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## CHAPTER FORTY

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### ARTISTIC TALENT, PERSONALITY AND MEANING MAKING IN A GLOBALIZED SOCIETY

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#### **Abstract**

*This paper addressed a number of related issues and questions that surround Nigerian performing arts since her independence in 1960. What are the contemporary performing artistes telling us about the world in which we live? What responsibilities come with their God-given capacity to create? How do they use their God-given talent? That such questions should be thought to merit an extended discourse today in a book of this kind is of itself significant. The performing arts have been considered as justifiable areas to be involved in empowering artists for their socio-economic and political transformation and that of their audience- the society. Performing something new was happening in theatre, film, music and other areas of performing arts industries in Nigeria. During this period there was a shift in performing artists' thinking conditioned by the global economy and the politics of the period. However, when one looks at the works of the performing artists, it is slightly simplistic to see in the period 1960s to the present emphasis on socio-economic and political issues such as liberation theology, philosophy, sociology, entertainment, culture to the religious melody. There is also a shift from realistic arts to art for art's sake as a result of stringent contestation in already charged economic space. These are shifts characterized by several significant factors. It is the artistic response to perceived needs, and need is the first priority of human beings. Using a qualitative research method this paper will evaluate the Nigerian creative industry since independence.*

**Keywords:** Nigerian performing arts, Personality, artistic talent and Globalised society.

#### **Introduction**

Art is man's challenge to time, his rebuke to chaos; the protest will survive neither the triumph of fire nor the finality of ice - but it is better than the silence of consent (Idel Dreimer)

The importance of performing arts derives from an understanding of its place in the wider cultural and intellectual pretensions of any period. From the colonial era to 1960 a lot has happened in Nigeria performing arts scenes and has continued to happen to this point in our history. Thus, the first five decades of Nigeria as a nation was a period of prolific artistic experimentation and of statements through performing arts. Messages explicit and implicit, ancient and modern were produced by traditional artists and emerging Highlife and Rock music; theatre, film and dance, and other mainstream arts. Most of these artworks were a response of the whole person to his evolving environment. It transcended solely pietistic responses. It was a kind of response to the existential question- man's alienation in the neo-colonial hegemonic state.

A discourse on mainstream performing arts might reasonably be expected to go further than the ordinary conversation in defining performing arts and their values. Definitions of terms

will not derail our conversation here. However, the paper will be approaching the topic in a somewhat evasive manner. It shall be suggesting that the term "performing arts" is one that can be of greater use in discussion of this kind when it remains as a term of convenience than when it is forged into a lightly defined theoretical concept. Therefore, the term 'performing arts' will be in regular use in this paper, than music, dance, theatre, film and performing art. This is because most of us are ready to expound without much provocation on what we like and what we don't, what is and what is not, and on who deserves the title "artist and who doesn't.

Again, there is indeed something about art which seems to invite qualitative evaluation. In talking about performing arts we constantly use evaluative terms such as a 'good', 'beautiful', and 'powerful', or their opposites. We can't quantify such terms. 'Performing arts' has a variety of meanings and implications which reveal themselves in ordinary conversations, switches of emphasis or even contradictions. Do we mean by 'art' just painting and sculptor? or music and dance or theatre and film? Sometimes we do, but an art historian also studies architecture, church parapet or mosque minaret and a host of other objects, while an art programme on television or an 'art section' of the newspaper usually includes such disciplines as film, literature, music, theatre and dance. According to its context, 'art' is sometimes mean in a 'narrower, sometimes in a wider sense; sometimes the word is used exclusively, sometimes popularly. We have become adept at slipping from one meaning over into another, as soon as a discussion about art becomes heated, the different implications of the word seem to sharpen into topics of great controversy and the conversation can take on a Babel-like aspect, or a kind of Babylonian confusion. Thus, this paper refers to music, dance, film and theatre as a performing arts. The performing arts range from vocal and instrumental music, dance and theatre to pantomime, sung verse and beyond. They include numerous cultural expressions that reflect human creativity and that are also found, to some extent, in many other intangible cultural heritage domains.

Music, drama, film and dance are perhaps the most universal of the performing arts and are found in every society, most often as integral parts of other performing art forms and other domains of intangible cultural heritage including rituals, festival events, carnival or oral traditions. It can be found in most diverse contexts: sacred or profane, classical or popular, closely connected to work or entertainment. There may also be a political or economic dimension to performing arts: it recounts a community's history, sings the praises of a powerful person and plays a key role in economic transactions. The occasions on which performing art is performed are just varied: marriages, funerals, rituals and initiations, kinds of entertainment as well as many other social functions through varied media of communication.

Apart from these, there are also numerous travelling theatre groups in Nigeria using their arts to entertain, educate and conscientize the populace. The likes of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ladipo, Ogui players, New Masquerades, Magana Jarice; and many musical groups that traverse the length and breadth of our society for economic and social purposes, contributed

a lot in this respect.

