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Abstract

Environmental education, field interventions and entertainment-education have been deployed to raise ecological consciousness in society; and studies tend to focus more on impacts, audiences and social change; often overlooking the critical encoding segment in the communication chain. If animistic or romanticist ‘immersion in nature’ engenders eco-friendly dispositions, it’s also possible that behavior change can come from immersing change-agents (cast/crew) in natural environments to enhance eco-consciousness and improve encoding and communication competencies. This study used participant observation within natural immersive production environments; and random interviews to assess eco-behavior change in key cast/crew in the production of Linda’s Joint, a radio serial on gorilla protection in Cross River State, Nigeria. Findings show that majority of cast/crew imbibed eco-friendly attitudes, showed improved encoding competencies and became convinced change-agents following their participation in the production. Significantly, the study strengthens pedagogical values of loop-writing approaches and experiential learning especially in ambient production locations.

Keywords: Environmental Education. Linda’s Joint Serial. Immersion in Nature. Entertainment-Education. WCS/Cross River Gorilla. Eco-Criticism.

Conceptual Background

Introduction: The reality of ecological problems and how to deploy the humanities to improve eco-consciousness is increasingly stressed (cf. Peterson 2017, 177; www.ecdpm.org/climatechange) both in eco-
criticism and critical interventions; as global environmental issues remain controversially, a ‘never-ending debate’ (Easton 2007, xv). Communicating these ecological issues from the perspective of the artist remains challenging. This difficulty is due to theatre’s narrative technique of ‘cover up and reveal’, using structures of ‘curtains, lights and denouement’ and always based on ‘language, image, emotion and mood’ all of which are quite different from ‘scientific inquiry’ which often uses ‘microscopic formations, statistics and graphs’ (Walsh 2020, 102). This difference in the environmental communication approach problematizes the issue of encoding ecology; thereby calling for continual search for how ‘theatre [can] relate with different forms of data, cultural conventions, material and digital archives...environmental destruction and climate change’ (Walsh 2020, 102) to communicate with audiences. This study tries to contribute to resolving this communication challenge by focusing on the encoding segment of Linda’s Joint, an eco-serial by immersing the cast/crew in natural ambient environments as a way of facilitating eco-conscious behavior change.

Eco-critical interventions often communicate the systemic interconnectivities between the writer/artist and the environment, the environment and the work of art, and how the environment shapes modes of human perception. These links are often communicated through environmental education or field interventions using Entertainment-education, and many other approaches including Immersive theatre techniques as theorized by Josephine Machon’s and others like Gareth White, Adam Alison and James Frieze in their studies of many practitioners (Machon 2013, 1-38). Many of these ‘immersive’ interventions were carried out in mediated simulated environments. Frieze’s work for instance ‘interrogate[s] claims ... that participatory performance extends engagement’ using creative spaces that include ‘bodily, technological, temporal, spiritual, performative, pedagogical, textual, social’; with analyses based on ‘participant as co-designer, [...] the facilitator of immersive/participatory performance... and the critic’ (Frieze 2016, Review). However, the concept of ‘immersion in nature’ as used in this study is not directly connected to mainstream Immersive Theatre practice. My approach derives from my experience of animistic and Romanticists’ attitudes or reverence for Nature in what I conceive as ‘immersion in nature’ rather than immersion in mediated or simulated environments which Immersive theatre involves.

Studies on Radio drama production have tended to focus more on audiences, impacts assessment and effectiveness of interventions of eco-drama with little attention to the encoding agents and ‘the producer’s perspective’ (Tuft 2003, 2; Tuft 2001, 25-51; Jedlowski and Régob 2018). Meanwhile, the cast/crew remains the critical encoding segment in the drama communication chain. Examining this communication segment is significant because the ‘story-teller, the playwright, the actor, the designer, the choreographer must [...] put forth their thoughts ... for arts to thrive’ (Nda 2013, 21), and like Arthur Miller remarks, ‘the very impulse to write... springs from an inner chaos crying for order, for meaning, [...] which] must be discovered in the process of writing the work’ (Brockett & Ball 2004, 302). The implication here is the imperative to re-examine whether communicating through drama especially radio broadcast platform affects the essential dispositions, roles and attitudes of the communication agents. Like Jaeho Cho et al, observe, ‘[self] expression could create a spiral of self-reinforcement in which individuals become more confident in their prior [...] convictions and less ambiguous in their attitudes’ (2018, 89). All of these dispositions may affect the efficacy of the intended message. So how is the drama writer/actor/designer accounted for in the process of production beyond being mere instruments and media for the message? Are they also part of target audiences or should they be ignored? This critical communication segment forms the population and the problem of this study.

