

THE DIRECTOR AS A COLLABORATOR: A CASE STUDY OF TWO NIGERIAN
DIRECTORS

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A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS
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DECLARATION

I DECLARE that this project work is based on a study undertaken by me in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts University of Benin under the supervision of Mr. Israel Meriomame Wekpe for the purpose of acquiring Bachelor of Arts B.A (Honours) degree in Theatre Arts. All ideas and views are products of my research where others view have been used and expressed, they where acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research study was embarked upon by Charisa Abieyuwa Igbinoba in the department of Theatre Arts under my supervision.

Mr Israel Meriomame Wekpe
Project Supervisor

Date.

DEDICATION

This academic piece is dedicated to The Mahanta, The Living Eck Master, whose unwavering Love and guidance guided me through every challenge and triumph I have experienced during my time at the school. I also dedicate this to my beloved family, who have been my rock throughout this journey because of their steadfast affection, encouragement, and help.

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ABSTRACT

The role of the theatre director has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from an authoritarian figure to a creative collaborator who guides, inspires, and unifies the artistic team. This study, titled ‘The Director as a Collaborator: A Case Study of Two Nigerian Directors’, explored how directors function as collaborators

within the creative process, using Dr. Patrick-Jude Oteh and Dr. Ovunda C. Ihunwo as case studies. The research was inspired by the growing realization that although theatre is inherently collaborative, much of the scholarly focus in Nigerian theatre studies has centered on the director and the actors often neglecting the equally vital contributions of other collaborators particularly the stage manager.

This study therefore examined how Nigerian directors establish and sustain collaboration with other theatre practitioners such as actors, designers, and stage managers. It aimed to understand how communication, teamwork, and role definition contribute to the success of a production, while also identifying the challenges and tensions that arise in the collaborative process.

Using a qualitative research method, the study employed interviews and textual analysis to explore the director's collaborative approaches. Information was obtained from both directors through structured interview sessions, supported by relevant theoretical and scholarly literature on collaboration, directing, and theatre practice.

Findings from the study revealed that both directors recognized collaboration as the heartbeat of theatre. However, they differ in approach. Dr. Patrick-Jude Oteh combines administrative discipline with creative flexibility, defining collaboration as a partnership that thrives on structure, trust, and professional communication. Dr. Ovunda C. Ihunwo, on the other hand, roots his collaborative process in textual understanding, performance authenticity, and cultural expression. The study further noted that while Oteh treats the stage manager as a core collaborator essential to production success, Ihunwo perceives the role more as an assistant director, reflecting a difference in operational philosophy.

The study concluded that successful directing depends not on authority but on the ability to create a participatory environment where each collaborator feels valued and heard.

Keywords: Director, Collaboration, Theatre, Stage Manager, Communication, Nigerian Theatre, Designers

CHAPTER 1

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The role of the theatre director has undergone significant transformation, evolving from rigid hierarchical control to a more fluid, ensemble-oriented practice that characterizes contemporary performance. Historically, directors such as Edward Gordon Craig epitomised an authoritarian model in which the director maintained total control over every aspect of production. Craig famously envisioned the actor as an 'Über-Marionette' a stylized figure whose movements were meticulously controlled to serve the director's singular vision. As Paola Degli Esposti notes, Craig's conception of the actor 'minimizes personal emotional expression in favor of precision and artistic unity' (8). His 1912 Hamlet production, characterized by symbolic movement and rigid stylization, exemplified an approach where collaboration was minimal, and the director's authority reigned supreme.

However, In today's theatre the role of the director has become increasingly complex and multifaceted. The directorial process typically begins with the conceptualisation of the playwright's script, followed by the development of a production concept and style. It involves working closely with stage managers and designers, selecting and rehearsing actors, and ultimately bringing the script to life for an audience.

This intricate process requires not only technical expertise but also strong interpersonal and organisational skills.

The theatre director possesses a distinctive role. As Robin Schraft notes, in *The Directors Toolkit* (2018) 'the director's influence is felt and seen everywhere in a production, yet their contributions often remain invisible to the audience' (4). This argues that unlike the work of the playwright, performers, or designers, the director's input is woven into every element of the production but is not always directly identifiable on stage. This invisible yet omnipresent influence underscores the director's unique position in theatre-making.

For this study, the focus is on the director as a collaborator. Collaboration is widely recognised as the heart of theatre. It is not merely an objective or an instrument but fundamentally the spirit that drives theatrical creation. The process of collaboration begins with the director, whose ability to establish a collaborative environment at the outset sets the tone for the entire production. As Schraft asserts, while a collaborative director does not automatically guarantee a fully harmonious process, 'a positive collaborative experience cannot emerge without the director first creating the conditions for trust, openness, and shared creativity' (5).

Reflecting this shift, Jean M Burgess in *Collaborative Stage Directing: A Guide to Creating and Managing a Positive Theatre Environment*, notes that effective directing is 'a process built on dialogue and mutual respect, where meaning develops through the contributions of all participants'(2). This perspective underscores that

collaboration is not only an artistic technique but a leadership movement where the director's success is measured by how well she communicates, listens, and integrates collective creativity.

Looking at this evolution, I realise that communication is the key to collaboration in theatre. A director who fails to communicate properly with her actors, designers and stage manager limits creativity, while one who listens and engages with her collaborators builds an ensemble that works as a unified artistic force. Thus, the director's task is not only to lead but also to bridge her vision with the contributions of others. When this delicate balance is achieved, the outcome is a performance that embodies the spirit of collaboration at the heart of theatre-making.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

By its very nature the theatre is a collaborative art. Thus, collaboration is very crucial in creating a successful production with the director as the pioneer as he coordinates and combines the effort of actors, designers and other contributors. Although considerable academic focus has been directed towards the director's leadership role with these people, there seems to be a slight exemption in acknowledging the stage manager's role within the collaborative structure.