Many decades of performing arts in the life of Nigeria is quite epochal, and it naturally calls for reflections. Hence, it is not wrong to appraise our performing artists now. It is a truism that Nigeria abound with talents in performing arts industry, and many of them have brought and continue to bring honour and glory to themselves and the nation in general. Still, many use their talent to achieve the 'good-bad taste syndrome that is at the heart of some artists. 'Art is a shadow of what a person is thinking... a small glimpse of what they hold inside. Little secrets, regrets, joys... every line has its meaning (Sara; 1999).

The Nigerian performing arts industry, theatre, music, dance and Nollywood films have continued to receive international acclaim. Because of the imperative of performing arts to national development, and its economic empowerment Nigeria continues to be recognized on the global arena. Despite their achievements, there is a need for improvement beyond where we are today; especially, on the part of the artists. The only significant change we have witnessed is that now we listen to music and watch films produced in Nigeria by Nigeria artists. So, we have made progress here. But some of the content and form of these arts are heart-rending beyond imagination.

Our performing arts are still alive and vibrant. But the question is, in what form? Have our performing artists do what they are supposed to do in our society? Have our performing artists fulfilled their role from traditional to our contemporary context? What message are they communicating to their teaming audience? On looking at these questions you begin to reflect on whether the artists worth their onions. Contemporary performing arts scenes, especially, music and video films are characterized by the good, the bad and the ugly tastes. Performing arts from the 90s have become too sexy, vulgar and therefore dirty, unlike the songs and movies of their predecessors- Sunny Okosun, Christie Okotie, Bongos Ikwue, Hubert Ogunde, New Masquerade, Oriental Brothers, the Doves and educational films produced from scholars within the control of Nigeria Film Institute, that portray who we are and what we need using good lyrics and pictures with a beginning, middle and a message that develop the mind. Today everyone is singing and producing anything with or without novelty value, rhythm or lyrics for commercial purposes. All this shows the nature of our contemporary artists and therefore pointing to their personality.

### **Artistic Personality, Meaning Making, and Self-Discipline in a Globalized Society**

Once upon a time, there were the mass media and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives for those who were not prisoners of the mass media. Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on. Asked Umberto Eco, (2007: 56).

People believe that globalization is a totally good idea. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda Minister once said in the thirties “that; “A lie told once remains a lie but a lie told

a thousand times becomes the truth". This is what is happening today with a neo-liberal discourse on the free market. Neo-liberal and globalize capitalism is supposed to bring progress and well-being to the world. In fact, the gap between the rich and the poor is fast increasing. Taping the dynamism of market is alright, of course, provided it does not lead policymakers to a complete surrender to its money-oriented logic.

Unfortunately, this is what is taking place nowadays in our society. We are easily deceived by globalization because there is obviously something very positive about it, such as chances it offered people in cosmopolitan spaces to communicate, travel and interact. Internet, e-mail, YouTube, etc. are some of the positive aspects of globalization. Yet, even e-mail, internet etc are mix blessing, as lots of fraud and lies are perpetuated through them. The advantages of these have been made relative; we may agree that globalization promotes the spirit of the global family. At the same time, we must keep in mind that this is something quite different from much-heralded globalization and liberalization of markets. It is the intensification of human relationships not of the maximization of profit. But globalization is like Janus, that Roman god with two faces, a beautiful versus ugly side, a negative and a positive one.

Globalization, as it is promoted today, leads to the theocracy of the demonization of market forces. Today, multinationals govern the world and exploit the masses through the imposition of values detrimental to their survival. This is the first effect of globalization. Its underlying economic logic leads to the reduction of everything to a commodity to be bought and sold on the market. Social and familial bonds are progressively being dissolved by competitiveness and obsessive profit orientation. Globalization is the destruction of the mystery of traditional wage labour. Indeed, instant gratification and consumption prompted by globalization tend to erase human affection. The urge to quantify and to reduce the complexity of the human being and of society to simple measurable components so as to achieve better control is very harmful.

Globalization has a far-reaching effect on world culture. What arose in the modern West has now become global and universal. Today the idea of baby mama or baby papa is developing among our performing artists. Musicians and Nollywood artists are now contesting on having babies out of wedlock. Aggressive human drives have spread all over the world and created a kind of exhilaration. Today, it is desirable to be the best, to push others out, to beat them in the struggle for survival in the cosmopolitan economic spaces. Bonding, feeling with nature and other gratuitous approaches to life are being marginalized if not ridiculed and eroded. 'It is a war of survival of everyone against everyone' as Hobbes (1902) puts it.

This paper, strongly believes that the only way out is to ensure a cultural transformation that is human and realistic, not gory or orgiastic trends. But the word culture itself has been impoverished and bastardized because it has been reduced by the market forces logic to

mean something like entertainment. Culture, at a genuine and deep level, is what enables people to give meaning to their lives, as well as a sense of direction. This most of our contemporary music and Nollywood movies industry has shied away from doing.