In addition, drawing from my participation in the process of designing, scriptwriting and production experience, the change in the communicator is perceptible, albeit in differing degrees, because a work of art represents part or all of the outlook and ideology of the writer; even if the writer is perceived in Jungian terms as a mere medium of the creative impulse. This study is based on the field production of the debut 26-episode radio serial Linda’s Joint, the drama component for the radio magazine, ‘My Gorilla-My Community’, a PCI-Media Impact/Wildlife Conservation Society’s gorilla protection magazine currently running on CRBC Radio and HIT FM, Calabar, Nigeria.

Romanticist/Animistic Immersion & Eco-Consciousness: Eco-writers and interventionists perceive
nature in different ways: as ‘utopian pastoral dream’, as a dystopian ‘eternally consuming and regurgitating monster’ (Sullivan 2007, 1); as a ‘curse’ as in Nigeria’s Niger Delta, where the people suffer environmental and socio-economic problems because of oil exploitation (Ifowodo 2005, 52). Others contemplate it as a soothing healer as reflected in the use of terms like ‘mother nature’ by gynae-critics, androcentric writers like Romanticists and neo-Romanticists. Traditional African animistic relationship with nature is often imbibed through ‘immersive’ experiences in pristine natural spaces; which engenders sustainable eco-friendly attitudes in the community.

Eco-friendly orientation stretches back to mytho-biblical times’ Garden of Eden; in Hellenistic period as painted by Theocritus in his *Idylls* (c. 316-260); Platonic-Aristotelian perceptions and discourses of art as mimesis or imitation of nature, neo-classical ideals of verisimilitude, representation and modernist debates about Realism and Naturalism. Most of these strove to create artistic expressions that reflected or represented Nature, as a ‘counter to the philosophy of idealism’ and ‘promotion of common-sense realism’ (Kennedy 2011, 496). The ‘real’ aesthetic values of Nature came with the emergence of Romanticism; with its earlier fore-shadowing by writers like Shakespeare in his pastorals (As You like It, 1623; The Tempest, 1623). Traditional African communities’ eco-friendly attitude to Nature is visible in animistic religions and promotion of ‘sacred groves’, and totem animals which are archetypes of national parks and green spaces. I draw on these practices to illustrate my use of ‘immersion in nature’ and to show how the cast & crew get ‘immersed’ in the drama production process as an approach to self-conviction and behavior change. A further foray into Romanticism and traditional African’s reverence for nature may be relevant here.

Romanticism was a complex artistic, political and intellectual movement in 17th century Europe and chiefly characterized by ‘the elevation of feeling above reason’ and the ‘the worship of Nature’. In Germany, Goethe and Schiller’s *Sturm and Drang* movement also promoted Romanticist ideals (Kennedy 2011, 517). The real contemplation and adoration of nature became more palpable in the writings of the English ‘Lake District’ poets like Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats, etc. (cf. Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads; The Prelude*). In his ‘Tintern Abbey’, Wordsworth declaims nostalgically: ‘The sounding cataract haunted me like a passion [. . . .]/ An appetite; a feeling and a love’. In his later days, sadly faced with commercial agriculture and the Industrial Revolution, he could now only hear in that same Nature, ‘[t]he still sad music of humanity’ (Hayward 1956, 262); even though Greg Garrard argues that the ‘nature’ which Wordsworthian Romanticism valorized is different from that which contemporary environmentalists seek to protect (2004, 43). Garrard traces the beginning of ‘modern environmentalism’ from Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962); which is reminiscent of William Blake’s *The Sick Rose* that also bemoans the blight of industrial urbanization on nature where ‘pastoral peace rapidly gives way to catastrophic destruction’ (2004, 2).

Contemporary African ‘neo-Romantic’ writers and eco-critics like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Ken Saro Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, Joe Ushie and Ogaga Ifowodo also see nature as teacher, provider, lover, mother, god and healer. In *The Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi says through Kamiti: ‘I want you to learn what nature and solitude can teach us. Simplicity and balance, the Way. Call it the Forest School of Medicine and Herbology [. . .] Nature is the source of all cures’ (2007, 266-7). Ngugi here reflects the African adoring attitude to Nature and its possibilities for sustainable humanity. These neo-romantic writers are simply reflecting the reality of their traditional upbringing and natural environments which are now being devastated by materialist greed and desertification. African animistic-romanticist reverence for nature as reflected by Ngugi, also reveals some universal mythic origins and traditional African communities methods of ‘conserving’ nature through the creation of sacred grooves, ‘evil forests’, totem animals and plants, sacred streams, rivers and pools, etc. In all of these hallowed spaces, it’s forbidden to hunt or poach, harvest or trespass in anyway without community sanction. This attitude is also perceptible in the mythical injunction in the Bible where God tells Adam and Eve: ‘but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it. . . ’ (Genesis 2, v17); or even as Noah is instructed to bring into the Ark: ‘every living thing of all flesh. . . to keep them alive with thee’ (Genesis 6, v19).

