



Multiplicity of visuality as an evolving culture in twenty-first century Nigeria

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Abstract

This study is a multi-disciplinary study that cuts across various endeavours of life but has underlying unifying factor which is visuality and that is a state of being visual or visible. Nigerian visual culture is very visible but not really documented and that is why this study attempts to add to the scarce body of knowledge. Nigeria has experienced increased visuality in terms of evolving culture in the various cities within it. It is not only the additional visual windows that are introduced within the past ten years but also, some of the existing windows have been enlarged and enhanced. It is this evolving visuality that this study sets out to investigate, utilizing basically qualitative mode in research design, employing analytical narrative approach. These various visual windows include city sculptures, architecture, civil engineering, fashion statements, digital graphics, television and media arts, computer/ cyber arts and the telephones. It is indeed an era of multiple seeing culture. A critical analysis of these visual windows, the sites in Nigeria and the impact on the Nigerian culture cumulates to add value to the limited body of knowledge in visual culture in Nigeria.

Keywords: visuality, multiplicity, seeing, culture, Nigeria

Introduction

Visuality is a word from visual, which emanates from vision, meaning the quality or state of being visual or visible, things you can see. It became a political slogan in 2016 in Rivers State in Nigeria, captured in the expression 'Vote for change that you can see' which capitalised on the visible infrastructure on ground that the people can see. The power of vision and the sensibility attached to objects and its impact on the culture therein is the focus of this article. Jeffrey, Hegarty, Kelly, Penman (2011)^[7] opined that we are now in the middle of a second Gutenberg shift - from book fluency to screen fluency, from literacy to visuality. There is a cultural turn right from the mediaeval period to this twenty-first century of the culture of reading of manuscripts to the era of multiplying visuals. This same turn is moving away from Art History to a new field of study that is emerging in this twenty-first century that acknowledges the centrality of images in understanding of visual culture. Katrin Schulze (2008)^[18] in her studies on contemporary visual culture in Northern Nigerian looked at ways of approaching the study with Islamic cultural undertone. Portugal and Rocha (2010)^[4] delve in aestheization of violence and contemporary cinema, while Fen Lin and Mike Yao are concerned with information and cognitive processes in Art appreciation. Marlon Calza (2010)^[9] is concerned with printed T shirts as visual imagery. Cataloguing and appreciation of twenty years of visual studies in communication as developed by Lobinger and Grittmann (2010)^[8] all add to the body of knowledge in Visual culture.

A new spirit of synthesis of multidisciplinary studies that tries to tear down barriers of existing spheres of study is what le Corbusier foresaw and said in 1920 that a new spirit of construction and synthesis was in the air (Stanislaus, 2009)^[19]. More so, in this twenty-first century era where the grey areas of knowledge are melting into one another. This synthesised culture of seeing or visuality cuts across city sculptures as three-dimensional images that define the cities as landmarks.

The city environment is dotted by architectural pieces that give a definitive character to a town, be it urban or rural, developed, developing or underdeveloped. The network of motorways, highways, railways and ordinary roads, spice the engineering visuals of a city. The pulse of creativity of a people within a city can be felt from the fashion statement by its dwellers.

According to Dikovitskaya (2006)^[3] the study of visual culture has emerged as a growing important interdisciplinary sphere of knowledge that places images as central in understanding the meaning of the world, without undermining Art History and this is suitably captured in the adage that 'seeing is believing' which aptly underpins the study of Visual Culture. Visual culture explores a history of vision, visuality, and the screen since the 19th century (Gillian, 2007)^[5]. It investigates how machines, life, and knowledge are historically reformulated and organised in relationship to new media practices. It cuts across avant-garde art practices, scientific experiments, and factory floors, familiarising the audience to methods and ideas in the history of representation, science, media, and the body.

Visuality and the emerging visual culture within Nigeria and multiplication of new visual windows have affected the historical landscape of visual culture in Nigeria. This article investigates visuality in Nigeria using the historic yardstick of pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial. Similar study has been done by McBee (2014)^[14] that looked into the medieval manuscripts and illustration mirroring the culture through the images around the manuscripts. It is a task to decipher the meaning of the various icons within the manuscript and to read meaning of such images with the context of the underlining and exposing the Christian and Jewish medieval culture. Some of the visuals presented within the text of the medieval manuscripts are: Pharaoh at the Nile; Hispano-moresque Haggadah (1300), and Miriam at the sea. The main issue in visuality obviously depends on looking and seeing, 'the eyes have it'.