Performing artists are championing the new global cosmopolitan good-bad taste and morality. This is the effect of globalization. The characterizing of our music and Nollywood movies as dirty, exploring vulgar sexuality and the retrograde immoral appetite of the audience demands that music and Nollywood clean its lyrics and pictures. In Nollywood and music discourse, the mapping of the polis in terms of dirty and cleanliness, moral degradation, shows that these arts are a vulgar commodity that could contaminate the metropolitan environment. The equation of metropolis with vulgarity, immorality, and filth also confirmed another stereotype, as Knopp (2000) illuminates in his work, “portrayals of sexual diversity and freedom as peculiarly urban phenomena”; demonizing the city as a dirty sexual subculture and attitude threatening to occupy cosmopolitan spaces" are some of the values Nollywood film and music industry favours and churn out for their ready ignorant audience.

The assumption that urban monetary influences drove the production of “dirty pictures” and “vulgar lyrics” further stemmed from artists' reliance on comic sex ideas. This is because the mainstream middle class needed protection from liberal tastes of the metropolitan minority; transmitted through aesthetic music and film glut of dominant production of economic culture of our time. The productions are commercializing orgiastic trends and vulgarity for the economic interest of the stakeholders in the industry. They do not hide their profit-driven exploitation of good-bad tastes in the style of low budget production for maximum economic gain. This is what Pablo Picasso called dreadful taste. “Ah, good taste! What a dreadful taste. Taste is the enemy of creativeness”. Picasso believed that artists who make art their business are mostly imposters. Far from low-budget art movies and music; these works remained a pricey production aiming to capitalize on stars as well as "fashionably", the lurid depiction of sexual freedom stolen from more “tasteful” cosmopolitan arts. Thus, they posed a threat to Nigeria taste standards, because they convey the idea that taste for vulgarity and orgiastic frenzy now carry cultural capital as fashionable, sophisticated and cosmopolitan. If these arts appeal to the audiences; the urban sensibilities of good-bad taste would triumph over the established definition of art, taste, and so would the cosmopolitan lifestyles have represented by good-bad taste products of music and Nollywood movies flourish. Art should be the elimination of unnecessary ornamentation to maximize economic gain. "It is a personality with a penny's worth of talent. It is an error which chances to rise above the commonplace. The chief enemy of creativity is good taste" (Picasso).

The miracle of performing arts would be impossible if its creators were not men of powerful and impeccable personalities, men that understand their environment and create in accordance with the desire of their people – the economic and, morally depressed segment of

the society. Most artists are from this segment: the unemployed, the rejected, and the downtrodden. But they use their arts to project their vision of the world and service their economic needs sometimes at the detriment of the society's development. To do this aesthetics of violence are employed by certain artists for a kiss of life. This, in turn, reflects the personality of the artist. Art is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the reactions of his personality to the world he lives in.

Any lover of performing arts, especially music, dance and film, must critically look at the artists themselves and try to figure out their personality, creative power and worldview. The artist's personality is a word that is full of meaning. We can only recognize it through the artists' work. This is because the artist's personality always shines through the work, he/she presented to his target audience. Every artist in every era must create work that reflects the yearning, longing and desire of the society he/she creates for in order to transform it. For Vasquez (1977):

... in a certain sense, each society gets the art it deserves, both because of the art it favours or tolerates, and because artist, as members of society, creates in accordance with the particular type of relations they have with that society. This means that art and society, far from finding themselves in a relationship of mutual externality or indifference, seek each other out or avoid one another, meets or separates, but can never completely turn their backs on each other (1997).

The attitude of the artist and society toward each other change because the artist, being a concrete being, changes, as does the society in which he makes his art, along with its values, ideals and traditions. That may be the reason artists like Sunny Okosun, Christie Okotie, Sunny Ade, etc change from one genre of music to another- from traditional to gospel music, from rock to gospel and back. Even Chief Osita Osadebe an Igbo Highlife maestro made a move towards gospel music before his demise, a kind of musical prostitution for their survival or that of the gospel, not the society they create for.

Arthur Miller once noted that:

The arts make us feel connected to one another and less isolated. Through the arts, we share emotion and that sharing connects us with each other and we realize we all feel the same emotions. The arts are our last hope. We find our identity and make it easier and more pleasurable to live and they also give us wisdom. (1998).

Our performing artists must play a key role in transforming our community for good or for bad, thereby our lives. They must provide communities of our nation varied opportunities to experience the arts, which develops creative, confident and capable individuals, who can go out into the world and impress others with their creativity. Performing artists make a unique contribution to the education of their audience through the use of verbal and non-verbal communication. Artists have the opportunity to think about how to use movement to explore and communicate ideas and issues as well as their own feeling and thoughts. As they work, they develop an awareness of the historical and cultural origins of different performances as well as their social awareness. Art is the stored honey of the human soul, gathered on wings

of misery and travail, according to Theodore Dreiser (1917).