One way the traditional African appreciates Nature and gets attuned to it is being immersed in it. This process is promoted by the fact of the on-going disruptive transition from rural and agrarian setting to
William Lewis in his review of Josephine Machon’s *Immersive Theatres…* (2013) remarks that Machon’s work may have arisen from her discontent in an ‘age of user generated content…[where] theatre audiences have become numb to the mainstream passive spectator model of theatrical engagement’, complicated by contemporary conflicting theatre marketing concepts like ‘interactive’, ‘participatory’, and ‘experiential’ (Lewis ND, 293). Machon admits that while Immersive theatre is not actually a genre, she, like other practitioners, uses the metaphor of ‘submersion in a bathtub where the immersant becomes fully engulfed for cerebral and imaginative affect’ (Lewis ND, 293). Drawing from multiple theories from Deleuze, Ranieri, Umberto Eco, Bourriand, etc, Machon’s puts forth her ‘own theory of (syn)aesthetics’ in her book *Immersive Theatres…* (2013). She acknowledges that the practice covered in *Immersive Theatres…* might ‘fall outside the realm of theatre but her contribution is important’ in the sense that she attempts to ‘establish and confirm a new form of theatrical enterprise outside the traditional model of passive spectatorship’. Lewis makes it clear that in spite of the ‘newness’ and the immersive ‘age of Web 2.0, immersive practice looks forward to a rich style of developing affective storytelling and connection via theatre performance’ (ND, 293). Machon, like Freitag below, identifies ‘immersive features’ which can be used as a ‘scale of immersivity’ to include: audience involvement and evolvement, sensual worlds with their accompaniments of immediacy, intimacy and sensuality; space, place and what she calls *prae*sonce: site-inspired practice; and immersive worlds including immersive environments and the environment (2013, Proof, 70-89).

From an multi-disciplinary perspective, Florian Freitag and her colleagues admit the fact that Immersion ‘figures in multiple academic discourses yet remains conceptually, terminologically, and methodologically fuzzy’; but depending on context, it describes ‘either a specific state of mind or a set of properties found in either objects or practices that contributes to generating such a set of mind’ (2020, 2). Because of the difficulty created by these trans-disciplinary applications, they also adopt the term ‘immersivity’, as a ‘gradable property of VR [virtual reality] systems’ as well as a ‘state of mind’ as distinguished from ‘a set of properties’ (Freitag 2020, 4). Immersion can be a ‘state of mind… and process of reception’, and ‘Immersivity’, a ‘process of production’ which can enable us to ‘measure’ immersive attributes in a production (2020, 4).To measure ‘immersivity’, Freitag et al provide a model called ‘Wolf’s Factors of Aesthetic Illusion’ made up of three interlocking circles: ‘Representational Features, Reception Process Recipients and Framing Contexts’ (2020, 5).

Romanticism and animistic is related to ‘immersion in nature’ as both have provided ways of contemplating and experiencing nature. Unfortunately, European colonialism introduced and propagated Christian/medieval assumptions of man’s superiority over nature, and consequent destruction of animistic beliefs (White 1996, 10); probably in obedience to the oft-misinterpreted biblical injunction to ‘be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it…’ (Genesis 1, v28). Lynn White suggests a Zen-Buddhist-
Franciscan disposition to contemplating nature; a position echoed by Jonathan Chaplin who, drawing from Pope Francis’ 2015, No.45 *Encyclical* for an ‘integral ecology’, notes that a ‘holistic conception of nature is being re-articulated across several religious traditions…’ (Chaplin 2016, 2). This emerging pro-nature religious attitude is clearly pro-animist and romanticist even though man-centric anti-Romanticist devastation of nature in the post-modern time is transformed into what Vandana Shiva calls bio-piracy, involving plundering of Nature, large scale commodification, genetic manipulation, exploitation and franchising. Christopher Manes calls for a return to these traditional ‘motifs of humanism […]’ found in *primal cultures*, postmodern philosophy and medieval contemplative tradition’ (1996, 26).

