

PLANNING AND DESIGN OF THE ENVIRONMENT: THE FAILURE OF GOVERNMENT SPONSORED PROJECTS

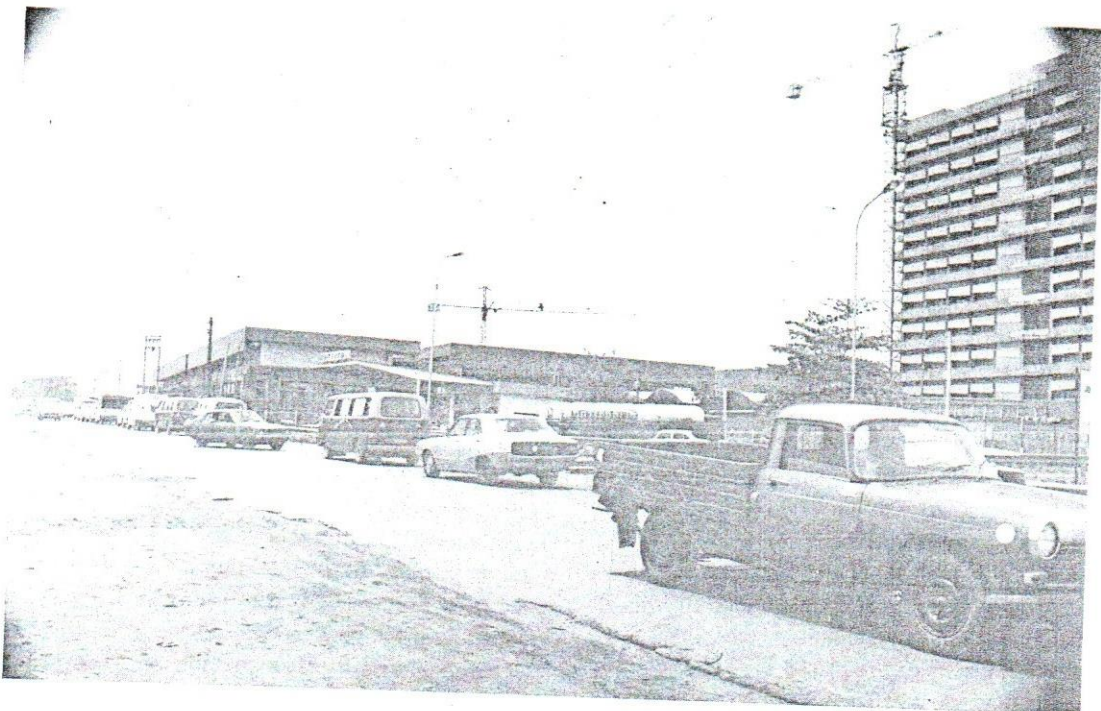
In all developing countries of the world, most physical structures erected are sponsored by the Governments just as all town and city planning are their responsibility. Given such a central and authoritative control over environmental development, one would expect a carefully planned and integrated development. These governments have the services of both local and foreign design experts at their disposal and we know that they employ them on all projects. But results have been catastrophic as all physical plannings have shown no valid practical or social logic on developments in Nigeria.

- Designs are not related to immediate environment;
- Siting of projects are determined by political and superficial exhibitionist considerations;
- No considerations are given to the recreational needs of the people as towns are built up without open spaces;
- There is criminal negligence of the strength of structures which leads to fast deterioration or outright collapse;
- The aesthetic appearance of the environment is totally neglected.