Significantly, some Nigerian theatre scholars such as Duro Oni, Ahmed Yerima have created insightful pieces on theatre direction and collaboration. Duro Oni's critiques concentrate more on the technical and visual design aspect in relation to the director's vision, frequently neglecting to give a proper account of the stage manager's role. Likewise Ahmed Yerima, a theatre practitioner, stresses the interpretative dynamics among the directors, the script and the actors, while showing little recognition of the stage manager's coordination duties.

Looking at the works of these two, I deduce that the stage manager's role is rarely addressed, leading me to ask 'Why Is The Stage Manager's Role Exempted In Some Of Nigerian Theatrical Discourse?'

This study seeks to explore the director's role in the collaborative process while highlighting the overlooked yet essential role played by the stage manager.

Another issue is that of communication. Although communication happens all the time during the creative process it does not necessarily mean co-operation. It is no new knowledge that the various departments in the theatre have their own unique characteristics and contributions they include to the overall production. But insufficient communication from these departments will lead to a disorganised production.

It is also important to note that in theatre productions, communication and collaboration naturally involve the exchange of diverse ideas, creative visions, and artistic interpretations. Because each collaborator from the actors to designers to stage managers brings their own unique perspectives and personal approaches, disagreements are almost inevitable.

As Parker Palmer (2008) asserts, in *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* 'there is no knowing without conflict' (90) meaning that genuine understanding and creative growth often emerge when ideas are tested, questioned, and refined through constructive disagreement. For a director, this dynamic is particularly important as it provides an opportunity to explore various viewpoints, challenge assumptions, and arrive at more nuanced artistic decisions. This research will therefore treat conflict as a natural component of the relational dynamics between the director and other collaborators.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- i. To identify the challenges and conflicts that arise in collaboration: This objective involves identifying the various challenges and creative differences that occur in the collaborative process.
- ii. To understand how communication affects the whole production process: This objective explore how communication influences the overall production process, focusing particularly on the director's role as a key communicator in bringing a performance to life.
- iii. To identify the unique characteristics they add to a production: This objective investigates the distinctive contribution the director, stage manager and designers provide to a production while focusing on how those roles collaborate to shape the final performance.
- iv. To understand the need for role definition in the theatre: This objective examines the importance of clearly defined role as a collaborator, enabling coordination between the cast and crew.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is to explore the director's role in the collaborative process. This study aims to identify how directors collaborate with actors, stage managers and designers, the directors role and the challenges they face as collaborators while guiding performance. This study will employ qualitative research methods through an interview. This method will ensure a more nuanced understanding of the director as a collaborator.

Theatre practitioners will serve as the research sample size, however this study is centred on Nigerian theatre directors Patrick– Jude Oteh and Ovunda C. Ihunwo respectively.

This focus will ensure that the study shows the director's role in the creative process and how they work to develop a cohesive artistic vision.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The findings from this study will show the director's function beyond being in charge, highlighting their capability to foster collaboration and creativity in a production, It will also show the benefits of collaboration not just within the theatrical field but in our day to day life

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research intends to answer the following questions.

- i. Who is a director, and how does he contribute to the creative process?
- ii. What is the director's role, and how does it bring about collaboration?
- iii. Who is a stage manager and how does additionally function as a collaborator?
- iv. How does a director promote teamwork in the creative process?

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

- i. Director: A person who brings a team of actor, designers together to bring a shared vision to life.
- ii. Stage Manager: An organiser who helps coordinate the efforts of all departments, serving as the central communicators ensuring that everyone's work aligns together seamlessly to create a successful production.
- iii. Designer: A professional who works closely with the director, cast and crew to visually shape the overall production.
- iv. Communication: The act of passing information within all departments of the theatre in the creative process.

CHAPTER 2

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The role of the director goes beyond the mere tasks of managing, overseeing, and coordinating a production. Directing is fundamentally about collaboration, a delicate interplay among diverse creative contributors, technical staff, and performers. In *The Empty Space* (1995), Peter Brook emphasises that theatre can be distilled to its essence and all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged is for a man to stroll over a vacant area while someone else is watching him.'(9).He highlights that the director's dual role is both as a creator, shaping the artistic vision, and a supporter guiding the ensemble toward a unified realization of that concept emphasising that the director's craft becomes the art of cultivating connection between performer, audience, and the space while fostering a cohesion within the creative team. This chapter examines related literature regarding the role of the director in the theatre investigating how collaboration takes place within the creative process, emphasising the director's connection with other creatives and technical team members. While analysing the challenges of collaborative directing.

2.2 THE DIRECTORIAL ROLE

Over the years,the director's role has changed considerably. Director's now hold pivotal roles, having been seen as a choreographer, a manager or overseer of stage action in the past. The modern director is a creative leader who blends the input of actors, the stage manager, designer, playwright and other collaborators into a cohesive artistic vision,rather than serving as an authoritative figure.

Robert Knopf reimagine the director's role as that of negotiation and synthesis. In his seminal work, *The Director as a Collaborator* he redefines the director as an artist whose primary role is to unite and motivate the creative input of everyone in the production,rather than dictating. He claims that modern director's ability to harmonise artistic vision with acceptance to the idea of the playwrights, designer and performer (1-2). This perspective removes the director from the frame of a sole authority to that of a creative facilitator.

The director's role spans all phases of production,acting as a link between artistic vision and practical implementation. The director performs a thorough dramaturgical analysis during pre-production,by understanding the script, the themes, the subtext and the narrative. This analytics work forms the basis for a unified conceptual approach which is created through communication with the designers and sometimes the playwrights. These initial discussions establish the production's emotional and visual tone, making sure the set, costume, lighting and sound component correspond with the text's foundational idea and the director's vision.