A work of art must communicate the results of its author's intellectual activity in such a way as to give them practical force, and this force depends not only on what is communicated but also on how this is done. Some of the Nigerian artists of the past years were of outstanding personality. What made great artists outstanding talents were their ability to say something about their societies and knew how to say it for the transformation of society. We must, therefore, be interested in the creative artist-his personality, his predilections, his sympathies and antipathies, his thoughts and feelings. There is nothing wrong reprehensible in this curiosity. It can give one the joy of discovering the ability of another person to see thing differently, more profoundly and subtly than one sees it oneself. This is because the duty of the artist is to send light into the darkness of men's hearts. For performing art was made mass and dwell among the masses as their light. Thus, we talk about performing live. Such inquiry could be appreciative, evaluative, and expository in nature or it could be all depending on the personality of the artist. It is our deep conviction that in the majority of the cases the artist succeeds or fails to depend on the character of his personal attitude to life through his work; the author's attitude historicism.

Art gives food for discussion about the extent to which the social ideal represented in it corresponds to reality, about how the ideas that inspire the artist are put into practice, and about what their future is likely to be (Rappoport, 2000).

Let us recall how the audience was stunned by Alleluia Chorus or Handel's Messiah right from the classical period down the spiritual ladder to us. We can also recollect audience reception of the film "Living in Bondage" that triggered off the evolution of modern Nigerian Home Video Movies, the Nollywood, or much modern Nigerian Music, created by people whose personality their works created for them never died even after their death – Osadebe, Ebenezer Obey, Oliver de Coque, Paulson Kalu, Sunny Ade, Dan Marya Jos, Maman Shata, Bongos Ikwue, Joe Nez, Fela, Celestine Ukwu, and so on. There are also movies in the past that mirror our culture, the joys and sorrows of our nation. These include *Mirror in the Sun*, *Village Headmaster*, *Itchioku*, *Magana Jarice*, and so on. These films are well written for societal transformation.

Their creative works proved to be an answer to questions troubling their minds and people in a particular generation. Their works would not have come to us had they not typified ordinary people and ideas that live in the memory of the people and in the heart of the artist. The discovery of the deep layers of life, exploration of the new; these words are often heard nowadays in conversation about arts. The real power, the originality, the social value of talent comes to light most clearly when it is involved in the fast flow of life. This is precisely when the artist's own theme, heroes and problems arise. Genuine art is interested not in, stating an ethical thesis, but in describing moral searching; because there are no ready answers to the questions posed by life, but they are solved through the actions and suffering of the characters and their lyrics. This is what some of our contemporary artists have shied away from doing.

This thought was voiced poetically and philosophically in our most creative works since independence. The story of evil versus virtue; socio-political questions, how virtuous or devilish the artist is; is another issue yearning for answers. Most of the songs and stories are told with such poignancy that surely no audience could evade the question of morality in some of these works. Some are art for art's sake pointing to nothing that could transform their society. An important theme in the work of any performing artists should be the preservation of the heart in man. Man must preserve the best that is given to him by God. Spiritlessness, based on callous pragmatism, may sustain a temporary victory over goodness and human nobility, but moral superiority is always on the side of those who defend man's right to be a man. The tragic fate of the audience, who dreamt about the triumph of the "good over bad taste"; which the audience seem to see so vividly in some of these works of art as they listen and watch may bring about moral catharsis. But the aesthetic dimensions of some lyrics and movies may trouble their vision of contemporary reality.

Characters and ideas in a work of art provide an example of the artist's complex explorations and cognition of the modern world. The commitment to societal issues in some of the works of these artists are profoundly human and demanding. It has great relevance and is raised to the level of "ideal" experience. The images or pictures these artists use in some of their works and in the artist use of them, clearly expressed their personalities, its human and civic dimension and the nature of their talent.

The artist must understand personality as the need to create something outstanding and demanding. Man is the creator of his own attitudes to the world and to himself, therefore, to his work. The artist uses materials from his environment to create. These materials are from experience, history or legend of the people. Every work of art is a piece of emerging history. It is history converted into art and the point of this conversion is ideology. So, every work of art reflects the ideology of its creator and defines his/her personality.

What then are the authorial and aesthetic ideologies of our performing artists in the past decades of our independence from colonial rule? What are the attitudes of these artists to their materials? What are they creating? On whose side, are they? The artist is either on the side of the masses; the majority of their audience or on the side of an emergent hegemonic class of the epoch and this influence the content and forms of the work. It also influences the artist's aesthetic vision of his work. But every work of art must reflect the yearning of the society in which it exists, or it becomes a useless occupation. The artist's work always defines his personality.

