeply mistrustful of one another. As a director, I used theatre to foster reconciliation, bridge divides, and encourage dialogue through performances in IDP camps. These performances used local languages and symbols to promote unity, forgiveness, and coexistence. They addressed grievances like land disputes and ethnic tensions while promoting shared humanity.



Plate 10: Developing Story Ideas with Darfuris in a Darfur IDP Camp

Its participatory nature made the process inclusive and impactful. Such initiatives show that theatre is more than entertainment. It is a tool for conflict resolution, offering space for storytelling, catharsis, and healing. Feedback shows that theatre can empower communities to envision peace.



Plate 11: Using Theatre to Promote Peace in Darfur

As shown in Plate 4, I used storytelling and performances in refugee camps to promote cultural identity. By giving voice to war experiences, theatre fosters healing, resilience, and peace advocacy.

5.4 Theatre as Therapy

Drama therapy uses theatre techniques as a psychological treatment. It helps individuals express emotions, explore personal issues, and improve mental well-being.



Plate 1: Darfuris in Abu Shouk IDP Camp, Al Fasher, North Darfur, Participate in Songs and Drama Sketches that Offer the Message of Hope.

During my 2017 sabbatical, I served with UNAMID in Darfur. In Abu Shouk IDP camp (Plate 1), I used improvisation, role-play, and storytelling to help rape victims narrate their experiences. This enabled self-exploration. IDP camp residents were engaged in drama therapy through songs and enactments that offered hope. Drama therapy in Darfur helped war-affected children and victims cope with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through role-play.



Plate 2: Dramatic Role-playing by Darfuris in Sortoni IDP Camp, Darfur.

Similarly, in northern Nigeria, drama therapy has aided the rehabilitation of women and children affected by insurgency, and JOS Repertory Theatre engages Boko Haram survivors in therapeutic performances.

Drama therapy is used in hospitals, clinics, schools, and rehabilitation centres. It supports people dealing with trauma, depression, and anxiety. Enabling role exploration helps individuals gain perspective, develop coping skills, and enhance self-awareness.

5.5 My Train-the-Trainer Experience

In 2014, sponsored by GIZ, a German concern, I travelled to three East African countries, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya, to serve as a trainer of trainers at three major East African film festivals, using film for sustainable cultural development. At the Arusha African Film Festival, I trained actors and directors, linking creative industries to national development initiatives. At the Nile Diaspora International Film Festival (NDIFF) in Uganda, I trained filmmakers on content policy and documentary practice. At the Lola Kenya Screen Festival, I used film as a communication tool to support regional integration across multiple sectors. From 2022 to 2025, I served as a member and Chairman of the jury, and as a resource person, training participants on the use of theatre for sustainable national development.

5.6 My Editorial Work

As part of my contributions to knowledge, I edited four volumes of *The CRAB Plays*. Each volume contains ten meticulously curated plays that showcase the remarkable creativity and talent of our students. This anthology highlights the artistic prowess of our students, provides them with a prestigious platform to share their work with a wider audience, both nationally and internationally, and serves as a testament to the exceptional skills and innovative ideas nurtured within the Department of Theatre and Film Studies

at the University of Port Harcourt. *The CRAB Plays* enhance the reputation of the University as a centre of excellence in creative arts education. It opens the door to collaborations with publishers, sponsors, and cultural organisations, thus creating a sustainable revenue stream. Furthermore, the anthology positions the University as a significant contributor to the Nigerian and African theatre. It offers students invaluable opportunities for professional growth and industry recognition. By fostering visibility for student talents and creating avenues for income generation, *The CRAB Plays* serves as both a developmental and economic asset to the University.

I am the pioneer editor of *The CRAB Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, an annual journal housed in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Uniport, and seven volumes were produced under my watch. I am the pioneer editor of the journal titled *EGOR: Journal of Theatre and Performance Arts*. The journal is dedicated to the memory of Professor Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi (EGOR), the pioneer Head of Department and my mentor, who encouraged me to seek employment at the University of Port Harcourt. I am also the pioneer editor of the *DGN: Journal of Directors' Guild of Nigeria*, which has produced two volumes.