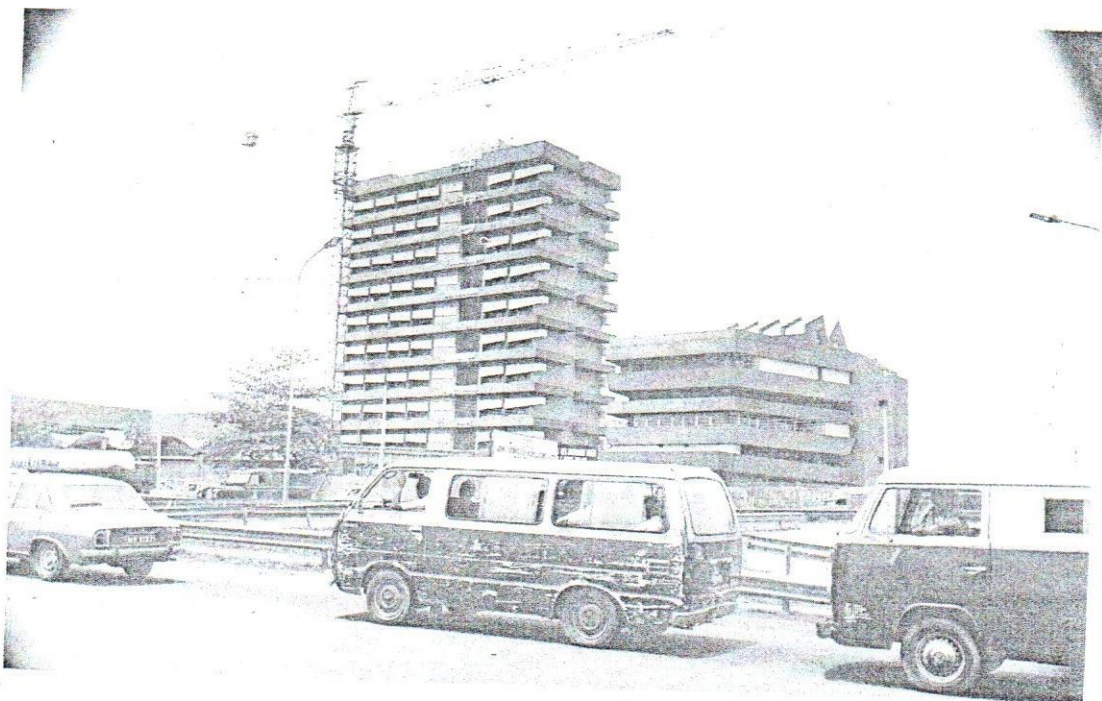
To try to place the right finger on the reason why effective control of our environmental development is so difficult is like going through a nightmare. We know that there was uncontrolled build-up in most townships during the colonial era which the independent government inherited. Few model lay-outs in some of the towns like in Ebute-Metta, Port-Harcourt and Enugu, did not anticipate the type of growth that followed.

The great tragedy was that the indigenous governments that took over did not do anything about planning the physical development of the towns. Residential and commercial areas mushroomed all around with no formally laid infrastructural facilities. All access roads were proposed roads on Government records. The people live and work in environmental surroundings that look very much like pig-sties.

When finally government officials woke up to the dismal realities of our environment, it was too late. They took one good look at the problem and decided that the best line of action was to shut their eyes to the sore. The sore festered on into cancerous ulcers, which can only be cured with the bull-dozers. So the governments decided to build



Two views of THE SHOPPING CENTRE AT THE BUSY ENTRANCE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN. THE COMPLEX ENCOACHES ON THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY WHICH SERVES AS THE MAJOR LINK THROUGH THE TOWN TO THE NORTHERN PART OF THE COUNTRY.



brand new layouts which were designed by both indigenous and foreign planning consultants. The results of these professionally conceived projects still fall short of the expectations of good environmental planning.

In the first place, the plans for the projects are not comprehensive enough to take care of every aspect of country, town or city development. The houses still come before the roads, the roads before the drainage, and the services come last and the roads and foundations of the houses will be dug up to lay them.

The haphazard development of properties is not the only environmental nuisance that we have to contend with. The individual properties are not sited with any conceivable valid logic. One can only conjecture that political considerations determine the siting of some projects, while superficial exhibitionism decides the rest.

The shopping centre placed at the busy entrance to the University of Ibadan is one case in point. Its plan is such that makes further road development impossible, creating a permanent traffic bottleneck.