The audience usually reacts sharply to the appearance of grey mediocre works. This is precisely why one should also like to talk on the conscience of the artist; the talent. Can one imagine that the farmer does not love the land that feeds him or the mechanic his tools including his work clothing, or by analogy the image or work an artist creates? It seems that such instances do occur. One always thinks of this when an artist has imbued his work neither with serious thoughts, nor with warm inspiration, nor with intense feeling, and will to

empower and transform his society. This is because, in the end, the artist is helped by 'task of duty and conscience'. It is these that do not allow him/her to waive truth, play a bad role or to work half-heartedly because of monetary gains. In Nollywood, it seems sex and vulgar conception of art is business, and the uglier the role, the bigger the pay packet. It is a personality with a naira worth of talent.

We all know that Art is not the truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies. (Pablo Picasso)

We often talk about the artist's responsibility before society. This, of course, is important. But the artist is also responsible before herself, before her talent. Talent is binding. This responsibility should be called the conscience of the artist, which is always restless and demanding towards itself. The freedom of the artist begins with what he allows and does not allow himself to put up before his audience. This is a difficult task, demanding great will and intellect, let it be stressed, and complete selflessness. Distortion of the truth in art more often than not stems from the artist's background, his limited world view and inability to understand the natural laws of social development. But sometimes it can result simply from his unexact attitude to himself. Oscar Wilde (1889) once notes: 'to us who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are things that do not concern us'.

The greatness of performing arts since independence which is confirmed by its whole historical experience can be measured above all by the artistic power with which it portrays and eulogizes the heroic essence and spiritual beauty or decay of our society. The artist's duty, if he wants to be heard and understood by his contemporaries, is to embody his aesthetic ideal in the figure of a positive hero whom every audience will perceive as a true hero of their times. The positive hero that embodied the best features of the people; the beauty of their thoughts, feeling and actions is an innovation every artist must achieve for the transformation of his society. To continue the traditions of our greatest artists, to portray the ideological and moral greatness of the national culture, as the most valuable property of our society must be the civic duty of the artist of our times.

The history of art knows countless instances, where a talented artist did not allow some work to take shape for national interest for selfish reasons. This is the bedrock of artistic indiscipline. The artists must dream of augmenting the treasure - house of society's art, the classics. We dream that there should be more and more works which will rank among the world's finest. Nigerian artists are called upon to give today and future generations works of great philosophical power, worthy of the age of socio-political reconstruction.

In any kind of understanding of art, we come across the concepts of content and form. They are refracted in art in a specific way, related to its very essence. A superficial glance at art cannot distinguish between its content and form. The work of art divided, as it were, into its external, consciously perceptible appearance and its inner essence, into its material 'skin' and

its ideological 'core', into its mental world and the means of its embodiment. We begin to distinguish between what a work of art tells us and how it does this. We see both the psychology and philosophy of work, the devices, means and techniques used in creating an image. All these are different aspect of more general categories which are defined as the content and form of a work of art. The audience must have critical ability to discern and interpret your work holistically for better comprehension of its meaning.

One of the main achievements of contemporary art critiques is that they recognize art as a reflection of reality. This premise treated, dialectically, is the theoretical basis of realism. Reality is reflected by art as a whole comprising both content and form. In this sense, both content and form are the reflections of life and so they correspond to each other. This conception has developed, in various shades and forms from classical philosophy to its modern epigones.

The performing artist must highlight the potential of the art to contribute to national development using their respective art as a medium. The artists can play a significant role in this; they can sing songs of development and perform the woes of our nation. The performer can give shape and flavour to the vision of the nation. The choreographers and dance performers can portray development themes and educate the citizens on many ideas such as hygiene, health, literacy, development, and politics. We are fully convinced that arts, music, dance and film give connectivity to the multiple variants in society.

Some Nigerian performing artist's dedication to their works were not just a profession, but a way of life, lifelong learning, and their works integrates minds across the country and beyond. There are relatively few creative people about whom it can be said without exaggeration that their achievements are likely to have a following for a hundred years from now. This could be said about major artists like Osadebe, Ebenezer Obey, Suny Ade, Oliver de Coque, Sunny Okosun, Onyeka Onwuenue and countless others. Performing arts is thus the soul of life. Performing arts indeed serves as a medium of sustaining the soul. It relieves people of tension in time of grief and provides entertainment and education as well. This statement reveals the significance of film, drama, dance and music to the development of mankind. Through it, citizens are admonished to be patriotic and the ills of society are preached against and purged. The character and morals of people are shaped for good or bad through performing arts and continues to provide employment for many citizens. So, the performer must be conscious of what he/she put out for the consumption of the audience.