Part Six: My Non-Artistic Engagements as a Director

i. Aligning Creative Differences and Managing Conflicts

Theatre is a collaborative art that brings together diverse perspectives on interpretation and style. This often creates tensions and conflicts, which must be effectively managed. I treat conflicts as opportunities to align creative differences. Therefore, I foster open communication and respect. I balance firmness with flexibility for progress without compromising integrity. I handle private complaints and reports about a production collaborator by inviting both parties to a conversation rather than making decisions based on hearsay. This is a conflict management skill I use to effectively discourage gossip, which can destroy a production.

1. Collaboration, Communication, and Time Management

For effective collaboration, I define roles and expectations through clear communication. I schedule rehearsals and production tasks effectively because time management is critical; delays can reduce production quality. Although I maintain a structured schedule, I allow for flexibility to achieve creative exploration.

2. Audience and Feedback Management

The audience is essential to theatre. Therefore, I treat audience reception and feedback as valuable. I do not accept feedback uncritically but assess and apply relevant feedback.

3. Professional Remuneration

Remuneration is important, and practitioners deserve fair compensation. As a director, I balance fair pay with resource management. Theatre is both artistic and professional, and its sustainability depends on valuing creative labour.

Part Seven: My Future Research Direction

My future research will centre on the use of theatre as a tool to stimulate reflection, dialogue, and social transformation. I will expand my work in Tfd, focusing on peacebuilding and dialogue because theatre enables communities to express concerns, resolve conflicts, and imagine alternatives. My major intellectual framework will be the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In a paper titled "*The Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs), Nollywood, and the Promotion of the SDGs*" (Emasealu, 2023), I have noted that some Nollywood films dramatise several of the seventeen SDGs by translating abstract global targets into compelling human stories. Films such as *Makoko: The Floating Slum* and the award-winning *The Milkmaid* reveal how film can illuminate issues ranging from poverty and gender inequality to peace, justice, and institutional accountability.



The SDGs as a Desirable Destination in Sourcing a Play or Script

The above diagram presents the 17 SDGs. Building on this foundation, my future directing research will explore dramatic works that address key SDGs such as Quality Education (Goal 4), Gender Equality (Goal 5), Climate Action (Goal 13), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16). By situating creative production within this framework, I intend to strengthen the capacity of theatre and film to function not merely as artistic entertainment but as vehicles for civic consciousness and sustainable development.

I will direct stage and film scripts that address sensitive issues such as gender, religion, race, trauma, and social justice because I consider it the director's intellectual responsibility.

I will train directors and actors, as this is an area that needs attention, particularly in Nollywood.

Digital and AI technologies present new opportunities. Therefore, I will explore integrating these technologies into directing. I will

develop a model of directing that integrates artistic intuition with technological fluency, because the modern director must navigate advanced tools such as previsualisation platforms, virtual production technologies, and real-time rendering environments. This includes Unreal Engine, Blender, FrameForge, and ShotPro. These systems will allow me to design scenes, environments, lighting structures, and camera movements before physical production begins, thereby transforming the rehearsal and planning process.

High-resolution digital cinematography and accessible editing platforms such as DaVinci Resolve, Adobe Premiere Pro, and Final Cut Pro have also expanded the director's creative agency in post-production. In addition, editing has evolved into a powerful site of narrative authorship where rhythm, colour, tone, and emotional intensity can be sculpted with remarkable precision. Therefore, I will learn editing literacy because it has become an essential competency for contemporary directors, ensuring that the narrative vision conceived during pre-production is faithfully realised in the final work.

I will use AI systems to support script development, dramaturgical research, narrative restructuring, and conceptual exploration. I will use image-generation technologies to develop visual languages through concept art for characters, costumes, environments, and lighting designs. Similarly, I will use video-generation tools to create animatics, visual experiments, trailers, and motion studies, to enable me to test ideas rapidly before committing resources to a full production.

Prompting, which resembles the language of directing notes, is the ability to communicate clearly with AI systems through carefully structured instructions that define context, tone, style, and pacing. I will rely on prompt literacy because prompting clarifies intention, shapes visual imagination, and guides creative interpretation.

In my future directorial engagements, I will aim to develop a hybrid directing model that combines tradition and technology, as the director of the modern technological age must be an artist, strategist, technologist, and cultural thinker simultaneously. By cultivating continuous experimentation with digital tools, visual design systems, and AI-assisted workflows, I will expand my expressive capacity while maintaining ethical responsibility and cultural sensitivity.