He also collaborates closely with the performers during rehearsals to investigate blocking, rhythm and character; this act ultimately fosters an environment for discovery. During the technical and performance phases, the director collaborates with the lighting, sound, costume and stage management team to sync every aspect while shifting attention to synthesis. This leadership empowers each collaborator to produce their finest work while influencing the production narrative and visuals. This cohesive role is what brings a script to life as a performance that resonates with the audience and brings about the collective capacity of the whole cast.

Anne Bogart in *A Director Prepares* further emphasises the director's role as a collaborator by portraying the rehearsal space as an ideal laboratory in which the director listens, curates and provokes. The best directors she writes 'are not those who know all the answers but those who ask the right question' (14). According to this philosophy, the director has a duty to cultivate a creative atmosphere in which ensembled members feel encouraged to make significant contributions.

Katie Mitchell contributes to the discussion as she supports Bogart in *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (2001) by emphasising that directors need to be adaptable but well prepared. She states 'the director is responsible for creating a safe and imaginative space where actors can explore' (26)

In *Stage Directing : The First Experience* (2015) Jim Patterson offers a foundational and approachable method for directing. He describes the director as someone who organises concepts, inspires performers and oversees the entire creative process in order to 'shape a production from page to stage' (3). Significantly he emphasises that successful directors are interpreters and facilitators not dictators (8). This supports the idea that directing is as much about interpersonal skill as it is about creativity.

Pasquale de Marco in *Stories in the theatre* (2018), describes the director as a listener of stories. Someone who must interpret and collect the narrative and emotional threads in a performance (51). His reflective and initiative approach implies that directing is as much about perception as it is about projection. After reviewing these various perspectives I perceive the director as a vital figure serving as a visionary, interpreter and a unifier. The perspectives from Knopf to De Marco shows that the director's role is not only in defining the production's artistic vision, but also in promoting cooperation among his team.

2.3 COLLABORATION IN THE THEATRE

Collaboration in the arts denotes the vibrant process of several participants joining forces to create a cohesive artistic vision. It dwells in the heart of theatrical productions as the theatre flourishes on the interaction of several imaginative minds, which contrasts with solidarity arts such as painting, drawing etc. The Director, actor, designer, stage manager technically contributes their unique viewpoint and abilities closely to create a cohesive artistic experience.

Collaboration starts with ethics as the manner in which people cooperate is influenced by their respect, support and responses to one another. In the theatre

ethical considerations guarantee that every voice is considered and that both emotional and physical safety are preserved within the rehearsal environment and that all contributions are recognised equitably.

Fionna Bannon in *Considering Ethics in Dance, theatre and performance* (2018) agrees with this as she asserts that collaboration in creating performances should be founded on ethical awareness. She highlights the significance of mutual respect and shared accountability, depicting collaboration as a process where all participants are acknowledged as co-creators of the work. Although her focus is on dance, the principles are directly applicable to other aspects of the theatre; where the coordinator must ensure that the creative environment appreciates the contributions of every individual. She further explores how ethical practices in performance are relational and developed in conjunction with others as concepts are formed collectively. She suggests that 'ethical work is relational, forged in association with others as we cultivate ideas that matter' (215). This viewpoint emphasised the importance of collective responsibility and mutual involvement in the creative process.

For proper collaboration to happen in the theatre, effective communication must be included in the creative process. As a collective and multidisciplinary art form, the theatre depends on continuous dialogue among directors, actors, designers, stage managers and the production team.

Communication is key to collaboration, as it functions not only as a way to share ideas but also a method for negotiating creative choices, resolving disagreement and upholding one vision throughout the creative process. During collaboration in the theatre, the director serves as the central communicator. In *Play Directing: Analysis, communication and style*, Francis Hodge and Michael McLain asserts that the director is essentially a communicator whose creative impact is conveyed through collaboration. They characterise the director as a 'communicator whose main role is executed through actors and designers who subsequently convey ideas and energies to the audience' concluding that the director's role there is also to function as a communicator of the highest calibre (2). From this perspective the director is not just a decision maker but an important voice in collaboration. By effectively expressing the vision of the production and encouraging dialogue among performers and designers, the director guarantees that the final performance aligns with clarity, purpose and emotional significance.

Laurie Kincman in *The Stage Manager's Toolkit* (2016) emphasises this concept as she articulates that proficient communication forms the foundation of any production process. She also indicates that the stage manager's function relies on serving as a dependable channel of information among all departments explaining how vital communication is not only for logistics but promoting collaboration while on the fact that communication needs to be purposeful, steady and all encompassing ensuring that every contributor irrespective of their role has access to the information needed to operate effectively (1-3). This corresponds with the director's necessity to cultivate transparency and clarity during rehearsals. She additionally emphasises that communication in the theatre encompasses not only verbal exchange but also

written schedules, cue sheets and production notes, showing that when communication is organised and carefully presented, it lessens confusion and enables proper collaboration. This also shows the stage manager as an active member in the collaboration process in the theatre. From this, I deduce that collaboration in the theatre requires a director who serves as a facilitator and individuals who can lead while promoting shared ownership of the creative process. In this creative process, performers also play a role in the collaborative dynamics by responding to the environment created by the design and providing insight that affects character representation and blocking.

As noted by Lisa Porter and Narda Alcorn in *Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice* (2014), 'including actors in initial design conversation can be essential (67). They propose that designers who stay attentive to actors requirements assist in establishing a more practical and expressive performance space.

Furthermore, in *The Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance* (2014) Paul Allain and Jen Harvie characterise collaboration in the theatre as a 'reciprocal process of meaning-making' where every participant understands and modifies the developing vision of the production (123). This shows that the duty of collaboration rests not solely on the director but also with the designers, actors, Stage managers and other production team's readiness to engage; adapt and co-create.

This collaboration occurs when it's based on ethics and effective communication.