Driving along Ibadan-Ife road, a Federal trunk A highway which will soon be built into a dual carriage express-way, one is dismayed by the siting of 'Sixty bed hospitals' along its proximities. At the final development of this highway, these hospitals will be right on the verge of the roadway. This type of careless siting of major town amenities is the rule rather than the exception on all highways all over the country. Schools and markets are usually treated in the same manner, more I suppose, as status symbols to score political points rather than effective service units. The lack of co-ordination between planners for the country is made ever so glaring when the gains of one programme is neutralised by the thoughtlessness of another planner. The new highways are planned to by-pass towns, but no sooner are the roads completed than town developers, led by the Local Government Councils will move their physical developments on to these highways. Such developments have greatly endangered life and limbs.

Another planning lapse is found in the non provision of adequate open spaces for vehicle parking or recreation purposes. Public toilets which were even known to exist during the colonial days are conspicuously absent in our towns and cities today. In the absence of such conveniences, people answering 'nature's call that knows no Kings' litter the environment with human wastes.

The maintenance of Public buildings and facilities is another area of gross neglect. Very little or nothing is budgeted for the upkeep of these facilities and this practice is very wrong. It is true that the renewal of damaged facilities is not an economic or healthy solution. It encourages in the people, a habit of carelessness, an attitude that is already brutalising the sensibility of our young generation to public responsibility.

We are all learning to live with decay and death and are progressively becoming insensitive to bad planning and its resultant unhealthy environment.

Demas Nwoko





THE AESTHETICS OF AFRICAN ART AND CULTURE

Studio Master — Demas Nwoko

THE AFRICAN CONCEPT OF BEAUTY: THE CONCEPT OF UGLINESS

When a thing is big or large, it is naturally desirable, and when it is small, it becomes naturally less desirable. The largeness of the heart for example; if it is big, it will be large enough for many people. If it is small the chances are that it will be reserved for only a few and if the natural attribute of the African is to make sure it reaches many people, then smallness will become undesirable. So we like opulent people. The image of an opulent person is the image of goodness, and in reality, he is agreeable and very amiable, all bubbles of laughter and jokes. 'If you watch them eat you will like eating', though you in your thinness will not be able to eat half as much as them. For the big person, it is big food, big laugh, big talk, and generous gestures. Unlike the small man, who is at some great size disadvantage and lives in fear that all about him will swallow his personality.

To be able to survive in an African society as a mean person, you have to be a very clever

person because meanness goes against the grain of accepted principles of interpersonal relationship. While the beauty in largeness is easily recognised, you have to look hard in physical smallness to find good points. Fortunately for the small, the African is always prepared to look hard as he does not sign off a living thing as bad or ugly until he has proved it to be so in performance.

Physical deformity as another composed form; Ugly but real:

The African finds it possible to live with the physically deformed, practically as if they were normal due to the African's exceptional ability to look beyond physical qualities. In African society the deformed are fully integrated into the family life. He even entertains them with his deformity and everybody laughs, making light-hearted jokes at the deformity, these jokes usually led by the deformed person himself.

Folklore is full of morals that teach the young

ones the beauty in the deformed person. In these tales, it is always the hunch-back who saves the day, the cripple who brings life; the sick and afflicted, though ostracized, who finally bring in riches and the good things. If children are taught to see beauty in the afflictions of these creatures that are abnormally deformed, by the time the children are grown up they would have begun to see good things in the deformed.

The Politics of the Stranger

The African goes a step further. Initially he bestows the best of attributes to the new and unknown until he has had time to discover the contrary. Therefore a stranger is respected for his unknown qualities as you cannot think of yourself as greater than a person you do not yet know very well. For this reason you give him preferential treatment all because you do not know who is visiting. It could be a god!