It is noteworthy that I did not take my subjects in these clips to the studio, use an OB-van or record them in their homes or offices. I generated these clips using AI.

Part Eight: Contributions to Knowledge, Recommendations, Conclusion

8.0 Contributions to Knowledge

I have contributed to knowledge in theatre directing practice by advocating the three-point audition technique, critical synthesis approach to directing and the bottom-line role interpretation technique.

In my scholarly engagement with theatre-for-development, I have contributed to knowledge by examining how participatory drama empowers communities to address local challenges and drive social change (Emasealu, 2003). The findings reinforce the transformative potential of Tfd: when communities “*find their voices*” through theatre, they can indeed inspire positive change from within.

8.1 Recommendations

i. Strengthening Directorial Practice Through Government Cultural Agencies

Nigerian directors should actively engage with government cultural agencies such as the National Theatre and National Troupe, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), National Gallery of Art (NGA), Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation (CBAAC), National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), National Theatre Development Agency (NTDA), and the National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism (NIHOTOUR). These agencies, under the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy, provide opportunities for capacity building, professional training, access to heritage, regulatory guidance, and platforms for showcasing creative works. Strategic collaboration with these institutions will enhance artistic authenticity, strengthen professional standards, promote Pan-African cultural inspiration, and increase national and international visibility. Ultimately, such engagement will enable Nigerian directors to produce culturally grounded, professionally refined, and globally competitive works aligned with national cultural and economic development goals.

ii. The Integration of Other Disciplines into the Theatre Arts Curriculum

Contemporary theatre and performance practices have become increasingly complex, requiring exposure to diverse fields such as philosophy, psychology, architecture, engineering, business, history, sociology, religion, and digital media. To address this complexity, a multidisciplinary curriculum is recommended to train well-rounded directors and theatre practitioners. Integrating these disciplines into theatre arts education will enhance interpretive depth, leadership capacity, contextual understanding, and creative adaptability. It will also equip students with the intellectual

breadth, technical competence, and cultural literacy necessary for directing across diverse genres, media platforms, and evolving performance environments.

Furthermore, interdisciplinary training strengthens employability and fosters creative innovation in an industry increasingly shaped by technological advancement and global cultural flows. Table 1 below outlines recommended interdisciplinary linkages across Theatre Arts specialisations.

Table 2: Interdisciplinary Linkages across Theatre Arts Specialisations

Theatre Specialization	Relevant Disciplines/Courses to Borrow
Directing	Philosophy, Psychology, Education, Literature, History, Religion, Media Studies
Playwriting	Philosophy, Literature, History, Sociology, Religion, Psychology, Linguistics
Scenography/Set Design	Architecture, Civil Engineering, Visual Arts, History, Interior Design
Lighting Design	Physics, Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Computer Science (lighting software), Technical Theatre
Sound Design	Physics, Sound Engineering, Electrical/Electronic Engineering, Music Technology
Costume Design	Fine Arts, Fashion Design, Textile Design, Cultural Studies, History, Anthropology
Makeup Design	Chemistry (for safe use of products), Cosmetology, Visual Arts, Anatomy
Acting	Psychology, Philosophy, Religion, Education, Literature, History, Linguistics
Theatre Management	Business Administration, Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Human Resource Management
Theatre for Development (Tfd)	Sociology, Development Studies, Public Health, Education, Political Science

Dance and Movement	Physical Education, Human Kinetics, Anthropology, Music, Psychology
Dramaturgy/Theatre Criticism	Literary Theory, Philosophy, History, Media Studies, Sociology
Stage Management	Business Studies, Project Management, Logistics, Information Technology
Technical Design (Props, Rigging, Automation)	Mechanical Engineering, Mechatronics, Material Science, Architecture
Theatre Architecture	Architecture, Acoustics, Urban Planning, Interior Design
Multimedia Theatre/ Digital Performance	Computer Science, Animation, Web Technology, Film Studies, Digital Media Production
Medical Theatre/Drama Therapy	Psychology, Medicine, Social Work, Counselling, Public Health
Tourism & Cultural Theatre	Cultural Studies, Tourism, Anthropology, International Relations
Advocacy Drama/Legal Theatre	Law, Political Science, Ethics, Sociology

iii. The Integration of SIWES into Theatre Arts Training

It is recommended that the Theatre Arts curriculum be redesigned to formally incorporate the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES). This initiative will provide students with practical exposure to professional directors, technical crews, performance companies, media houses, and production studios. Through such hands-on training, students will acquire essential competencies in camera operation, lighting, sound, editing software, multimedia tools, and virtual production—skills increasingly central to contemporary directing.