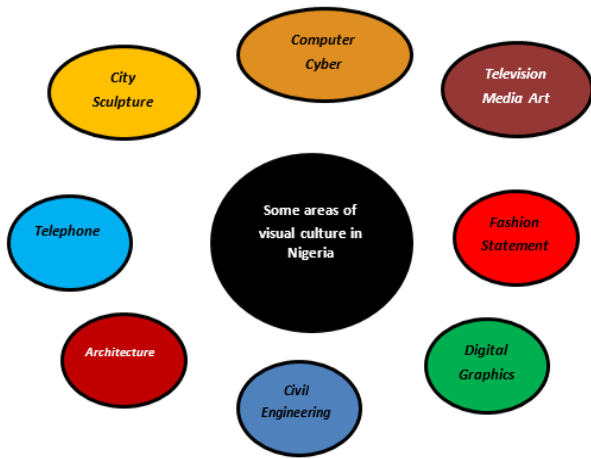


Fig 1: Areas of Visual Culture in Nigeria, Courtesy: Antonia Okogwu

City sculptures in Nigeria

A city sculpture is a three-dimensional work of art that is strategically placed in roundabout or otherwise to make statements in the city centre just as in the case of Statue of Liberty found in New York City. In Nigeria there were many sculptures as far back in history, the Nok Sculptures in 500 BC, including the monoliths in Calabar axis in Nigeria, the bronze reliefs in Benin, and the Ife realistic sculptures. The shrines also have some sculptures that are not really exposed to the public. The Northern part of Nigeria that is associated with Islam is actually having issues with three-dimensional naturalistic Sculptures.



Fig 2: Herbert Macaulay Tolu Filani, Fibre glass, 480cm, 1934.

Dignified naturalistic sculptures of commemoration like that of Herbert Macaulay in Lagos (See Figure 2, or the tradition based sculpture of Shango by Ben Enwonwu that celebrates the Yoruba god of thunder in Nigeria Electricity Power Authority (NEPA) building in Lagos (See Figure 2), the face of Lagos; and *Welcome to Lagos* by Bodun Sodeinde (See Figure 3). Some sculptures are built to warn against vices including abortion by teenage girls as in the ‘Stop Abortion’ a sculpture work placed in triangular public space in Asaba, the capital of Delta State (See Figure 5).



Fig 3: Shango, by Ben Enwonwu, NEPA Building, Marina Lagos.



Fig 4: Welcome to Lagos, Bodun Shodeinde, Fibre glass, 12ft, 1991. Courtesy: welcome to Lagos/<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>

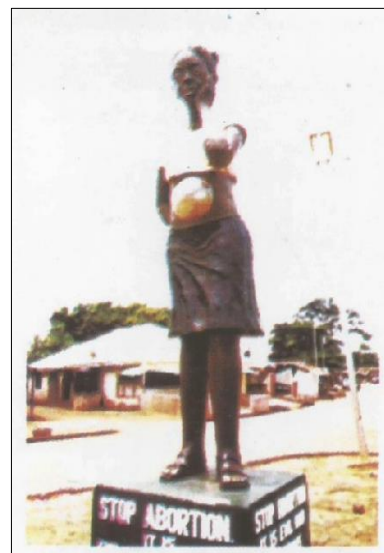


Fig 5: Stop Abortion, Emekus, Cement and Perspex (nd) Courtesy: Antonia Okogwu, 2015.

Architecture in Nigeria: The old and the new

The story of Architecture in Nigeria could be seen from three basic historic stages of development; the precolonial, the colonial and the modern/postmodern. Before the entrance of western world into Nigeria and Africa as a whole, architectural scenery was of simple huts, mud and thatches,

just tailored to the basic need of shelter using the available natural resources. These types of ethnic shelters are seen in Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture (MOTINA) in Jos. The outside world infiltrated Nigeria and impacted on the face of her shelter. Western architecture and Islamic archetype influenced Architecture in Nigeria of which Prucnal-Ogunsote (2001) [15] tried to trace the various trends of Architecture in Nigerian as illustrated in the diagram below:

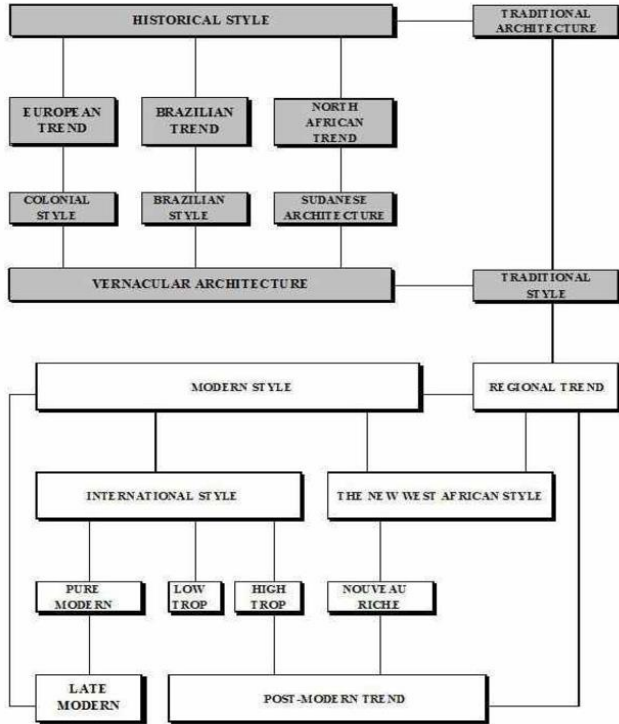


Fig 6: Architecture evolution in Nigeria, Prucnal –Ogunsote, 2001, Courtesy: <https://www.researchgate.net/figure>.



Fig 7: Ado Bayero Mall, Courtesy: www.adobayeromall.com



Fig 8: Projecting Future Architecture in Nigeria, Courtesy: www.nairaland.com

Civil engineering as visual structures in Nigerian environment

Nigeria is a developing country with a lot of construction works going on. The Institute of Civil Engineers is an

overseeing body and it declares that the profession is guided by the application of Mathematics and Physics in designing projects of roads, canals, dams, bridges and high-rise structures. These visible structures that are seen dotting the various cities in Nigeria, impact positively to the metropolitan nature of the Nigerian environment. The structures in Nigeria have enjoyed boost within the past ten years as part of the dividends of uninterrupted democracy. New roads are built and old ones are maintained and many high rise buildings are springing up and all these make up the visuality of Nigeria. The value of the total network of roads was 193, 200 km in 2004 and reached the maximum value of 194,394 km in 2014. In Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Tuesday live with Cyril Stober (NTA 27, May, 2014), revealed through the interview with the former Nigerian Minister of Works, Ononomeme that the Nigerian Federal roads were 5000km as far back as 2011. It has risen to 250000km presently. This points to the enhancement of visuality in Nigeria. Contracts for the construction of two more bridges have been awarded; second Niger Bridge from Asaba to Atuma, and the fourth Mainland Bridge in Lagos all added to the visuality of Nigerian cities. Apart from roads and bridges, railways that had witnessed dearth in Nigeria have been revamped by the past administration of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2015. Images of dams are also part of the engineering visuals in Nigeria. Some of the dams are Bakori Dam, Kafin Zaki Dam, Tiga Dam, Gusau Challawa Gorge Dam, Kainji Dam and Jebba Hydroelectric Power Station. Enhanced visuality is not only found in civil engineering but also in other areas including Fashions that is flamboyant in Nigeria,

Tracing the origin of fashion and fashion statements in Nigeria

Fashion is aesthetic application of design elements into clothing; make up, footwear, hand bags, jewellerys, body tattoos, hair, accessories and general composure of the body. Charles Frederick Worth is said to be the first to revolutionize dressmaking into an art and he achieved this feat in 1826 with his house of Worth and Bobergh and later after the Franco-Prussian War: his partner dropped while he continued with his sons in house of Worth Rennolds, Milbank, Caroline (1985) [17]. Coming back home in Nigeria Awodikpe (2016) [2] looked at the evolution of fashion in Nigeria from 1960 and the European influence and British fashions precisely. The Mary Quaint mini skirts and dresses, platform shoes stiletto heels, boot legged pants afro hairs rocked the world. In the following decade *oleku* fashion trend of baggy-sleeved *buba* over mini *iro*. The cyclic nature of fashions brought in the mazes in the Nigeria in the eighties. In the nighties some influxes from United States of America were visible in Nigerian fashions before an introspecting evolved, birthing an era of Nigerian afro-centric contemporary fashions. There are different types of fashion styles, Boho, Feminine, School, Sporty, Statement, Festival, Ethnic, etc. but for the purpose of this study that is Nigerian based, the ethnic fashions, the Western fashions and the Arabic Islamic fashions and the return to African fashions with western couture is highlighted. The typical Afro-Nigeria fashion came in from some efforts of Foulorunsho Alakija and the Fashion Designers Association of Nigeria (FADAN) project. Some First Ladies also contributed towards the growth of Nigerian Fashions, like the late First Lady Miriam Babangida who should have had a house of Miriam just as the house of

Worth. Nigeria is a fashion conscious country right from the village festivals to the offices in the cities.