2.4. THE DIRECTOR'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CREATIVES

The director's relationship with actors, designers, and stage managers is at the core of successful theatrical collaboration. Directors must balance leadership with openness to others' creative ideas, fostering an environment where all participants feel valued. Palma Parker in *Directing for the Stage: A Workshop Guide of Creative Exercises and Projects* emphasizes that 'effective collaboration emerges when directors use creative exercises that invite contributions from every member of the team, transforming rehearsals into spaces of shared ownership' (45). This perspective underlines that collaboration is not simply a managerial task but an interactive process that thrives on mutual respect and creative engagement.

2.4.1. DIRECTOR–ACTOR INTERACTION

The relationship between the director and the actors is among the most intricate and impactful in the creative process. Mitchell underscored the necessity of creating a collaborative atmosphere in which actors feel enabled to offer their creative input; she details Twelve Golden Rules for working with actors' which includes building trust, promoting exploration and upholding clear communication (117). This approach

guarantees that actors are not just following orders but are also involved in the production process.

In *Play Directing: Analysis Communication and Style*, Hodge and McLain emphasise the importance of the director as a cooperative communicator instead of a singular authority. They point out that a director should assist 'actors in creating characters through a process that combines analysis and creative exploration'(59). This collaborative interaction establishes the basis for an effective rehearsal and atmosphere. This shows that the director's duty is not only molding the performance but also fostering the actor's creative development.

This ultimately contrasts with Mitchell as she advocates for cooperative actor centered approach, where the director acts more as a guide than as an authority, staying that rehearsals are places for exploration, urging directors to ask questions rather than give answers, enabling actors to grow into their own characters naturally. This shows a shift from an organised coaching by Hodge and McLain towards a more shared process of discovery.

2.4.2 THE DIRECTOR DESIGNER DYNAMICS

Designers have an essential role in bringing the director's vision to life as they aid in the visual, spatial and atmospheric elements that are important to storytelling. According to Stephen Di Benedetto in *An Introduction to Theatre Design*. (2017) ,the collaboration with designers starts during the conceptual phase and lasts all the way through to the final technical rehearsal. The director expresses thematic objective while designers interpret and provide creative solutions. He regards theatre design not as a secondary feature but as a fundamental aspect of storytelling developed through the collaboration between directors and designers. He explains that the director must engage actively with designers to establish an environment where visual, spatial and thematic elements are seamlessly added into the dramatic action.

He further clarifies that collaboration starts with the director clearly defining a conceptual vision for the production. However, this vision isn't enforced; rather it acts as a basis for discussion. The creative responses that the designers present after interpreting that vision, might evolve or even transform the initial concept.

Di Benedetto points out that this exchange not only encourages innovation but also ensures aesthetic unity. He also notes that the strongest production emerges when the director embraces the designer's input as integral rather than supplementary.

Mitchell also highlights the significance of openness and consistent communication with designers. She suggests that directors should engage designers in the initial rehearsals to observe the developing performance and modify their design as needed (81). This continuous conversation guarantees that design decisions are attuned to the emotional and spatial dynamics of the actors' performance.

2.4.3 THE DIRECTOR VS THE STAGE MANAGER

Though often less visible to the audience the stage manager is a crucial collaborator for the director. Throughout pre-production, rehearsals, production and post production; the stage manager guarantees organisational effectiveness, taking comprehensive records of blockings made by the director and managing communication between departments.

Lawrence Stern and Alice O'Grady (2016) highlights in *Stage Management* that the director's skills in delegating and communicating efficiently with the stage manager significantly impacts rehearsal dynamics and technical execution(99-100).

The director must have trust and confidence in the stage manager to maintain the integrity of the production during technical rehearsals and performance runs. This trust - based relationship requires consistency, mutual respect and professional transparency for it to succeed.

Laurie Kinckman emphasises this notion in *Stage Management; The Essential Handbook* articulating that ' the stage manager is the director's administrative partner not only the logistics but also the director's style and communication reference (1-3). A fruitful collaboration relies on the director being clear about their expectations and honouring the stage manager's authority in managing the show. This partnership goes beyond the technical aspects; it is both collaborative and adaptable. The director may spearhead the vision, but the stage manager ensures that the vision stays intact in the face of change, stress and time limitations. As a result of this the director - stage manager relationship serves as a foundation of consistency and professionalism in the theatre.

Lisa Porter and Narda Alcorn highlight in *Stage Management; Theory as a guide to practice* that when stage managers are viewed as equal partners; the overall production process gains from unity and effectiveness. Stage managers frequently act as the link between various departments and their function in overseeing time, resources and personnel is crucial for bringing the director's vision to life in reality (41-62)

The connection and relationship that the director has with the actors, designers and stage manager are not secondary. They are the foundation of a successful theatrical production process. Successful directors harmonise leadership with collaboration, vision and receptiveness. By fostering trust, transparency and responsiveness in the connection directors empower all creatives to fully engage in the collective creative process.

2.5 CHALLENGES IN COLLABORATIVE DIRECTING

While collaborative directing is frequently lauded for promoting creativity and inclusivity, it also introduces various practical and interpersonal obstacles. Directors engaged in collaboration practices must continuously negotiate creative freedom with unity, multiple perspectives with a singular vision and transparency when it

comes to authoritative control. These obstacles can complicate the directing experience and necessitate advanced communication, flexibility and emotional awareness. A significant challenge exists in navigating diverse creative contributions.

With a collaborative environment, actors, designers and stage managers all offer ideas that could either enhance or complicate the director's vision. As Fiona remarks 'collaboration often involves tension between individuals artistic intentions and group responsibilities (1-21) . This tension may result in conflicting priorities making it challenging for the director to preserve clarity of purpose while also respecting the creative independence of collaborators.