Beyond technical proficiency, SIWES also fosters vital professional skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and time management. By immersing students in real-world production environments and diverse directing practices, SIWES will bridge the gap between academic training and industry

expectations, ensuring that graduates are skilled, confident, and industry-ready.

iv. Establishing a Faculty of Creative and Creator Economies

In line with the good work NUC is doing by supervising the revision of the Nigerian University curriculum, I recommend the creation of a **Faculty of Creative and Creator Economies** in Nigerian universities, as the global creative economy now integrates artistic expression with digital technologies, entrepreneurship, and platform-based content creation. Nigerian creators, such as Tayo Aina, Fisayo Fosudo, Sabinus, Peller, Layi Wasabi, and Jadrolita, have achieved tremendous success without formal institutional preparation. Universities must now provide structured training for this emerging sector. The proposed Faculty may begin with the following four Departments:

1. Performing and Cinematic Arts – theatre, film, directing, screenwriting, multimedia storytelling
2. Digital Content and Creator Platforms – influencer strategy, podcasting, digital content design, monetisation
3. Creative Enterprise and Innovation – branding, IP law, cultural economics, business models
4. Technology for Creative Expression – animation, AR/VR, projection mapping, post-production tools.

This Faculty will produce directors who are not only artists but also digital-native creators, cultural strategists, and innovation-driven entrepreneurs. It aligns with global best practices at institutions such as NYU's Tisch School, the University of the Arts London, and KAIST. I call on the National Universities Commission (NUC) to champion this initiative and reposition Nigerian universities at the forefront of contemporary creative education.

The establishment of such a Faculty should proceed through phased and strategic implementation to make it more actionable. Rather than beginning as a full-scale faculty in all universities at once, it

should first be piloted in selected institutions with demonstrable strengths in theatre, film, mass communication, music, fine arts, or digital media. The NUC should encourage an initial interdisciplinary model in which existing departments contribute courses, personnel, and facilities while the proposed faculty gradually develops its own curriculum, staffing, studios, and digital laboratories. Strong partnerships with industry practitioners, content platforms, media organisations, technology hubs, and legal experts in intellectual property will also be essential to ensure relevance, internship opportunities, and entrepreneurial incubation. In this way, the proposal becomes both visionary and feasible: a carefully staged reform that allows Nigerian universities to respond realistically and effectively to the growing demands of the creative and creator economy.

v. Establishing Theatre Arenas in Major Nigerian Towns and Cities

To complement existing structures, it is recommended that state-of-the-art theatre arenas be built in major Nigerian towns and cities to allow theatre companies to run extended productions, deepen community engagement, and professionalise the country's theatre ecosystem. These theatre arenas can help to cultivate a generation of directors who can mount long runs, develop new works, and build audiences across regions, thereby strengthening national cultural cohesion.

A coordinated national theatre network in Nigeria's large urban areas, with a strong domestic market for live theatre and touring productions, will enhance cultural exports and provide sustained platforms for directors, actors, designers, and technical crews. These venues can provide technical flexibility, rehearsal stability, and architectural environments that allow directors to realise innovative staging concepts.

The economic benefits of the theatre arenas are enormous because they can generate employment across artistic, technical, administrative, and hospitality sectors. Surrounding businesses such as restaurants, hotels, and transport services also benefit from increased patronage. Government incentives, such as tax reliefs, grants, and public-private partnerships, would attract private investment and ensure the sustainability of these venues.

International examples show how the dramatic arts anchor thriving creative economies: Broadway contributes \$14.7 billion annually to New York City, while London's West End generates over £1 billion in box-office revenue. The recent renovation of the Wole Soyinka Theatre in Lagos demonstrates the significance and transformative potential of theatre infrastructure.

vi. Establishing the Centre for Creative Technology and Performance Innovation (CCTPI), University of Port Harcourt
To position the University of Port Harcourt at the forefront of creative scholarship and digital innovation, I recommend establishing the **Centre for Creative Technology and Performance Innovation (CCTPI)**. This interdisciplinary hub will integrate theatre, film, design, and storytelling with emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, 3D animation, motion capture, AR/VR, digital scenography, and immersive media.