In a new place, the African is expected to behave like a fowl brought to a new home. It does not run all over the place asserting its personality over the other fowls, or over their feeding grounds. The new fowl stands on one foot and walks first on one and then the other, stopping to study the surrounding each time as it strives to know exactly how to move. When you are in such a position, you are obviously at a disadvantage, at least in grace of personality. You have to be humble and modest to find time to look well and understand all before you assert your personality. In this way there is little room for sweeping statements and generalisations, which result in view-points that see only surface or outward beauty. It was this African attitude to the stranger which misled early European visitors to Africa to believe that the African thought them beautiful, superior or even gods.

Respect for the unknown and possible goodness of the future also rules the African's attitude to the rules of good and bad. Think of whatever evil person you may—a thief, a murderer, a liar, a slanderer—as long as he is alive, the African never writes him off as he holds that he could change. He lives with him, expecting that the day that dawns next will bring that change. That is why

the bad and ugly could live a fully integrated life in the society. If there is a thief in the family, people are not sympathetic to his course; so, if he is caught and beaten up, he deserves what he gets, but they will treat his wounds and will not punish him further by ostracising him. This is a type of social therapy. It is easy for the African to live with a sick person who in the Western Culture would have been put away in a special home and so, ostracized. For example the mentally sick or retarded is not only allowed to live in the family, people will sit down for hours holding conversation with him as if he was perfectly normal. This attitude has made it possible for many mentally ill people to get cured without any other medical attention. So most psychiatric cases that would have gone to a doctor or a hospital in other cultures, never get out of the home here. In this spirit, deformities in man are overlooked, giving the deformed member full opportunity to live as full a life as any other normal person.

This type of attitude arises from the fact that it is philosophically accepted that no type of deficiency, especially in man, should be allowed to stand in the way of your aesthetic relationship with him, and so his ability to realise that ultimate aesthetics of association, out of life. To ensure this, the deformed are left to survive only when it is established that the defect will not hamper fairly normal living.

If a child is born deformed, the mid-wife who takes delivery of the child has a duty to assess the extent of deformity and if it is very bad, to terminate the life of the child. Bad to the extent that the deformity will make life too ugly for him, or too unbearable for him. In such a case, it will be given out immediately that 'the child was born but it did not cry'. To have stated otherwise will be in bad aesthetic taste. The mothers are not even allowed to see such children. To protect the aesthetic life of the parents, of everybody around, and of the child itself if it survived to live a life of the permanently hospitalised, needing assistance to perform daily acts of life, its life is terminated. To the African such a life is an

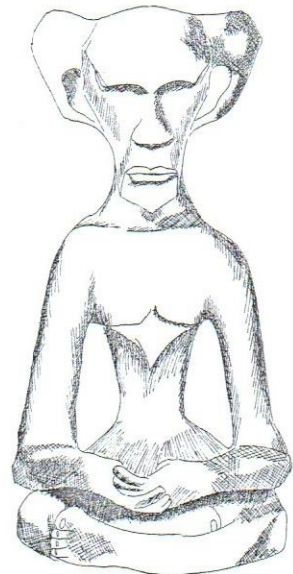
aesthetic nuisance, and the victim will hate the world, so he never sees the light of day.

In Africa, the first consideration to malformed children would be that they do not live because they are not good children. They are usually referred to as beasts and monsters and other names that establish from the on-set, that they are not human and so could not live. Their mothers were not allowed to see them for fear it could break their hearts, and they were attributed to the work of witches.

Violent killing is part and parcel of ugliness. But because the African values life and good living, killing is accepted as a most tragic incidence. In the olden days, Africans fought wars, like inter-tribal wars, with hardly any killings until the more deadly weapons were introduced. Villagers fought and if one person died, it was a tale for the next half-century about the battle that was so fierce that a man was killed in it. Weapons were sticks, swords and knives, which often left scars to show for the wars. The death of a man is a big tragedy to both sides because the wars were not extermination exercises but a fight to get a right to a place to live and enjoy neighbourliness. So you do not fight to die but to live, to fight again. Unlike in the Western Philosophy where you fight to eliminate the enemy in wars where man is expendable and a dispute over anything material and human, like the love of a lady, was settled by an open duel of elimination. The person who comes off the duel alive, takes possession of the object or subject of dispute. Given such a situation, the African might prefer to share the quest than take all, over the dead body of the other. This attitude is based on our aesthetic pursuit to attain the ideal, the pure. When you begin to eliminate life, people's incentive to attain the pure gets highly reduced. Because if you could be eliminated at any point, effort put in to attain the superlative looks wasted, hence the African who loves the pursuit of the ultimate, fears sudden elimination. In fact, he rules it out entirely, he does not recognise it as valid part of life. Even today, with our beginning to become