Time limitations represent another ongoing collaborative technique that usually necessitates more extended rehearsal times to create room for exploration, conversation and modification. Carol Price agrees to this as she recognises in *The Art of Rehearsal* that although open-ended exploration produces richer performances, it also requires time that might not be feasible within standard production timeline (1-30)

Another challenge stems from the emotional demand involved in managing group dynamics. Collaborative settings rely heavily on trust and mutual respect, yet these characteristics are not always assured. Directors must be equipped to mediate interpersonal disputes and ensure that all collaborators feel acknowledged and valued. This emotional labour can be burdensome and if poorly handed, it may lead to dissatisfaction or disengagement from the group.

Moreover, hierarchical expectations within conventional theatre framework may challenge collaborative methods. Even when directors strive for flat power structure, or some certain standard may still place the director in a position of dominant authority.

As Josephine Machon points in *Immersive Theatre: Intimacy and immediacy in contemporary performances* genuinely collaborative directing must address and disrupt these deep rooted hierarchies, which can be a slow intricate journey (75) . In spite of these obstacles, collaborative directing continues to build traction due to its ability to enrich artistic involvement and foster a more inclusive and democratic creative process. Effective collaborative directors are those who view these challenges as chances for growth, discovering innovative approaches to balance leadership with openness.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The director as a collaborator is vital in creating a unified production. Collaboration goes beyond the rehearsal space and involves dialogue with designers, actors, Stage managers and other members of the creative team where each participant contributes their own unique idea and the director's job is to enable a procedure in which those ideas are exchanged, enhanced and brought to life collectively. I deduce from this chapter that authentic collaboration is grounded on mutual respect, transparent communication and shared accountability. By creating an atmosphere

where all contributions, ideas are acknowledged, the entire ensemble, rather than just one individual vision.

CHAPTER 3

ONE ON ONE WITH THE DIRECTORS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Collaboration refers to the process in which people come together bringing their unique perspectives, talent and experience to work towards common objectives.

I conceive collaboration as an activity which brings various individuals to a certain goal through mutual respect and effective communication.

Anne Bogart in *The Art of collaboration; on Dramaturgy and Directing* (2014) effectively illustrates collaboration using metaphor 'windows'. In her view, collaboration unfolds as a scenario in which members of the creative team observe the production through a unique window. The director, actor, designer, and other participants all engage with the same event, yet their perspective differs greatly (213). This diversity of viewpoints highlights the richness of collaboration, as each person's distinct lens contributes to a fuller understanding of the creative work. For Bogart, the concept of a singular director or actor may not exist in a definitive sense. Instead these roles can be viewed as various windows that allow any member of the team to make meaningful contributions to the creative work.

In *Devised Theatre* (1994), Allison Oddey states that collaboration must be included in any definition of devised theatre (3) as devised theatre is a work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people coming together (1).

These perspectives resonate with how I conceive collaboration as more than just teamwork; but a dynamic space characterised by active listening, open negotiations and shared input that collectively shapes the final outcome and also emphasises the collaborative nature of the theatre suggesting that each individual's input is valued and essential to the creative process.

I will be exploring the director as a collaborator through the responses from the creative lens of two Nigerian directors namely Patrick Jude Oteh and Ovunda C. Ihunwo respectively.

Patrick Jude Oteh is a renowned Nigerian theatre director, playwright and art administrator. He is the founder and artistic director of The Jos Repertory Theatre Companies, based in Plateau state. He originally wanted to become a Catholic priest, but discovered his passion for theatre while waiting for seminary admission and eventually earned a PhD in theatre arts from the University of Ibadan. He has directed numerous productions and led initiatives focusing on social issues like

trauma, violence, and peace building. Through his leadership, Oteah has made significant contributions to Nigerian Theatre, cultural development and social transformation through the arts and

Ovunda C. Ihunwo is an Associate Professor of Performance and Film Aesthetics at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, in the University of Port Harcourt. He is an experienced theatre director, actor-trainer, and voice coach, known for his expertise in acting for stage and screen as well as film production. Ihunwo holds a BA in Theatre Arts and advanced degrees (Master's and PhD) in Film Studies from the University of Port Harcourt. His directing style blends structure with creativity, emphasizing discipline during rehearsals while encouraging collaboration and cultural expression. Beyond directing, he is a prolific scholar, having authored works like *The Actor's Triune Nature*, *The Psychology of Auditioning*, and several articles on Nollywood narrative techniques, African dance aesthetics, and acting theory. His productions often highlight musicality, rhythm, and indigenous cultural elements, reflecting his belief in theatre as a communal and socially relevant form of art. Dr. Ihunwo has also served as National Vice President (South-South) of the Actors' Guild of Nigeria and is a Fellow of Theatre Arts as well as a member of the Directors' Guild of Nigeria.

3.2 . A REFLECTIVE SESSION WITH PATRICK–JUDE OTEH

IGBINOBA: Please can you introduce yourself?

OTEH: Patrick–Jude Oteah PhD is a trained theatre director and holds Diploma, Bachelors, Master's and Doctorate Degrees in Theatre Arts and another Master's Degree in International Law and Diplomacy, with emphasis on International Economic Law. He was an international participant at the Media Meets Message / American Film Showcase training at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. He was a Summer International Fellow (2009-2011) at the DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington D.C. He is a member of the select group of specialists under the John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress at New York University that was inaugurated at the Rockefeller Foundation Center, Bellagio, Milan, Italy. He is the founding Artistic Director of the Jos Repertory Theatre as well as the festival producer of the annual Jos International Festival of Theatre currently in its 16th edition. He holds Fellowships with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington DC, and the National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP). He was a columnist with the Peoples' Daily Newspaper. His interests in the theatre range from directing for the stage, dance, theatre administration, fund raising and improvisations. He has travelled extensively and has directed plays locally and internationally. He has also produced over 340 radio drama episodes on various issues ranging from counter-messaging, de-radicalization, insurgency, reconciliation, agriculture, gender and gender based violence. Alongside his work at the Jos Repertory Theatre, he is an adjunct Senior

Lecturer at the National Film Institute, Jos where he teaches on the intersection between Theatre and Film. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), Nigeria, a UNESCO advisory organisation on conservation and heritage.