The core functions of the CCTPI will include:

- i. Research and development in emerging performance technologies
- ii. Training programmes and workshops for students and professionals
- iii. Incubation of startups in animation, media-tech, gaming, and interactive storytelling
- iv. Industry partnerships with global technology companies
- v. Hosting festivals, certifications, exhibitions, and digital arts showcases.

The CCTPI will function as a university-wide resource, benefiting multiple faculties. It will support immersive learning in the Humanities, innovative pedagogy in Education, engineering prototyping, business enterprise development, legal research on digital rights, social science studies of media culture, health communication initiatives, and environmental storytelling projects.

For directors, the Centre will serve as an innovation laboratory, equipping them to engage confidently with AI tools, virtual production, motion capture, and immersive media. It will foster a new generation of directors who are narrative architects, creative technologists, and entrepreneurship-driven artists. Through this initiative, the University of Port Harcourt can redefine directorial training for the twenty-first century and contribute to Africa's creative renaissance.

International models such as USC's Institute for Creative Technologies and Triggerfish Animation Studio demonstrate the viability of such centres in catalysing innovation and economic development. The expected impact of the CCTPI includes:

- i. Positioning UniPort as a continental leader in creative technology
- ii. Attracting external funding, investment, and global collaborations
- iii. Generating revenue through consultancy, production, and training
- iv. Preparing students for careers in animation, film, AR/VR, gaming, and digital performance
- v. Supporting the growth of African creative-tech startups, including potential unicorns.

8.2 Appreciation

8.3 Conclusion

In this inaugural lecture, I have expressed that theatre is not “mere entertainment” and that directing is the central organising force of theatre. Directing is the process of translating the dramatic text into a visible, audible, and emotionally engaging performance by synthesising acting, design, sound, lighting, and technical elements into a coherent theatrical experience. Directing integrates collaborative efforts by coordinating the contributions of playwrights, actors, designers, and technical crew into a unified artistic vision.

I have stated that directing is both interpretive and compositional. It shapes dramatic meaning and transforms spontaneous human play into organised theatrical communication. Directing is a cultural and intellectual activity that mediates between performance and society by reflecting cultural values and encouraging social dialogue. Through critical synthesis, directing combines global theatrical techniques with indigenous African performance traditions such as song, dance, chant, and mime. Ultimately, directing embodies the philosophy of “**Let Us Play**,” by transforming imagination into meaningful, socially relevant theatre.

In this inaugural lecture, I have expressed that the responsibilities of a director include interpreting the script and shaping dramatic meaning, providing artistic vision and leadership for the production, coordinating actors, designers, and technical crew, guiding actors toward effective characterisation, shaping pacing, rhythm, and dramatic tension, designing spatial composition, movement, and picturisation, ensuring clarity of communication and audience engagement, fostering collaboration and ensemble performance, integrating cultural context and social relevance, encouraging creativity, experimentation, and innovation, promoting ethical responsibility in play selection and interpretation, facilitating theatre as a tool for education and social reflection,

organising performance as shared dialogue between actors and audiences, and balancing artistic imagination with technical and practical execution.

In view of these concluding submissions, I invite you all to the world of theatre. **Let Us Play.**

Play is celebration, relaxation, bonding, healing, learning, and cultural expression. Indeed, play is essential to the total well-being of both individuals and society. Playtime is a moment to unwind, ease tension, and temporarily step away from the burdens of life. Play offers opportunities for introspection, reflection, emotional balance, and mental rejuvenation, all of which are indispensable for sound mental health. Play can also take the form of healthy competition, as seen in sports and games, where discipline, teamwork, resilience, and excellence are nurtured. In this sense, play contributes not only to personal wellness but also to social harmony and collective progress. “Let Us Play” serves as a timely reminder that even during struggle, a people must preserve their humanity, emotional strength, and communal spirit.