So what can eco-pedagogy learn from the foregoing ‘immersive’ traditions, and how do we imbibe, communicate or teach these pro-ecological values, which are what centrally, concerns eco-critics, pro-eco-teachers and interventionists? William Major poses the relevant question: ‘Should we not as eco-critics seek to understand more fully the people, the culture, and the ideas of the rural world (rather than our own sometime idealized version of it) and make it a more central part of our critique?’ (2007, 53). Nature teaches and instructs in the manner it rewards and punishes humanity’s activities. Rueckert emphasizes this relationship between poets and green plants ‘being engaged in the same creative, life-sustaining activities and of teachers and literary critics as creative mediators between literature and the biosphere’ (1996, 121). Like hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, the Ebola Virus Disease is perceived as a ‘war waged by bush animals against greedy humanity who prey on them’ (Betiang 2016, 343.).

So if nature so teaches, we as eco-pedagogues, interventionists and critics should also re-examine and broaden the methods of nature’s pedagogy, ‘immerse’ ourselves in it, in order to understand with conviction and improve on our own encoding methods to make us more effective communicators. My emphasis on the ‘encoding segment’ in eco-dramaturgy is because they form a critical segment of the change communication chain whose lack of knowledge, conviction in the educational value and attunement with nature can compromise the avowed communication objectives of eco-consciousness (Howarth 1996, 69; Garrard 2004, 3). This is because man remains a critical determining factor in this mediating process (Evernden 1992, 6).

**Methodology**

This study focuses on the making and creation of convinced drama communicators through ‘immersion in the natural space’ and how these ambient sounds are also mediated into the drama in post-production to convey reality in production. Rather than focusing on aspects of ‘Immersive Theatre’, like audiences and participatoriness, this study is more interested in the encoding and production segment of the communication process. Freitag et al rightly admit that ‘we cannot simply measure immersion by “counting the number of users’ senses that are provided with input and the degree to which inputs from the physical environment are shut out”’ (2020, NP) even though this is what it should entail; suggesting that ‘measurements appear more feasible when they are conducted on the production side of the immersive equation and tied to specific spatial configurations that are supposed to immerse a subject’ (NP). Using ‘cognitive linguistics’, Gareth White articulates the immersive theatre performances of Shunt and Punchdrunk, in terms of ‘installations… expansive environments which have mobile audiences, and which invite audience participation’ (cf. www.cambridge.org; cited in Freitag 2020). In his own approach, Adam Alston, drawing from his experience with the SIGNA Project, is interested in how all the ‘pulleys of performance’: ‘scenography, choreography, dramaturgy… coalesce around a central aim: to place audience members in a thematically cohesive environment’ (qtd, Freitag 2020); as well as using ‘materiality to enforce mediality’ [and] ‘in-character performers [to] introduce the participants [and audiences] to the “world” ’ (Freitag 2020, NP). For film or the audio medium of radio, Freitag et al add that ‘immersivity emerges from the interplay of (1) aesthetic, (2) material, and (3) phenomenological dimensions’ (2020, NP).

What all of these translate for me in the production of *Linda’s Joint* radio eco-drama serial is how the dramaturgs were able harmonize all the aesthetic, material and sensual elements to re-create and transfer the natural ambient gorilla world of Boki/Cameroon mountains onto an actable script, ‘immersing’ cast/crew members through in-character rehearsals; and, adding mediated sounds and effects to realize a convincing transforming experience in the cast/crew. This method involved a combination of participant observation
of the cast/crew (on my part as researcher) in production; my auto-experience of Nature and the whole process of designing and producing these first 26 episodes of Linda’s Joint; and post-production random interviewing of cast and crew.

Participant observation or auto-ethnography here involves my own personal critical observation, participation and analysis of self and others, participating throughout the design and production process; as well as how the process impacted on me as subject. Through participant observation, I monitored the ‘experiential learning’ process enhanced by the immersive natural environment; and the change that resulted. ‘Personal experience’ remains a valid method and ‘a recognised dimension of research practice itself […] as a form of research data and as an analytical concept’ (Pickering 2008, 17).

It’s important to note that at the beginning of the production process, participants were quizzed on their knowledge, attitudes and behavior with regards to the educational values; while random interviews were also used to collate responses from key participants (co-writers, assistant-director, actors/actresses, and sound editor) at the end of the production process. This was with the objective of finding out whether the cast/crew’s immersive experience in the natural environments where the gorillas live, recordings in natural ambient locations, participating in loop writing workshops, and in the production process contributed to changing their personal attitudes to the environment and gorilla protection, and improved their communication competences.