As a result of the crucial role of performing arts plays in the direction, it is significant that we pay attention to its development, especially the secular type. The reason is that the lyrics and makeup of some of our contemporary arts seem to be detrimental to national development. They literally and virtually promote and glorify illicit sex, 419ners; weird behaviours and other inglorious activities; and characters. The performing artists do this cunningly by using figurative words and actions to cover up such profane or unwholesome songs and actions. These indications send strong messages to its audience and drive many, especially the youth,

into deviant and other immoral acts thereby potentially increasing moral decadency and risk of diseases and other health issues prevalent rate in the society. The video clips of some of music and films demonstrate romance, ritual activities, illicit drugs, promotion of trending rogues and sexual orgies. The producers and marketers always use the clip of nude music performance and Nollywood femme fatal to promote their trade for economic purposes.

Unfortunately, and surprisingly, these are the songs and films that are very popular, the fastest-selling and receive most of the accolades and awards. The criteria for determining such award-winning songs and movies are basically their lyrics and rhythms, melody and other aesthetic collaborations or visual arrangements. Others are the popularity of the song and the number of times they are played on air without necessarily giving cognition and importance to the values and dangers of the lyrics and pictures. Since man is a spiritual and social being, the emphasis should rather be placed on the lyrics and the pictures and how they promote the spiritual and socio-economic development of the society. Surprisingly, some gospel musicians who should know better are also guilty of this offence. Their video clips show them wearing provocative dresses and their style of dancing having a good and ugly appeal that can never land one in heaven. What a gospel, if not commercial gospel?

In portraying contemporary Nigerian life-some of our artists took up the position of the rebellious patriarchal artist, sharing both their mentality and prejudices. Hence, their profound, merciless consistent criticism of all social injustice, oppression and social evil, and at the same time their moral and religious preaching, the idea of non-resistance to evil with violence and other weak aspects of their immature protest lyrics. This group is mainly reggae, jazz and gospel artists. Fela Ransome Kuti is their founding hero. The contradictions in above polemics are not contradictions inherent in personal views but are reflections of the extremely complex, contradictory condition, social influences and historical traditions which determined the psychology of various classes and various section of the Nigerian society in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century society.

It follows that the reflection of the essential facets of socio-historical reality must be done by the artist for the sake of influencing life from the position of an ideal which determines his understanding and evaluation of what he reflects in his work. Content is taken from real life, understood and evaluated in the light of a certain idea, is what becomes the content of art. Artistic content thus includes a theme taken from life, ideological problems which result from it, and an emotional-aesthetic evaluation of it – all bound together as a unity conditioned by the goal and social intention of art. Artistic content varies according to the form and genre of art and is more or directly linked with the real content of life, but always appears as its active reflection.

Even the reactionary mentality of some performing artists never prevented them from making a thorough study of their environment and creating things of great artistic value. But there can be no doubt that time it seriously narrowed their field of view. Their creativity, the first beginnings of which were laid by their splendid arts soon landed them in a blind alley, in a blocked tunnel. It was able to make everything its theme, nudity, syphilis, wealth and sex

included. This method was intimately linked with the standpoint of that materialism which fails to realize that the actions, inclinations, tastes and habits of mind of social man cannot be adequately explained by physiology or pathology, since they are determined by social relationships. Their objective attitude to the environment they create for implied, in fact, lack of sympathy with it. And naturally, they could not sympathize with that which, owing to their conversation, was alone accessible to their observation, namely the “petty thought”, and “Petty passions” which bred in the “filthy same” of commonplace middle-class existence.

Thus, most contemporary performing artists have landed in a blind alley and had nothing left but to relate once more the love affair of the first chance producer – merchant with the first chance actor/actress performer prostitute. Stories of such relationships could be of interest only if they shed light on some aspect of social relationships. But social interest and true love were lacking in such works. The result was that in the end, the relation of “the love affair of the first chance producer-artist-merchant with first chance movie/musician-producer prostitute” become uninteresting, boring, even revolting. But growing tired of depicting “the national mortal sins”, they end up abandoning realism and threw out the baby with the bathwater. The invention of such, types was once more confirmation of the idea that where there is no real life it is the task of art to provide an ideal life. But the ideal life of some artists was so entirely bereft of human content that its creation offered no way out of the blind alley. The performers betook themselves to mysticism which served as an “ideal” escape from a situation from which there was no “real” escape. This was perfectly natural in given situation circumstances. But see what we got.

An artist who turns mystic does not ignore idea content he only lends it a peculiar character. Mysticism is itself an idea, but an idea which is as obscure and formless as a fog, and which is a mortal enemy with reason. The mystic is quite willing to say something and even prove something. But he tells of things that are not of this world and he bases his proofs on a negation of common sense. This is Nollywood epic for you. There can be no artistic production without idea content. But when artists became blind to the major social trends of their time, the inherent value of the ideas they express in their works is seriously impaired. And their works inevitably suffer in consequence. This fact is so important in the history of performing arts that we must examine it from various angles.