In a world marked by conflict, inequality, and social fragmentation, theatre provides a platform for dialogue, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, **Let Us Play.**

Through performance, societies can confront differences constructively. **So, Let Us Play.**

Theatre is a reservoir of our history, beliefs, and cultural values. **Let Us Play.**

Theatre translates complex issues such as governance, health, climate change, and social justice into accessible human

experiences, encouraging critical thinking and responsible citizenship. **Let Us Play.**

Theatre amplifies silenced voices, promotes inclusion, and encourages social equity through meaningful public discourse shaped by the directorial art. **Let Us Play.**

In an age of technological advancement and social disconnection, theatre restores communal interaction, fosters empathy, and provides emotional catharsis. **Let Us Play.**

Man has prayed constantly: Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Eckists and traditional religionists. Let us complement praying with playing. Therefore, I proclaim: **Let us Play.**

Theatre challenges, educates, heals, and unites communities while encouraging reflection, imagination, and social transformation. **Let Us Play.**

Vice-Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, to play in the theatre is not trivial. It is transformative. In pursuit of peace, in search of understanding, in celebration of creativity, and in hope for a more humane future, **Let Us Play.**

I thank you all for the courtesy of being part of this experience.

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Appendix 1: Prominent Stage Plays that I have Directed

1. *Kinjeketile* by Ebrahim Hussein
2. *Woza Albert* by Mbogeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa
3. *Wind Versus Polygamy* by Obi Egbunna
4. *The Divorce* by Wale Ogunyemi
5. *The Gardeners*, by Emmanuel Oga (My former name)
6. "Floods Against the Crown," by Benjamin Ejiofor
7. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, by Ola Rotimi
8. *Closed Doors* by Julie Okoh
9. *Woman of Calabar* by Elechi Amadi
10. *The Wives' Revolt* by J.P. Clark
11. *Love's Unlike Lading* by Femi Osofisan
12. *Bargain Hunting* by Adnoyi Ojo Onukaba
13. *Grit* by Obari Gomba

Appendix 2: My Film Credits

1. *The Workingman's Death* (Documentary, 2005): Assistant to the Director
2. *Cashiering and You* (Documentary, 1983): Director
3. *The War of the Roses* (Feature, 1995): Director
4. *King Jaja of Opobo* (Feature, 1998) Assistant Director
5. *Obidike: The Last Warrior* (Feature, 1994): Assistant Director
6. *Hunted* (Fiction, n.d.): Actor
7. *Baby Sitters* (Fiction, n.d.): Actor
8. *Eye of Life* (Fiction, n.d.): Actor
9. *Omen of Love* (Fiction, n.d.): Actor
10. *Rampage* (Fiction, 1992): Actor
11. *The Visitors* (13 TV Episodes, 1983): Fiction: Actor
12. *What's Going On?* (Fiction, 2014): Short Film: Director

Appendix 3: News Stories and Documentaries Produced and Uploaded on YouTube During my Sabbatical Appointment with UNAMID, Sudan, in 2017.

1. *World Radio Day:*
https://youtu.be/AV6dwaS1MM?si=yJhN1j5j7D7g_vWq
2. *Photo Exhibition:*
https://youtu.be/o7q5cWxzbu0?si=yfM_L0cK42PqFZQ0
3. *JSR Visits Sector East:*
https://youtu.be/jM9nqgtvorM?si=iUZdERyE_V-7RPO6
4. *Drumming for Peace In Darfur:*
<https://youtu.be/BRXZfPrGNn8?si=XqZMKv49jDE1oiIU>
5. *International Day of UN Peacekeeper:*
<https://youtu.be/-EJk4iaZUc?si=MMoNa2Qd5RiCDeoW>
6. *World Environment Day:*
https://youtu.be/pigA_KVrz5k?si=CL152BxZgZhaGVas
7. *Um Baru:*
<https://youtu.be/hNMdJFjj0es?si=M2RyYVSmHiDoNaUY>
8. *Signs and Times in Abu Shouk IDP Camp:*
https://youtu.be/g7pAmF6meuc?si=Ygc6JpksArH_mWl7
9. *United Nations police in the African Union/United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur:*
https://youtu.be/4kfxjds-WU?si=OZvKsVDqPclK_FVM and
10. *UNAMID Closes Eleven Team Sites in Darfur:*
https://youtu.be/ROBaTPCSxqw?si=iv_lDIqctGdJP308

CITATION ON



PROFESSOR EMMANUEL CALVIN EMASEALU

Dip., B.A. (Hons.), M.A., Ph.D. (Ibadan) Cert. (Colorado)

fta, fsonta, hsonta, fdgn, fnal

Professor Emmanuel Calvin Emasealu, born in Erhurun-Uneme, Akoko-Edo LGA, on June 15, 1956, is an esteemed scholar and theatre practitioner whose illustrious career at the University of Port Harcourt spans over three decades. He earned his Diploma, B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Ibadan between 1979 and 2000. Professor Emasealu's remarkable academic journey is marked by three authored books, two inspiring plays, and more than fifty impactful scholarly journal articles and book chapters. His visionary leadership led to the launch of three notable journals: *The CRAB Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, *Nollywood Practice: Journal of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria*, and *EGOR: Journal of Theatre and Performance Arts*. He is also the pioneer editor of *The CRAB Plays*, which has four volumes of ten plays each.