slightly conscious of sudden deaths, like death on the roads, it can still be said that it shocks 90% who see it as the work of the wicked. Life insurance to the average African is still a morbid under-taking, meaning that we do not have a place for accidental death in our life. It was even believed that a victim of such a tragic end never found a place in the land of the spirits because he was suddenly cut off, having had no time to prepare for his journey there. That explains also the dread of death in war, which is sudden death. A shrine was never set up for somebody who was killed accidentally, even when it was accidental gun-shot, because they do not believe he has found a resting place as he is usually not given the usual full burial rites. As a result nobody ever supplicates through him, because they are not sure where he went, or where he is resting.

D. N.



NEW CULTURE LECTURE SERIES

1. CREATIVITY AND SELF-RELIANCE

When we think of self-reliance today, the mind races to advanced technology. This is even truer of African and Third World societies who cannot see how they can become self-reliant when they are still technologically under-developed. This stance, unfortunately is detrimental to their efforts to achieve self-reliance because it is wrong. Advanced technology has only added frills of refinement to life and living. Basic technology is the means of true sustenance of existence; you build and improve on it. Basic technology has been with us for a very long time, achieved over a thousand years ago and used to build the numerous empires that we all know existed in many parts of Africa before the arrival of Europeans to trade with us

In spite of this great beginning our contemporary society has not fared very well on the road to self-reliance. We have lost the ingenuity and resilience of our ancestors, becoming mere consumers of the

products of other people's technology. Why has this generation of Africans not been able to build on the basic technology we inherited? There was the mind and faculty enslavement of colonialism we all know too well and on which we have blamed all our backwardness. But what has happened since independence? We have been taught not to worry about providing for our growth. The colonial masters decided to present to us, on a platter of gold, all the good things of life both material and spiritual. This gift was in exchange for the exploitation and management of all means of conversion to the use of all natural resources which exist on our lands. The finished products were made abundantly available to us.

Can we acquire or steal this advanced technology along with its finished products, convert it to immediate use and thus become self-sufficient and therefore self-reliant? The answer is NO! You cannot acquire true technology you did not participate in its develop-

ment. The process of development of patented inventions to marketable commodities proves the correctness of this stand. An invention goes through a highly intensive period of co-operative research and development before it becomes a consumer item on the market. Until we participate in all the processes of development of products of technology which we use, we will not understand them enough to make them our own. When all avenues are opened to us to participate in these development exercise, we will not participate fully to achieve meaningful results if we are not creative.

Creativity is not the preserve of any race or nation, it is a human endowment that has made itself manifest in all parts of the world. It is the instrument with which man has worked the resources of his environment to his utmost benefit.

By what we know of early man, he must have had a start that was very similar to that of other lower animals around him. I mean the way he lived in his natural shelter like caves and the way he procured his food by hunting down other animals, scratching out roots from the soil and picking fruits from the trees. But not very long in this state, the first man started to improve on his comfort through playful transformation of his physical surrounding. I had deliberately chosen to use the word, playful, because these activities of transformation could not have been indispensable to his existence. Even when they became useful, they were not imperative but they built up in man, a sense of relative superiority over other animals. Only relative because a good knowledge of animals revealed that most of them possess fairly high creative intelligence.