IGBINOBA: What kind of a director would you say you are, and could you describe your directing style?

OTEH: As an undergraduate director, I was autocratic because I believed that route would carve out for me respect and acceptance amongst my peers. But I was only competing against myself because from 300 until final year, I was the only directing student. However at the undergraduate level while being autocratic serves its purpose in making fellow students see you as the “no-nonsense” director, in the real world, this does not work. You have to carve a niche as a benevolent director with listening ears and collaborative sense who gives colleagues and peers the ability to air their views in the creative process. Being empathetic also helps a lot because then you can achieve more results that you all can be proud of. My directing style is collaborative. I usually segment this into what I refer to as “actors problems” and “directors problems”. This means that there are challenges and problems in the creative situation that I segment for actors and directors. For instance, if I have to create a scene where two actors talk like a couple, I prefer the actors to work it out within themselves in terms of what kind of couple they want to showcase. That is the actor’s problem. If however, in trying to block my play and I determine that I would get a better picture if the actor moves from stage right to left, I do not expect the actor to question this because there is a picture in my head I want to see. This is the director’s problem. However, a week to production, I hardly allow any more collaborative intrusions except from the technical crew and costumes department. At this point, I believe that further changes might complicate what we have already set out.

IGBINOBA: Given your experience as a director, how do you view collaboration and where does it really begin in the production process?

OTEH: I have to clarify at the onset that the only time I get to function as a theatre director, in the full terms of that definition, is when I am working internationally. Then I do not have to worry about mundane existential problems and most importantly, I do not have to worry about funding. But here at home in Nigeria, I function more as an administrator and only on rare occasions do I get the opportunity to direct. But when I do get the opportunity to direct, the collaboration starts with the playwright whose script I will be working on. Then the audition process but before this, I have to determine how many actors we will be able to afford within our production budget. Alongside the actors, I have to carefully choose my technical crew. My lights and design are very important. The costumes come later. Over the years, we have

evolved the poor theatre concept reducing a lot of cost in the area of spectacle but relying more on the actor as a person and an instrument.

Collaborations are very important because you cannot do it alone. You must work with people. Even if you are doing a one actor act, you need personnel and other creatives to partner with you to bring your vision to life.

IGBINOBA: When you think about collaboration, who are the key personnel involved and how do they contribute to the creative process?

OTEH: Refer to (3) above. Collaborations are key to the creative process.

If handled properly, you can have a huge production that costs less to nothing because you have engaged the right colleagues to collaborate with. Let me clarify with our work with the author and playwright, Sefi Atta:

As a director, it is very important for me to have the liberty to handle my script. She gives this but the respect I also have for her is not to cut or edit her dialogue which I think are always carefully chosen. She gives me my liberty and I reciprocate by giving her the respect she deserves. She sat in on rehearsals of Last Stand and The Engagement – she was not obstructive nor wanting her influence as a playwright to shadow over my own work as a director. However, she shares her notes and ideas especially in the final picture of the characters she sees on stage and how credibly they relay her vision. However, in directing her Death Road, she only heard about it and I think it was very successful especially as we hosted the world premiere. I think it is her most formidable play yet. I had to seek clarification from her on some of the issues raised in the play and she was very forthcoming. My experiences with directing her plays and with her have been the normal working relationship of a director and a playwright.

IGBINOBA: Who typically initiates it?

OTEH: I guess you are referring to the collaboration? It is the director that initiates it. For me as a director, I am at that level of independence in my work that I have to tell my producers or funders that I will choose my own team. You cannot impose someone on me whose work ethic is probably at variance with my own because you think you know the producer or the funder. This liberty to initiate the process of collaboration should rest with the director and no one else.

IGBINOBA: Peter Brooks talks about directors as collaborators with actors and creatives. From your professional experience do you consider the stage managers as collaborators themselves?

OTEH: The stage manager is an integral part of the collaborative process. The times I have chosen the wrong stage manager, the production is doomed even before starting. Recall that above, I told you that I function more as an administrator? If I have to travel or leave the production, it is the stage manager that takes over the

process and no one else. So if you do not have a competent and efficient stage manager, you will certainly run into serious challenges. So for me the choice of the stage manager is key compared to the lead character.

IGBINOBA: As a director, what are the different strands of collaboration?

OTEH: I will say I use all strands as I believe they are all key to the production process.

IGBINOBA: In your experience, Can you describe how you ensure that the various elements of a production are nuanced in the process?

OTEH: It is the role of the director to bring all these together. Except if he / she is a superman/woman, the person will be over-worked if all these elements are not brought together into one cohesive whole and this is where the administrative acumen of the director comes into play. Especially in our climate, the director aside from being a very good administrator must also be a very good manager of resources and of people. If you have a production without a stage manager for instance, it will become very obvious at a stage within the production that either the director is over-worked or certain elements in the production process are missing. This becomes more intense towards opening night. In my own experience, towards opening night, the entire production team starts to meet daily to iron out production details and in the last week of opening, they must attend all rehearsals.

IGBINOBA: Can you kindly describe how collaboration stood out in the creative process from two of your productions?

OTEH: I usually think of our work with Sefi Atta and the August Wilson Foundation who handle the rights to the works of August Wilson. Sefi Atta embodies the ideal relationship between the playwright and the director while the August Wilson Foundation also embodies this but from a different perspective. I prefer playwrights who tell you outright that the image or picture you are creating does not reflect their thinking as against those that will sabotage you on opening night. Over time, I have developed and worked with creatives who once they read the script, they know what we are engaging with and how to go about it. In Aime Cesaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, our costume designer was in Abuja and over the course of two months, we worked online until two weeks before opening when she joined us but by then, most of the designs were already at the tailors. It worked perfectly well.