Professor Emasealu's commitment to scholarship is evidenced in his extensive supervision of undergraduate projects, master's dissertations, and doctoral theses. He has demonstrated exemplary academic leadership, serving as Head of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies (2008–2010) and Chairman of the Graduate Board of Studies Committee (2012–2014). He has also served as an external examiner to several universities, participated in NUC accreditation panels, and assessed professorial candidates across Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Professor Emasealu is a consummate community theatre practitioner and a visionary director. His directing credits are in short, feature, and documentary films. His stage plays include the NLNG award-winning *Grit*, written by Obari Gomba, which was staged as the convocation play during the 2024 University of Port Harcourt convocation ceremony. His passion for theatre for young people led to the establishment of the Uniport Children's Theatre (UCT) in 1989, a platform that has nurtured young minds.

An active participant in global and national intellectual engagements, Professor Emasealu has contributed as a keynote speaker, presenter, facilitator, and resource person at numerous conferences and workshops. These include SONTA conferences across Nigerian universities, the Afrocreation-sponsored acting workshop at the University of Legon, Ghana (1989), the British Council workshop on play production in London (2010), the 2023 UNESCO National Policy Dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals and Cultural and Creative Industries in Lagos, and several NDDC workshops in Port Harcourt, Agbor, and Uyo.

His two sabbatical engagements further reflect his global impact. At Niger Delta University (2005/2006), and later in El-Fasher, Sudan (2017), where he served as a Public Information Officer with the United Nations–African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), he deployed theatre and film as tools for communication, peacebuilding, and social transformation.

He has also served as a trainer and facilitator at international film festivals, including the Arusha African Film Festival (Tanzania), Nile Diaspora International Film Festival (Uganda), and Lola Kenya Screen Cinematography Workshop (Kenya). Locally, he has served as a juror, head of jury, and facilitator at major cultural events such as the Abuja Carnival, CARNIRIV, the Benin City Film Festival, the Calabar Carnival, and the Kano Indigenous Languages of Africa Film Market and Festival (KILAF).

Professor Emasealu has distinguished himself as a mentor to many industry leaders, including Ovunda Ihunwo, Edward Imo, Sunday Edum, Faith Aminikpo, Ejike Asiegbu, Bob-Manuel Udokwu, Hilda Dokubo, Francis Duru, and Daniel Kpodoh. His artistic excellence is further evidenced in his collaboration with Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka on *King Baabu*, staged in Switzerland, South Africa, and Lesotho, and his lead role in Femi Osofisan's television series *The Visitors*.

Beyond academia, Professor Emasealu has championed transformative initiatives as Director of Community Service, inspiring student skill development and fostering meaningful university-community collaboration. His creative spirit is evident as the second runner-up in the University of Port Harcourt anthem competition. He has excelled as University Orator for some years, Director of the University Printing Press, and has strengthened education by serving five years as PTA Chairman at the Nigerian Navy Secondary School, Port Harcourt.

Professor Emasealu's leadership is celebrated through his tenure as President of the Senior Staff Club (2003–2005), 10th President of Rotary Club of Choba–Uniport (2020), Assistant Governor of Rotary District 9141 (2022–2023), and his esteemed recognition as a Paul Harry Fellow (Stage 7).

Ladies and gentlemen, I present Professor Emmanuel Calvin Emasealu, the father of Dr. Victoria Emasealu and Miss Georgia Emasealu, a devoted husband to Professor Helen Emasealu, Fellow of four esteemed learned societies - NANTAP, SONTA, DGN, NAL - and recipient of the SONTA Lifetime Achievement Award, to deliver the No 212 Inaugural Lecture of the University of Port Harcourt.

Professor Owunari A. Georgewill
Vice Chancellor