1. Designing Linda’s Joint: The framework used for the conception of Linda’s Joint was based on Miguel Sabido’s Entertainment–Education strategy. The strategy uses archetypes and stereotypes to provide a model for depicting characters, drawing from the Social Learning theory. From the Triune Brain theory, Sabido borrows a model for designing messages that are charged with evoking desired changes in the message receiver (Singhal & Rogers 1999, 70). Linda’s Joint was designed to implement media messages, to entertain and educate, and increase audiences’ knowledge about [the] educational issue [of gorilla protection], create favourable attitudes and change overt behavior among the target population living along the Nigerian/Cameroon forest border; and to appeal to a wide variety of the population. This therefore required ‘honest human dialogue and strong emotional dramatic scenes about people’ (Brenner 1992, 141), thus begging the question whether it’s possible to create ‘honest human dialogue’ without creating convinced writers/actors/designers. So, in designing Linda’s Joint, it was necessary to attempt to change the ‘message encoder’ into a convinced active ‘change agent’ in the ultimate receiver/audience outside the drama production team.

The drama’s target population are residents of the Cross River National Park/South-Western Cameroon border whose mountains and forests house ‘the last 250 Cross River gorillas’ (Oates et al, ND); and the Afir Mountain area which hosts the Wildlife Sanctuary in Boki, Cross River State, being one of the three sites in Nigeria where gorillas are still officially protected (Bassey 2014, 11). The serial also targeted other stakeholders and communities in order to increase their knowledge, promote positive attitudes and inspire behavior change in favour of bio-diversity and Cross River gorilla conservation (Workshop Report, 2011). In defining this target audience, many factors were reviewed: top-down and bottom-up support, how to involve government agencies/officials, opinion leaders and early adopters, the children; as well as major players in business, law enforcement and media; bush meat traders and consumers. Target groups cut across faith-based, farming, governmental, law-enforcement, hunting, conservation experts, civil society, media, and identified ambassadors. Protecting and conserving the Cross River gorilla was therefore the main objective of the drama serial.

2. Preliminary Training: This began with a series of workshops; the first being facilitated by project partners from PCI-Media Impact, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) from Cameroon and Nigeria, and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service, with stakeholders from Nigeria and Cameroon. These initial talks, lectures and brainstorming by the facilitators and participants focused on the reality of the endangered Cross River gorilla (Oates et al ND, 1). The participatory session provided a forum that enabled the sharing of the knowledge base about prevalent attitudes, practices and beliefs that drive this environmental problem within the target population. This brainstorming concentrated on three key critical areas of habitat loss, forest corridors and hunting. The underlying factors were used to clearly envision some possible utopian
and dystopian futures, with or without the continued existence of the Cross River gorilla and other forest resources in the area. This session also helped to fill the knowledge gap among participants. A basic language analysis of the target groups settled for the use of ‘spicy pidgin’ English commonly spoken and understood by Nigerians and Cameroonian within the shared mountainous gorilla corridor.

2. Research & Scripting: Prior to actual script writing, the lead scriptwriter visited the ‘enclave’ target population to enable personal interaction and ethnographic familiarization with the forest people and their culture; to harvest local stories and names which were later engrafted to spice the plotting, narrative and local ambience. This visit included forest areas that were identified as ‘gorilla corridors’ where the apes roamed.

A Values Grid was designed to articulate a moral framework for the play. This was based on an earlier baseline research and consultations carried out in March 2013. The values grid drew its spirit from the Nigerian constitution, legal statutes, the United Nations’ Declaration of Human Rights, to which Nigeria is signatory and other extant laws governing Wildlife resources in Nigeria. These include: Wild Animals Preservation Act 1916, Wild Animals Preservation Law 1959 and others which illustrates the fact that ‘conservation and preservation of Wildlife and other biological diversity is now a global concern’ (Akintayo & Akinbola 2012, 396; UNEP’s CITES: http://www.unep.org). The Values grid in entertainment-education drama provides the foundation upon which the story is built; a tool that informs the characters’ personalities, choices and consequences in the play. It also provides a community consensus document on key issues and challenges and clarifying characterization of positive and negative attitudes of characters in the play. The Values grid for Linda’s Joint was founded on the key educational problems/issues: forest corridors which form the gorillas’ natural habitat, habitat loss due to encroachment of the locals, weak government policies or enforcement of conservation/protection laws and regulations, as well as local poaching/hunting. These values were reviewed and analyzed in positive and negative terms: values to encourage (e.g. the positive consequence of alternative livelihoods, increase listeners’ sense of self-efficacy in overcoming barriers and starting sustainable businesses); and, values to discourage.