IGBINOBA: Fiona Bannon argues that collaboration often involves tension. Does this resonate with any of the productions you have had?

OTEH: None.

3.3 OVUNDA C. IHUNWO: AN INTERVIEW

IGBINOBA :Can you please introduce yourself ?

IHUNWO: The Department of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of Port Harcourt employs Dr. Ovunda C. Ihunwo as an Associate Professor of Performance and Film Aesthetics. He is well-known for his knowledge of film production and performing arts acting, as well as his experience as a theater director, actor trainer, and voice coach. The University of Port Harcourt awarded Ihunwo a BA in Theatre Arts and graduate degrees in Film Studies (Master's and PhD). His approach to directing combines structure with creativity, placing an emphasis on discipline during rehearsals while fostering teamwork and cultural expression. He has directed important performances, such as Ola Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead, which was staged to commemorate Nigeria's independence in 2021, and We Are Here, We Are Here, which incorporates methods from African total theater.

IGBINOBA :What kind of a director are you and how would you describe your directing style?

IHUNWO: I can't say what kind of director I am because a dancer cannot see his waist. I can only say that I love to give a creative interpretation to any script I handle and make sure that my actors understand every subtext in the lines in order to give a believable performance.

IGBINOBA: When it comes to the production process in the educational world, where does collaboration truly begin for you?

IHUNWO: For me, collaboration begins from script reading.

IGBINOBA : Drawing from your experience and your work within Nigerian universities, how would you describe collaboration in academia? Who are the key personnel involved in that collaborative process?

IHUNWO: The key personnel involved are the set designer, costume designer, lighting designer, choreographer in the first instance. Others can come in much later

IGBINOBA : Who typically initiates it?

IHUNWO: I do

IGBINOBA : Peter Brooks suggests that directors are naturally collaborators, working closely with actors and creatives to shape a performance. Given your experience, how do you view the role of the stage manager in the collaborative process? Both in and out of the classroom ?

IHUNWO: The stage manager is an appendage of the director. He or she is like the unofficial assistant director. Once I finish blocking, I leave the rehearsal to the stage manager but come in once in a while to fine tune some areas.

IGBINOBA: As a director, what are your various strands of collaboration?

IHUNWO: I enjoy total theatre. As a director I'm also a good singer, composer and dancer but not a good choreographer, set designer or lighting designer. So I always collaborate with those whose expertise are in the other areas and save my vision with them.

IGBINOBA : How do you ensure that the different elements of a production are nuanced in the process ?

IGBINOBA : Can you talk about a time in any of your productions where collaboration really stood out? What was it like?

IHUNWO: When I directed Pedro Obaseki's *Obaseki*I enjoyed the power of collaboration. I had to call a colleague in Benin for the songs and he made his group sing all the songs, wrote them down and I took time to learn them before embarking on the rehearsal. Besides the collaboration with the choreographer, the songs were so well rendered that most people were enthralled. It gave us a full house for four days.

IGBINOBA: Fiona Bannon argues that collaboration often involves tension. Can you provide any related situations from any of your productions?

IHUNWO: Yes, I had an ugly experience with a very talented but indisciplined set designer in 2017 when I directed Kind Jaja of Opobo in celebration of Rivers State Golden Jubilee. He was mobilized many months before the production but on the day of production, he was still putting finishing touches. It kept me very uncomfortable and I swore never to work with him again.

IGBINOBA: In an educational based theatre project, how does collaboration differ from the professionals setting?

IHUNWO: I don't see any difference.

3.4 FINDINGS: COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

COMPARISON

i. Value of Collaboration

Both directors stress that collaboration is at the core of theatre-making. I strongly agree with this because, from my own understanding and limited experience in theatre, no production can truly come to life without the combined effort of multiple creatives. It's not just about the director giving instructions or telling them what to do, it's also about co-creating. This goes in-line with what I have always believed, that the theatre thrives when people work with each other, not for one another.

ii. Director as Initiator

Both directors believe that the director should be the one to initiate collaboration and choose their team. I agree with this because the director needs to protect the integrity of the production and work with people who understand and can execute their vision. However, I also think that sometimes collaboration can come from unexpected places like even actors or designers can offer fresh starting points. So while I understand their stance, I feel it's important not to shut down collaborative energy that might come outside the director's initial circle.

iii. Importance of Key Personnel

They both highlight the key role of designers, set, costume, lighting and other specialists like choreographers. I completely agree with this. These roles are sometimes underestimated, but the visual and aesthetic aspects of a play deeply impact how the story is received. Personally, I've seen productions not go as planned due to poor design choices, despite strong acting. Their points made me reflect on how every department in theatre must be seen as part of one vision, not separate units.

iv. Respect for Other Creatives

Oteh's respect for playwrights and Ihunwo's appreciation of musicians and choreographers really stood out to me. I agree with this value wholeheartedly because collaboration without respect turns into conflict. I admire how Oteh doesn't alter the playwright's dialogue without permission; it shows integrity and respect. I also appreciate how Ihunwo acknowledges areas where he's not an expert and chooses to trust others such as in lighting, costume, set.. etc. I believe this kind of openness is essential for directors.

v. Collaboration Enhances Productions

Both directors shared examples where collaboration improved the overall quality of the production. I agree with this because I've seen how ideas evolve and become stronger when more perspectives are brought in. For instance, Oteh's long-distance

collaboration with a designer and Ihunwo's work on Obaseki both show that when people bring their expertise together with mutual trust, magic happens. Their experiences reminded me that collaboration is not only about sharing responsibilities it's about expanding creative possibilities.

