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AN APPROACH TO AFRICAN THEATRE

by J. Scott Kennedy^{*}

The object of this project is to examine a specific approach to African theatre. This approach includes an inspection of the nature of 'technique' for African theatre as well as an inspection of the nature of 'the Ghanaian experience' in respect of the culture and life of the Ghanaian as seen through his drama, theatre, and art forms. The end objective is to formulate a specific way of working, or a technique or training for African theatre.

The subjects of this project include five Peace Corps trainees from America, who have had no previous exposure to Ghana or the arts of Ghana. There are three male and two female trainees. These subjects, specializing in the areas of drama, dance, music, technical theatre, and cinematography, are all college graduates, holding B.A. degrees from American Universities.

The method embraces an intensive eleven-week training programme for professional theatre and professional company development. The trainees will complete 300 hours of language instruction in Twi, 165 hours of theatre technique in acting, voice production, diction, and mime, specifically related to African drama and theatre, and production problems; 55 hours of lectures on African theatre and related arts; and 60 hours of observation. The fifth week includes a language live-in. Moreover, from the sixth week they will be engaged in an on-the-job training programme.

A team-workshop approach plus the lecture method is employed which utilizes two American specialists in drama and theatre studies, as well as Ghanaian specialists in all of the major areas of the arts

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and culture of Ghana. Specific tasks are designed to include seminars, trips, dialogue-confrontations, visitations, required readings, discussions, speak-outs, end-papers, and examinations, as well as autobiographical case histories.

The approach and check includes a specific design and analysis based on the 'Tune-In' and 'Unlocking' Process. Special materials such as check-sheets, dialogues, study-sheets, and syllabi are designed and structured around the Theatre and the Related Arts of Africa. On the other hand, special tasks and tests are also used based on the required reading and classroom experiences in order to determine an objective picture of the knowledge, skills, and insights of the subjects in respect to Ghana and Africa.

The examiners are expected to take a critical look at the behaviour and attitudes of the subjects in respect to their learned Ghanaian or African experience'. Moreover, the examiners are to determine to what extent the trainees have acquired specific skills, knowledge, and personal development in respect to African theatre.

The analysis uses as a point of departure the discipline of the Professional Actor, Writer, and Director in respect to the theatre training programme and trainee, and the discipline of the Specialist in Communication in the language area and the participant-observation area.

Major aspects of the training programme include the following:

- (1) Basic Technique for African Theatre
 - (a) Acting (b) Voice Production (c) Diction
 - (d) Mime (e) Dance (f) Music

- (2) Language Instruction in Twi
- (3) African Dance Forms
- (4) Music in Ghana
- (5) African History and History of Ghana
- (6) African Literature (Oral Traditions, Poetry, Prose)
- (7) African Drama and Traditional Theatre
- (8) African Drama and Conventional Theatre
- (9) The Language of African Theatre
- (10) Indigenous Language Patterns
- (11) Modern Language Patterns
- (12) Plays and Playwrights of Africa
- (13) African Religion (Ethics and Values)
- (14) Art (Visuals, Style and Social Values)
- (15) Production Problems in Ghana
- (16) Looking at Technique
- (17) An Approach to Productions - The Process - Method - Objectives
- (18) Unlocking the Artist
- (19) Research for Technique
- (20) Basic Communication for the Ghanaian Actor
- (21) Criteria for Standards of Excellence in Theatre Production
- (22) Isolating Production Problems
- (23) The Nature of the Dramatic Experience and the Ghanaian Audience
- (24) Opening up the Script - the Actor - and the Production
- (25) Trying to Understand the WORK as a TEAM
- (26) Discovering the ENERGY of the Dramatic Experience
- (27) Discovering the RHYTHM of the Dramatic Experience

II.

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA GRADUATES IN DRAMA AND
THEATRE STUDIES -- DIRECTION AND CAREERS

(An Analysis of the first seven years of the School of
Music and Drama at Legon)

The object of this project is to examine the direction and careers of the graduates of drama and theatre studies of the School of Music and Drama of the University of Ghana at Legon.

The subjects are thirty-seven, with twenty-eight males, and nine females. The instruments used include intensive interviewing via interview-response sheet, autobiographical case histories, questionnaires, and participant-observation.

The major objective is to inspect the demographic background of the graduates, their occupations, the relevance of their university education to these occupations, and the personal benefit they feel they have gained by studying drama and theatre studies at Legon. Included in this inspection is an examination of the quality, quantity, and facilities for training in drama and theatre studies at Legon. Also under focus is the relationship between the training received and the teaching or theatre activities of the subjects. Moreover, the nature of the skills, knowledge, and personal development acquired by the graduates is to be examined in relation to the 'character' of African theatre and the acquired 'technique' in a specific training programme.

This initial investigation limits itself in scope to the first seven years of the School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana, including the years 1962 through 1969. The investigation examines and inspects the first four groups of graduates.

The analysis uses as a point of departure the discipline of the Professional Actor, Writer, and Director in respect to the theatre training programme and graduate, and the discipline of the specialist in communication in the language area and the participant-observation area.

III.

A STUDY OF AFRICAN THEATRE PROGRAMMES
IN EAST AND WEST AFRICA

The object of this project is to examine theatre programmes in East and West Africa. The approach includes an inspection of the quality, quantity, and facilities for theatre training in the African Universities, Institutes of African Studies, theatre units, theatre companies, and centres.

The subjects of the investigation include the major theatre programmes in the following countries: (1) Ethiopia (2) Uganda (3) Kenya (4) Tanzania (5) Zambia (6) Congo (7) Gambia (8) Guinea (9) Liberia (10) Ivory Coast (11) Sierra Leone (12) Nigeria. (13) Togo (14) Dahomey and (15) Ghana.

The instruments used include intensive interviewing via interview-response sheet, questionnaires, visitations, and participant-observation.

During the visitations the examiner inspects theatre training programmes in respect to African theatre, and looks specifically at the aspects and elements of African drama. He is especially interested in the quality, quantity, and facilities for learning theatre and drama in respect to the specific training programmes as well as the relationship between the training received and the specific teaching or theatre tasks of the 'theatre people'.

The analysis uses as a point of departure the discipline of the Professional Actor, Writer, and Director in respect to the theatre programmes and companies, and the discipline of the specialist in communication in the language area and the participant-observation area.

The data and information will be used in implementing specific training programmes for African theatre and drama in the

various Institutes of African Studies. Moreover, materials and plays for possible productions in African theatre for Africa and Black America will be collected. These materials will eventually provide an Anthology of African and Black Theatre for production purposes in Africa and America.