The important thing to us now is that man believed in the superiority of his creative ability and used it to conquer the world around him. Interdependence was very high and it was detrimental to continued existence of all parties involved. It was a question of 'man eat beast and beast eat man' to be alive and the situation made survival a very hazardous venture. Man was the first to create less dangerous ways of earning his livelihood, and first to arrive were his remotely controlled missiles with sharp reusable stone and later, metal war-heads. A close look at the sheer variety of these first implements would reveal the

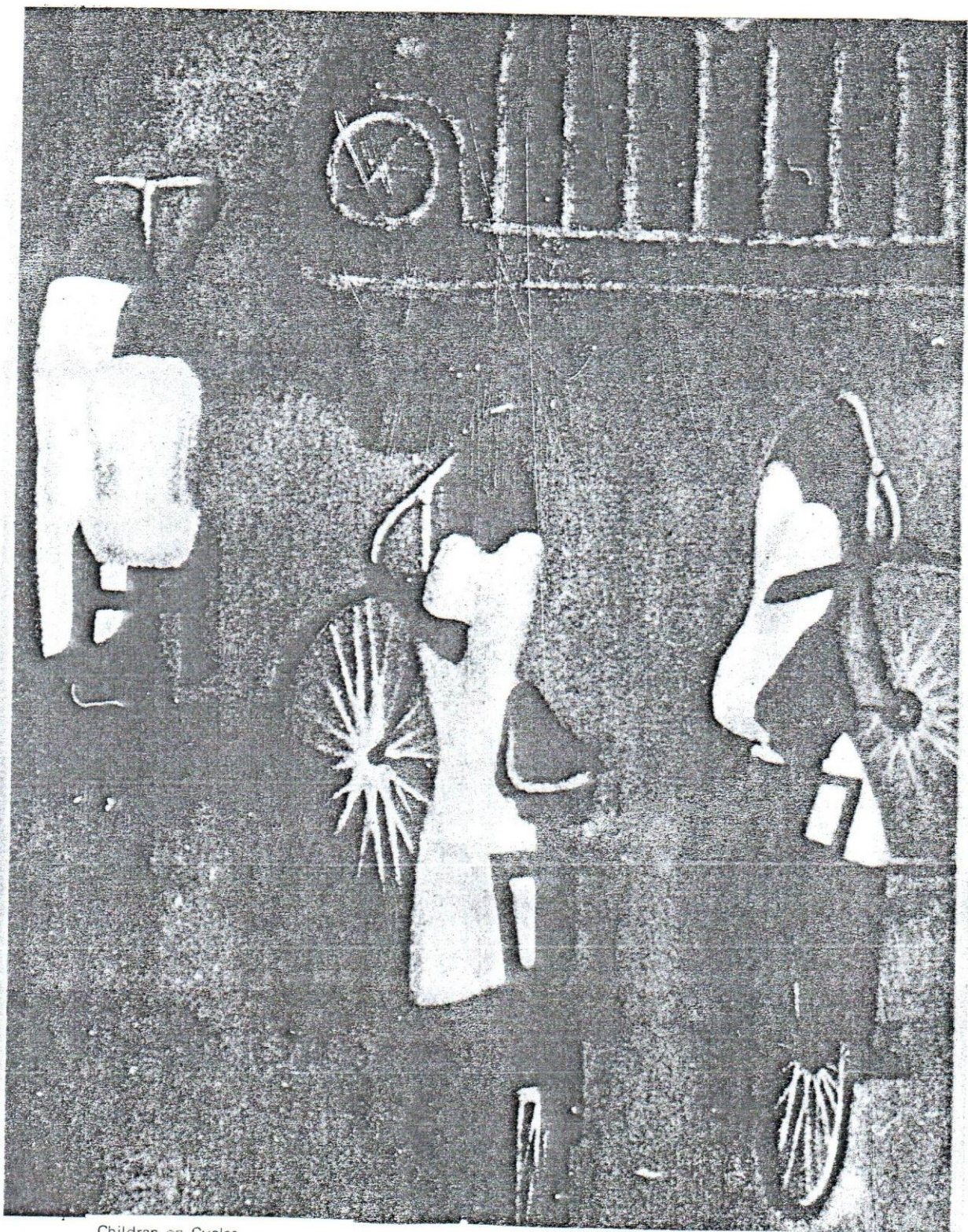
creative ingenuity with which the basic spears and throwing knives were laced to become not only more effective, but to be ruthlessly efficient. These instruments were soon to become weapons of defence when man decided to settle down to cultivation and husbandry. His decision not to depend solely on hunting down other animals was unilateral and was therefore not binding on other animals. They could hunt him down and steal his harvest of crops and domesticated animals if they could. So it happened that man had to defend his self-imposed independence through more creative ingenuity.