The relation of art to social life is a question that has always figured largely in all art that has reached a definite stage of development. As Georgi Plekhanov (1989:1) puts it:

Often, the question has been answered in one directly opposite senses. Some say: Man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man; society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to improve the social condition. But to others art is an aim in itself; to convert it into means of achieving any extraneous aim, even the noblest, is to lower the dignity of a work of art (1989:1).

Plekhanov further argues that:

The idea of 'art for art's sake' as the idea manifests itself in our contemporary performing arts is as strange in our time as 'wealth for wealth's sake', 'eating for eating sake', and so forth. All human activities must serve mankind if they are not to remain useless and idle occupations. Wealth exists so that man may benefit by it, science exists in order to be man's guide; art too must serve some useful purpose and not fruitless pleasure' (1989:1)

The theory of art for art's sake is a pernicious invention of loathsome "artists". The artist does this to derive aesthetic pleasure for audience gratification and show-box success. Thus, art becomes a commodity. It is this 'commoditization of arts that is the bane of contemporary performing artists of our time. Maxine Ducamp, condemning the passion for the form to achieve aesthetic angle alone exclaimed: *Form is beautiful, true when there is thought behind it. What is the use of a beautiful forehead, if there is no brain behind it?* (1986:23)

The aesthetic ideal is a part of social consciousness and incorporates certain aspects of social psychology and ideology. For this reason, it is directly linked with the traditions and customs, morals, prejudices and ways of thinking historically rooted in the psychological make-up of a people, and accordingly in the consciousness and unconsciousness of the individual. It is also linked with the rational form of thinking expressed in class ideology. Yet the aesthetic ideal is, rather, a 'practical' or 'working' ideal, because it invariably incorporates the process of creation.

Anton Chekhov a medical practitioner and one of the greatest Russian playwrights once says that:

The best of them performing arts 'are realistic and describe life as it is, but because every line is permeated with an awareness of an aim, one feels, apart from life as it is, also life as it should be and this is what captivates one' (1955:337).

This sensation of life 'as it should be which one received from great works of art, constitutes one aspect of the aesthetic ideal, which leads man to a deeper understanding and appraisal of the essence of man, as interpreted by the artist.

The aesthetic ideal is a synthesis of the objective conditions and the artist's subjective striving towards change, aesthetic perfection and maximum humanization of reality. The artist not inspired by an aesthetic ideal cannot rise above the quotidian or penetrate the essence of things; this is the characteristic of naturalism. Towards the end of the twentieth century, when some performing artists were displaying their works with ever greater flagrancy, decadence appears in the performing arena as Nollywood Film and music industry. The aesthetic ideal of the decadents was back-looking. Nostalgia appeared in refined, at times whimsical form. Mystical and transcendental ideas lurked behind symbolic forms, behind the measured, at times morbidly heart-rending, emotional form of arts. The sedentary social system brought a decline in arts as a form of social consciousness. The purely personal and individual longings forced cultural and the socio-aesthetic out of art. Artists turned in on themselves in a struggle for survival; 'A war of survival of everyone against everyone' as Hobbes puts it.

The progressing decay of money-oriented social system entailed the rise of modernist arts which introduced into art a spirit of anarchy, deformation and destruction of both content and form of works. Postmodernism is marked by dehumanization and anti-humanism. It is wayward art. The category of beauty launched from postmodernist art and aesthetes are replaced by a relish for the ugly and the pathological. Now, at a later stage of post-modernism, in pop-art, the art of the absurd, in so-called 'comedy', we have seen the appearance of the anti-art- the completely rational and emotional negation of life, progress and humanity. The representatives of modernism decry the necessity and possibility of rehearsing the essence of things about art. The future belongs to the aesthetic ideals of humanist art-art which fights the interests and dignity of man for social progress in the concrete conditions of objective reality. This is because, *'when humanity is destroyed, there can be no more art'* asserted Bertolt Brecht (1966:307). The post-artist; as H. Rosenberg confirms *'carries the definition of arts to a point where nothing is left of arts but a fiction of the artist.'* (2012:53)

### **Conclusion**

In considering the essence of talent and personality, one should stress above all its natural foundation. The experience of the history of art testifies to the fact that artistic ability can be developed or conversely lost, but can never be acquired, it stems from nature, as though programmed in the genotype of the personality. Almost any physiologically and psychological normal person can learn to drive a car or learn to become a lawyer. In art, the difference between talent and lack of talent is most apparent in any work of art. To teach a person art is difficult, if not impossible even given the most fervent desire on the part of the teacher and learner.