Plotting and characterization was achieved using loop writing, a process that began with three different groups creating character profiles and storylines based on each of the three thematic areas. Using this participatory writing approach, the three groups were able to come at the same topic from different angles, which were later collapsed into a single storyline; and a single plot based on a relationship/character map, where characters were developed along positive, transitional and negative molds; a categorization designed in melodrama to encourage audiences’ modeling choices. The actual play writing process continued with the development of the synopsis of the serial, detailed characterization and character mapping, character motivations, rewards and punishments; a scripting process that used ‘an involved storyline that constructs social context of shared social interaction and experiences’ (Singhal & Rogers 1996, 66). After this initial workshop stage, the rest of scene by scene treatment, dialogue writing and revision of the initial twenty-six episodes continued by a team of three scriptwriters.

3. Play-Reading & Rehearsing: The rest of the crew and cast joined the production team at this stage following an audition, play-reading and rehearsal. The radio medium basically required developing appropriate voices, ambient sound and silence with the right admixture of variety and verisimilitude. The objective of the rehearsal was to work the actors into convincing characters/voices, making them understand their virtual positioning in relation to the microphone, developing ensemble playing relationship, timeliness and timing for the demands of the radio broadcast format. The rehearsal process also got the actors to create the illusion of space and distance as well as contributing to the overall ambience of being immersed in the natural environment of the play. It was from this rehearsal stage that the rest of the cast and crew started getting the feel of being ‘immersed’ in the story and its natural environment; a process that began with the choice of a quiet ‘bush’ locale for rehearsals and recording.

The behavior-changing values embedded in the script were achieved through techniques like imitation, identification, role modeling, and observational learning from what characters do in the play. In courting potential audiences’ sympathy and identification, the script and rehearsal process aspired to inspire and elicit atten-
tion, empathy, aspiration and imitation from the target audience. To achieve all these, the cast and crew needed to become convinced communicators. Two key thematic questions guided this process: How would the design and rehearsal process of Linda’s Joint contribute to raising the level of eco-consciousness or change the behavior in the communicators themselves? Was it possible that self-conviction in these change agents/participants would enhance the encoding competence of the cast/crew or the effective reception of the educational values in the target audience? The choices of natural environments, in-character reading and rendition, repetitiveness of lines and voice modulation, and openness to ambient sensations were the tools used to immerse the cast/crew in the play’s environment at this point.

4. Recording & Post-Editing: The production of a radio serial is not complete until it rolls out of the editor’s suite. Beyond all the values that the characters as communicators and potential change-agents imbibed to communicate the educational values, much of the ambient sounds and effects were also added at the editing stage. Some of these forest ambient sounds included noises and sounds of forest animals and insects, bushfires and gunshots, running water and falls, storms and rainfall, village drumming and singing, and other subliminal effects. The rehearsal and recording process made it imperative for repeated actions and ‘multiple takes’ in such a manner that even though lines were read from the script for precision, exactitude of rendition or voice modulation, the repetitive process also contributed to imprinting the message and ambiance on the sub-conscious of the actors.

Findings

Against the background of a cast/crew that initially knew little or cared less about the gorilla and endangering habits of humans, the following responses indicate some degree of attitude change; because ab initio, the serial was designed to effect behavior change in target communities. Going by the twelve sampled crew/major cast members, key players admitted some level of change in personal attitude following their participating in designing and producing Linda’s Joint. In some ways, many others became convinced agents of change like this writer.

In the words of the Assistant script writer, ‘my involvement in the project opened my eyes and mind to alternative ways of doing legitimate home-bound trade and the need to safe-guard our forest and its habitat’ (Ewah, Interview). This response from a scriptwriter and indigene of the gorilla corridor touches on self-conviction and the need to create alternative livelihoods to divert attention from exploitation of nature; as well the need for sustainable conservation.

The Assistant director also admitted that participating in Linda’s Joint was of ‘great impact to me as it expanded my perception of nature. It deepened my understanding of the need to protect wild plants and animal species and their habitat; thus, having this knowledge undoubtedly triggered attitudinal change in me about consumption of bush meat, logging and deforestation’ (Achoakawa, Interview). This is a multi-pronged impact which covers most of the educational values in the serial.

Other significant responses are perceptible from some of the actors when they admit severally that: ‘I became more aware of the importance of wild life, my attitude to bush burning and eating of bush meat also changed because I now know the need to preserve nature’. And from another: ‘Yes to a large extent, participating in the drama serial helped me understand the need to preserve gorilla and I developed new thought in protecting them’.