CONTRAST

i. Directing Style

Oteh describes a shift from an autocratic style to a more collaborative one, distinguishing between "actors' problems" and "directors' problems." I find this evolution admirable because it shows growth. I agree with his method to some extent because it helps define boundaries and ensures efficiency. However, I go with Ihunwo's approach, which is deeply rooted in the text and focuses on helping actors interpret subtext. I agree with Ihunwo here because, in my view, truthful performances often begin with deep textual understanding.

ii. Where Collaboration Begins

Oteh sees collaboration as beginning with the playwright and considers administrative and budget factors early on. While I understand his approach especially in professional settings I personally agree more with Ihunwo's stance. He begins collaboration with script reading, which feels more creative to me. I agree with this because it prioritizes the art before the logistics. It reminds me that the heart of any production lies in understanding the story, not just in managing resources.

iii. View of Stage Manager

Oteh values the stage manager as an essential collaborator and believes their competence directly influences the outcome of the production. I agree with this. Having seen stage managers keep productions afloat under pressure, I understand how vital they are. Ihunwo, on the other hand, sees the stage manager more as someone who steps in after blocking, like an assistant director. I slightly disagree with this perspective not because it's wrong, but because it seems to underrate the full work and potential of the stage manager and her contributions, especially during the early planning stages. Her role in my opinion, should extend beyond just taking over rehearsals.

iv. Handling Tension in Collaboration

Oteh claims he has not encountered tensions during collaboration. While that may show a strong ability to manage relationships, I find this a bit idealistic. I slightly

disagree because I believe tension is a natural part of any creative process involving multiple minds. Ihunwo's willingness to acknowledge a negative experience with an undisciplined set designer felt more realistic to me. I agree with his honesty. It shows that even skilled directors face challenges, and what matters is how those challenges are addressed.

v. Context of Collaborative Examples

Oteh shares examples from international collaborations, often involving high-profile institutions and playwrights. I admire this and agree that exposure and knowledge is good for a director. However, I felt more connected to Ihunwo's local and culturally rooted examples. I agree with Ihunwo's approach because it reminds me that impactful theatre doesn't have to be global, it can thrive within local spaces. His examples made me reflect on how powerful collaboration can be when it draws from shared cultural Identity.

This study compares the directing styles of Patrick–Jude Oteh and Ovunda C. Ihunwo. Both believe that good theatre depends on strong collaboration with actors, designers, and other creatives. They agree that the director should lead the process and respect everyone's contribution.

However, their approaches are different. Oteh is more structured and focused on planning, while Ihunwo pays more attention to the script and helping actors understand their roles. I personally connect more with Ihunwo's style, but I also admire Oteh's experience and leadership. In the end, I've learned that there's no single way to direct what matters most is being open, creative, and willing to work with others.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Reflecting on this comparative analysis, it becomes clear to me that successful theatre production goes far beyond technical skills, it thrives on the director's ability to put together vision, discipline, research, and collaboration. In looking at the experiences of both directors, I have come to understand that while the fundamental values of theatre remain universal, the paths to achieving them are deeply shaped by each director's background, training, and techniques. This diversity in approach not only enriches the creative process but also reveals the many ways there are to bring about authentic performances. For me, this study reinforces the idea that collaboration, when paired with a strong artistic vision and grounded in discipline, is what ultimately gives life to a production, making it both believable and compelling for performers and audiences.

End notes

- i. Sefi Atta – A Nigerian-American author known for her novels, short stories and plays that address themes of gender, identity, and post colonial Nigerian culture. From a feminist viewpoint, she frequently mixes humour and social criticism. She maintains her support for social causes through writing and performing as a playwright and the creator of the production business Atta Girl. Her writing has a broad transactional appeal because it connects British, America and Nigerian cultural realms.
- ii. The engagement- A stage play by Sefi Atta which was adopted by the 21st MUSON festival of the arts as its chevron festival drama for the year 2017. It was directed by Dr Patrick Jude Oteh of the Jos repertory Theatre. Written in 2002 and first broadcasted on BBC Radio.
- iii. The last stand- A stage play written by Sefi Atta. It premiered at Terra Kulture in Lagos 2014. The play is about a battle of wills between a dying general and his estranged heirs.
- iv. Death Road – A classical tale about recruitment and radicalisation within one peaceful household whose livelihood is threatened from within by the first son of the family. Written by Sefi Atta and directed by Dr Patrick Jude Oteh for the 12th Jos festival of theatre Organised by Jos repertory theatre.
- v. Aime Cesaire – A martinican writer, poet, playwright, and politician, co-founder of the Negritude movement, which sought to restore Black identity and fight colonial tyranny. His important works, such as Discourse on colonialism and Cahier d'un retour au pays natal, merged creative poetry with strong anti-imperialist analysis. Césaire's works had a tremendous impact on Caribbean literature and global postcolonial thoughts.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1. SUMMARY

This study examined the director's collaborative process through the experiences and creative lens of Patrick-Jude Oteh and Ovunda Ihunwo. Their perspectives provided a deeper understanding of how discipline, research, and collaboration contribute to shaping effective theatre productions. The findings showed that while both directors value collaboration as the backbone of the creative process, their

approaches differ based on personal experience, training, and context. Oteah's global exposure and administrative insight inform a structured, resource-conscious approach, whereas Ihunwo's methods are grounded in text-driven creativity and cultural teamwork. These perspectives, when viewed alongside related literature, enhance my understanding of how directors can successfully navigate creative relationships to bring about a unified and believable theatrical performances.

4.2. CONCLUSION

In conclusion this project has demonstrated how the director's collaborative process is multifaceted, involving leadership, creativity, and the ability to balance contributions from various creatives. This research highlights that preparation, respect for collaborators, and effective team management are crucial to successful productions. Comparing the experiences of both directors revealed that directing is a dynamic practice where each director applies unique strategies to inspire and guide their team toward a shared vision. The findings also suggest that effective collaboration not only enhances production quality but also strengthens the director's vision. Ultimately, no matter the context, a director who fully utilise the tools of collaboration, research, and vision can achieve a compelling theatrical experience for both performers and audiences.

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