Performing art is never all comer's affair. It is for this obvious fact which to a large extent is responsible for various mystical and irrational conceptions of artistic creativity in today's Nigeria. Here, however, two circumstances are often forgotten. In the first place, only simple work, which requires no independent creativity, can be taught. Any heuristic activity presupposes the presence of natural abilities as a necessary condition for its effectiveness. For this reason, it is impossible, for example, to teach inventiveness. In the second place, art, like other branches of creative work, is impossible without training. There are many gifted, people but far fewer who become great artists. These are some of the reasons for the proliferation of bad arts in our society. Everybody claims to be creative being without artistic instinct that will imbue him with an outstanding creative personality.

The creative personality is the total of three factors – the intuitive, discursive and active. The active factor comprises the emotional-practical actions of a man; the discursive is his rational, indirect, logical cognition; as for the intuitive it is hard to describe, but it appears to be chiefly sensual intuition, akin to instinct. The natural basis of talent and genius is the same in science as in art. It is the potential for intuition, which is man's natural ability for direct contemplation of the truth. This kind of creative gift, which is so hard to define, is possessed to a greater or lesser degree by all great artists. It is this which gives rise to the special

receptiveness' perspicacity, power of observation and fantasy that always characterized real talent. It is just as erroneous to reduce it to mere inspiration. It is essential to stress that inspiration is only one of the stages-albeit highest of a creative process. The ground is prepared for it by the whole of the artist's preceding activity, which represents a complex of emotional and rational cognition.

What do we mean when we say the ground is prepared for inspiration? These words can be understood in two closely connected but in different ways. In the narrow sense, we mean the organization of place and conditions of work and the artist's psychological preparation for this. In the wider sense which is of more interest to us here, we mean professional make-up of the artist as a whole.

The first and most important condition for professional make-up is the artist's ability and desire to work selflessly. It has long been a maxim that "genus" is work. Artistic work, like all heuristic activities, is extremely attractive and gives man unequal joy. The artist needs will and purposefulness no less than he needs instructive cognition. In art, where there are no timetables for starting and finishing work, there is no substitute for self-discipline, correct, principled organization of this work is also important. The thesis 'not a day without a line' was proclaimed as far back as antiquity, underlying the importance of systematic, consistent work for the artist for him to create holistically. When this is acquired, the primary elements of a "formula" for talent gradually, emerge. It necessarily incorporates the ability and desire to work systematically on the development of one's abilities and on putting one's plans into practice.

The works of "Old School performing artists are philosophically laden and rich in content and form. Their works touch the soul and heart of their audience in a more recognizable form. They make sense in their environment as their works point towards the reality of their environment. We listen to the works of Majek Fashek - *Send down the rain*, Mike Okiri - *time na money*; but not *taste-money* without heard, and without good aesthetic collaboration, Onyeka Onwenu - *One Love*, Sunny Okosun, etc. These artists are telling us something real about our society in more honourable forms. The artistic form is fluid. Aesthetic is not a barren science for a functional artistic work must be clothed in a recognizable form (Chernyshevsky). Our high-life musicians, Osadebe, Obey, Sunny Ade, Oliver De Coque, Mike Ejeagha, etc, in spite of lots of praise songs, do appeal to the conscience of their audience. The traditional Egwu-Ekpili maestros, Ozoemene nwa-Nsugbe, Gody Ezike, Morocco, Ifeanyi Agedu, etc, are also making sense, although some of them have to turn it into money making galore-inventing he-female dancers that look like an absurd man of post-modern theatrics- a wayward art. The first crops of Nollywood movies, like *Living in Bondage*, are aesthetically good with robust stories that appeal to the minds of their audience. What we have today in Nollywood movie industry are movies of varied artistic embellishments, good story, funny plots, and half-baked stories with a myriad of parts to maximize profit. Most of them presenting shallow aesthetic and authorial ideology that does not align with their environment, thus making nonsense of reality vis-a-vis the personality of

the artists. Movies and convoluted lyrics are shunned out every day and thrown into the market for the easy accumulation of wealth. Quite often these artistic works fade due to the poverty of their aesthetic creative quality; its essence and structure. This is the danger of monetary ideology. This is the bane of contemporary Nigerian arts. This is decadency in performing arts. These are evident in sexual perversity inherent the films: *Glamour Girls*, *Itohan*, *Fuck me hard*, *Sex Crime* and so on, are some of the contemporary titles from Nollywood Industry; thrown to the face of unemployed youths.

Decades of performing arts in Nigeria is a story of mix-blessings. While some artists are telling us the way out of the socio-political and economic malaise, out of the woods, some have landed us in a blind alley in their bid to make money at the detriment of making meaning, through debased artistic productions that present us as amoral beings without culture. This should be reversed for the progress of our society.

Despite some abnormal angles in our creative industry, Nigeria is still one of the greatest creative nations in the world. On this note we will like to conclude happily in the words of Lagos "Observer" November 9, 1882 as cited by Michael Echeruo:

We are a musical race, and it is a fact that this beneficial gift of the creator has been acknowledged to fall more largely to our share than any other nation of the world.

Let us not debase it on the altar of monetary ideology.

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