The problem of independence was to be confounded when man started to eat man and the foundation for human isolation was laid. Man could not trust his fellow-man for fear of being eaten up—the foregoing paragraph could be interpreted literally or as a figure of speech—looked at from all sides, the question of survival today is achieved only through self-reliance. Dependence on other people or on particular plants and animals in an exploitative world like ours is a one way ticket to the land of the dead. You exhaust the plants and animals and they become extinct. The people you depend on could become wise to your exploitation and revolt against you and your system if you are a slave-master. They will murder you in your sleep through your acquired hypertension, or through starvation when your suppliers withdraw their services and products.

It is this urge to survive that has developed products of creativity into practical instruments of effective living. Such products are usually jealously guarded properties, kept as secrets as they become weapons of survival. So, for any people to survive, they must have a store of such precious properties which are what they rely on to see them through life, not on the level of bare existence but which enable them to be counted as one of the world's civilisations.

With improved transport systems, national areas of exploitation have been extended to include other vast areas of the world. The size of these areas of influence depended on technological superiority which ensured effective trade and military strength to protect or defend their right of way.

For the technologically advanced countries who had lost their exclusive commercial control over their



Children on Cycles
(Oil on panel — Demas Nwoko)

former colonies, survival and effectiveness have become a highly competitive commodity. To keep their heads above water, basic creativity has given way to innovative creativity. With them, advanced technology has become basic with its easy availability. This competitive nature of modern technology has generated a great creative urge in the people of the first and second worlds, which is constantly fed by their instinct to survive in the face of economic strangulation and death as a civilisation. To them, innovation has become the greatest instigator of growth. Innovation is the fastest process of creativity and is therefore very effective for achieving short term advantages in culture and commerce—pop art and mode-fashion in culture and the new models in commerce.

For Africa and the Third World, the need for creativity is no less essential as it is for the first and second worlds. The threat to survival is universal as the economic fortune of the world is tied together. Intensive producers need voracious consumer economies to keep up production. The survival issue is even more complicated with us in the Third World. We are in a world that we seem to have lost all control of. We live with products of the highest technological creation without a control of modern basic technology. So our problem is not that of competition but of fundamental understanding of the immediate world around us and developing an ability to survive effectively in it. If we fail, we will also die, killed by ignorance, but with such understanding, we will be able to maintain our technological acquisitions and use all our creative instinct to develop them into major technological gains.

The process to such an achievement calls for exceptional ability to adapt our acquisitions effectively for our true needs. During colonial times when the wealth of the nation was exported to build up European capitals and industries, earnings were meagre and our purchasing power very modest. Motorised means of transport were few, so the bicycle was the fastest means of transport in the family. It was put to the maximum use as both adult and children rode on the same bicycle. The adults rode on the leather seat provided, the adolescents rode on the steel frame or on the carrier mounted over the back

wheel and the children who were often under ten years old monkeyed on the same bicycle, riding under the frame. By this process of adaptation, the maximum use was made of the only fast means of transport in the family.

Those were intensive creative days when we made our own toys like guns, pedal cars big enough to ride in, and play-huts. Material resources were very limited but we lived completely fulfilled lives, not feeling deprived because we provided all we needed ourselves.