A key negative character admits that, ‘I personally had an apathy to bush meat consumption before Linda’s Joint; but after the drama, I was more informed and it actually made me decide not to eat any form of bush meat... in other words, I took a stand’ (Osoka, Interview). The exposure to the drama and the problem has validated his previous non-committed attitude.

There are further admissions of change: ‘participating in the play made me think differently especially towards bush meat. The play gave bush animals so much respect and importance as though they were humans’ (Osa, Interview). This also indicates the extent to which the play captures the reality of the problem which was naturalistically represented.
On the other side of the divide, there was also crew/cast who expressed partial or discriminatory awareness: ‘I did not totally [change] because I’m obviously still eating meat... all kinds of ‘good’ meat (bush meat). But it helped me in selecting the kind of meat I eat’ (David, Interview). The respondent here has imbued some level of discrimination in eating bush-meat since it’s not all bush animals that are considered endangered.

Another category expressed total indifference: ‘No, it didn’t affect or change my attitude to bush meat in anyway’ (Idu, Interview). But it’s significant that the two major respondents who were key to the dramatic-turgical process and directly responsible for engineering the script, cast and crew: the assistant scriptwriter and assistant director indicated significant ‘conversion’ and self-conviction outside the rest who were major actors/actresses. It’s also noteworthy that these attitudes were not there at the beginning of the production process during the preliminary assessment of their knowledge, attitudes, practices and beliefs.

Discussion

While many studies have tried to understand the change effects of EE-drama on audiences (Singhal & Rogers 1999, 179); ‘to advocate rights and engineer social change and mass awareness about health problems’ (Shahzalal & Hassan 2019:1; Khan et al 2017; Tuft 2001; Tuft 2003), the dearth of similar studies on the change within the communicator (Cho et al 2018), suggests that significant attention has not been given to this crucial encoding segment in the communication chain. We cannot meaningfully talk about communication without the encoder or the medium; which like McLuhan would say, can also become the message. In radio EE-drama, role modeling makes the model the message hence the key importance of character types.

In spite of the paucity of such studies, we can begin by examining how the hermeneutic process of designing a communication package brings about attitudinal change in the communicating agent; even though this study may not be able to show whether this external expression of internal conviction in the communication agents affects the efficacy of the message on the ultimate audiences. A Freudian psychoanalytical approach to understanding text privileges the author’s disposition at the point of creation/encoding. The creative or crafting process of message encoding therefore cannot but be linked to the agency of encoding at a point in creative time. But whether self-conviction in the encoding agency affects the ultimate reception/conviction in the audience falls outside the purview of this study.

In spite of this limitation, the responses above point to some mutation in attitude in the encoding agents of behavior change communication. Learning to communicate change through the dramatic process appears to me like a baptismal immersion of cast/crew in nature, which is the educational value. In analyzing the uses of drama, motivation and materials, Hodgson observes that apart from other multi-dimensional uses of drama for development, therapy and communication, drama impacts at the personal level in building imagination, speech, observation, movement and feeling (Musa 2006, 63). This personal level influence is also applicable to the actors and designers as agents of communication; in the same way that dramatics and role-playing strengthens the child-participant’s imagination and self-expression.

Like Lee Strasberg rightly expresses it, the actor ‘must somehow believe; [...] be able to convince himself of the rightness of what he is doing in order to do things fully on stage’ (qtd in Brockett & Ball 2004, 349). If the actor lacked this conviction in his/her interpretation of a role like we see in one of my respondents like, ‘I was just reading it as a play and nothing more...’ (Ejimbe, Interview), one wonders if this non-committed attitude doesn’t take away the efficacy of the communication. Identifying this ‘permeability at the boundary between self and character’ along Jean Baudrillard’s idea of simulation and faking, Pendle & Rowe quote a student-actor who says, ‘I found that making certain elements of my character similar to myself helped to maintain the validity of the character’ (2010, 99). Realistic Stanislavskian ‘method’ acting tradition requires the actor to ‘draw on their own somatic, psychological and autobiographical motivation; without [which] the work will lack energy and in-the-moment responsiveness’ (Pendle & Rowe 2010, 99).

From my personal empirical conviction, the radio medium achieves or uses Stanislavskian realism in role interpretation through self-conviction, voice modulation, and ambient realism to build authenticity and believability. This is because in role creation for radio, the actor draws from many levels of characterization
including biological, sociological, psychological and ethical dimensions. The psychological and emotional preparations draw heavily from Stanislavsky’s ‘emotion memory’. Effective radio drama acting therefore cannot be a mere mechanical process without the real ‘psycho-somatic’ involvement and ‘immersion’ of the actor in the narrative, real or simulated environments, except maybe in deliberate ‘anti-dramatic’ presentational traditions.