Since independence when we touched our material wealth, we have been sharing it out and, putting nothing back. With money in our pockets, we started seeing our improvisations as the poor man's effort, not befitting our independent dignity. We started to buy the real things from abroad, for show. Our children played with imported toys which we knew nothing about. So when they disintegrated within twenty-four hours of purchase, as they invariably did, neither us parents nor the children could do anything about putting them together again, so we shopped for new ones.

We eliminated creative play from the growth process of our children and thus killed the vital ingredient in the development of self-reliance. Today everything has to be shopped for and this shopping list includes vital manpower. In technologically advanced countries, the greatest emphasis is placed on creativity during the formative years of young people. Childhood days are spent entirely on creative plays. For the youth in schools and colleges, education is not seen as mere employment tickets but as a preparation for their contribution to the sustenance and enrichment of the cultural life of their society. They are visibly groomed to advance the technology they inherited. Emphasis is therefore deliberately placed on creative experiments and innovations. Inventiveness was encouraged with the award of merits and material rewards. To achieve these laurels, young people acquired the habit of invention by making things. Often they made anything and found use for them later. This process has set the pattern for most technological and industrial inventions.

For the adults, creativity led to instant recognition and fame. A man's right to material benefit from his inventions was protected by copyright and patent

laws which gave him first options to manufacture and place them on the market for a number of years. This hastened the development of inventions from mere playful creative exercises into economic, useful objects of cultural and environmental refinement, and an improved standard of living.

Most inventions that launched the present world civilisation were products of creativity for its own sake. The exercise of an enquiring mind that probes into nature and tries to match it. The aeroplane was the contraption man made to fly like birds. The motor car was man's attempt to create a horse power that was more amenable to total control with hopefully, an indefinite life, and thus superior to the animal horse.

Even when inventions were the direct products of sponsored research, results came from creative minds that were not afraid to try new ways of doing old things. Such minds are indispensable for the effective organisation of society. Any society which is assured of such a source of solutions to national problems and needs is self-reliant. By the same token, any nation which imports solutions to her problems and needs is a dependent nation and its people therefore a slave people.

The call for self-reliance is not new to us and we know that we have to be self-reliant or we face certain economic and cultural death. The fact that does not seem to be so clear to us is that the root of self-reliance is creativity. **There is no institution in Nigeria where creativity is extolled and rewarded.** This statement is categorical. Not in the civil service, not even in the Art institutions and finally, not in any of the professions of Medicine, Engineering, Architecture, Environmental Designs and Fine Arts. In industry, which depends on the manufacture of products of creativity, all designs are imported and local designs are strictly taboo, if available.

If this state of affairs should persist, we cannot achieve self-reliance. To achieve our desired development we need to re-orientate our attitude to the creative experience which is found in adaptability for survival, invention for independent sustenance and innovation from growth.

The process of creativity is often pleasant and the exercise is definitely most satisfying. The pace could

be very leisurely as results do not have to be immediately practical and useful. But as I pointed out earlier, most amusing and bizarre creations of yesterday become the most practical and useful inventions of today. Nothing created is a waste as we cannot predict that which will become useful in future. Moreover, creative activities which develop permanent creative minds is an asset to any society. The creative mind will always volunteer new and bold solutions to problems. Any such solution, even when they seem far-fetched in the context of the moment, is a positive step out of any impasse. Creative solutions are original products of the subconscious intuition which is rooted in culture and therefore more valid in the context of a people. The availability of such solutions will make for the effective control of the people's destiny.

It is my strongly held opinion that we will not make much progress towards true independence and self-reliance if we do not recognise creativity as the foundation of all sustained growth. Creativity here means the creation and re-creation of anything. The activity that demonstrates the will to improve on everything that has been done before which implies a rejection of stagnation.

We should carry away with us, a *'New Culture'* slogan which says—**For our survival, create something today, anything!**

If your inventions look like the product of eccentric dreams today, take heart for it might turn out to be our life-line of tomorrow.

D. N.