For the dramatic artist, the nature and process of communication requires a holistic approach and should begin from the change-agent who is also part of the ecological problem. This [contradictory] learning/teaching relationship is illuminated in Barranger’s linking of theatre’s ‘aliveness’ with the ‘humanity it mirrors’ since ‘actors parallel humanity, [through] simulation: reality, rehearsal: learning’ (my emphasis, 2002, 6). What this implies is that both cast and crew in a production process impact on the production in the same manner the production impacts on them since the process of dramatic creation and ‘stage’ as performance venue realization are tied together in the instrumentality of the human-artist as medium. There’s indeed some relationship between character and meaning as Bennett posits, that ‘theatrical interpretation (broadly conceived) should not just focus on meaning … but also examine the necessary truths about a character and/or play (that is, the input and truth value of the play)’ (2015, 3). The actor/character in drama cannot therefore remain unaffected by what s/he plays if communication must be effective.

This relationship also exists between the script writer, who conceives/encodes, and gives form and structure to the drama capsule, and the subject matter; in the same manner that there’s some ‘form of symbiosis’ like Rueckert brothers and sisters’ (Rueckert 1996, 120) produces better outputs. The argument here is that ‘experiential learning’ such as drama affords can become more useful for behavior change communication and as instruments of liberating communication or entertainment-education (Tufte 2003, 3; Tufte 2001). One is inclined to agree with Brockett & Ball that, ‘ultimately, performance offers the actor one of the best opportunities for learning, because the ability to affect or control an audience’s response is a major test of acting skill’ (2004, 358).

It is not out of place to expect the cast/crew to be part of the change the message seeks to achieve. It may be difficult to establish a direct inter-relationship between mere ‘acting/faking’ and ‘simulation/conviction’ and their total effect on behavior change in the communication agents/actors involved in this production outside the above post-performance testimonials of participants in this study. It can also be said that beyond the actor, the ‘immersion’ of the scriptwriters, the interpretive director, recording sound-engineer/editor in the educational value, made the crew and cast integral members of the encoding body whose artistic conviction or otherwise can impact on the ultimate outcome. This approach or study signposts the inherent positive values in using participative loop-writing and experiential approaches to scripting and producing EE radio serials, a process that has the potentials to ‘immerse’ the team in thinking/living out the ‘ambient messages’ that Linda’s Joint was designed to communicate.

Conclusion

This study moves away from the preoccupation with traditional effects and impacts that entertainment-education productions bring about on target audiences; to examining a little researched but significant encoding agency of behavior change communication. In the same way the classroom can become a theatre for imparting environmental change communication, one believes that the actual field of experiencing Nature where our ecology is ravaged can also become the frontline for this intervention; which is where this study was situated. The production process engendered this ‘ambient immersion’ and experiential learning. It is hoped that thinking along this divergent line will engender more research into this seemingly dark area of meta-communication in entertainment-education media performance studies. Using this narrow, informal auto-ethnographic experience and interaction with participants in conceiving, designing, writing and producing Linda’s Joint, this study also interrogates whether the cast/crew change-agents should experience personal conviction in the educational value for it to be effectively shared with target audiences. From the random responses of key participants in this production process, many admit they did ‘experience’ a positive behavior/attitude change with regards to the educational values; protecting the endangered Cross River go-
rilla and its eco-system; discouraging bush meat consumption, and promoting alternative livelihoods among
the farming/hunting population. Whether this change within the communication agents remains sustained
is beyond the scope of this study. On my own personal auto-ethnographic level, involvements in designing,
writing and directing this serial has left permanent eco-friendly imprints on my overall attitude to life.

Drawing inspiration from the inherent ‘teaching’ tendency of nature itself as articulated in animistic religions,
romanticists and personal experience, this study also significantly suggests the imperative to engrave possible
ways to ‘immerse’ dramaturgical teams of scriptwriters, directors, designers (and producers) in the central
educational values of productions because these cast/crew constitute the ‘bodied’ change-agents and are
integral components or canvas upon which ‘active’ change communication messages are being encoded,
whether in classrooms or actual intervention spaces. Experiencing an ‘immersion’ in the actual womb of
natural spaces during drama productions or brief encounters by communicators in the frontlines can become
useful strategies for winning potential proselytes for eco-literacy/consciousness towards cultivating ‘convinced
eco-believers’ and advocates for our environmentally challenged 21st century global village.

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