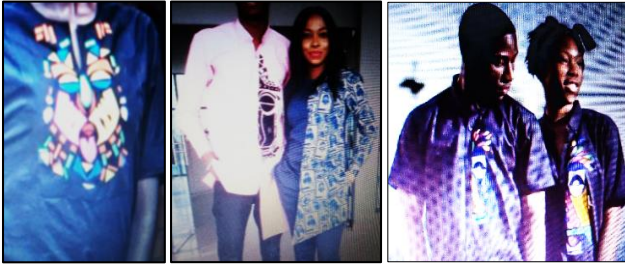


Fig 9: Contemporary African Fashions, Amechi Godwin, Fabrics, 2016, Courtesy: Godwin Amechi 2016.



Fig 10: African Hooded Long Gown, Expressions, large size. Courtesy: Antonia Okogwu, 2018.

Digital graphics as propagating tool for visuality in Nigeria

Digital graphics as against manual graphics is a process of imaging with the aid of software and invariably cannot be done without the aid of computer. It is indeed a faster tool in the creation of visual images or pictures, drawings, cartoons, animations. All the icons within the computer, smart phones and the pages within the web that are seen are done with digital graphics. Digital graphics has increased the visuals within the computer, smart phones and the media. It is one singular tool of visual propagation and multiplicity that cannot be ignored in this present dispensation, not just in Nigeria but all over the world. In recognition of this, there was an upsurge in the request to study Graphics in the Art Colleges in Nigeria between the periods of 2005-2014 (Ohene Boi, 2013) [13]. The impact of visuality within Nigerian culture could be seen in election posters and billboards and the Nigeria media houses. Its impact is seen in many churches in Nigeria and on their programme leaflets and posters. It has also aided in publication of books thereby increasing knowledge in Nigeria. Another area that has felt the impact of Digital Graphics is in the arena of burials and wedding ceremonies in Nigeria. It is also used in news casting in the media houses in Nigeria.

Television and media arts: history of television in Nigeria

Nigeria is the first in the African continent to start a television service (Nwulu, Adekanbi, Oranugo, Adewale, 2010) [12]. It was precisely on the 31st October, 1959 that the Western Nigeria Television Service began transmissions in Ibadan, blazing the trail with the slogan; ‘First in Africa’. It was, indeed, the first in all of Africa. Egypt, which had been a prominent international actor well before Nigeria gained

independence, established its first television one year after Nigeria. Ghana which had gained independence in 1957 three years ahead of Nigeria did not have television until 1965.



Fig 12: Interfacing Television, Civil Engineering and Digital Graphics. Courtesy: African

Independent television

South Africa followed in 1976. One issue stands out clearly in Nigerian Television history, though, it was borne out of political propaganda, and it has expanded the horizon of communication. In other words the invention of computer has increased visual imaging and enhanced same.

Telephones and the visual culture in Nigeria

In 1886 the first telecommunication connection was established between Lagos and the colonial office in London. Then government office in Lagos was covered with telephone wire in 1893, expanded to Ilorin and Jebba (Ajayi & Salawu, 1994) [1]. The first commercial trunk telephone service between Idu and Calabar commenced in 1923. Now is the era of smartphones, and it has increased visuality through social networking platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. This in turn has increased knowledge, crime and business. Telephone with its interconnectivity nature has really positively and negatively impacted on the citizens. Some have taken to serious studies through the knowledge, from the various sites like Wikipedia; others have taken into cybercrimes like the “yahoo-yahoo” in Nigeria which is involved with internet fraud. The multi-visuals are channelled towards business. Indeed the world has become a global village. Some pessimists are only concerned with the crimes within the cyberspace in Nigeria. However one cannot just look at the crime aspect of the cyberspace to overrun the huge benefits that accrue from this technology. Apart from the crime, there are many positive benefits from the cyber world which has come with increased knowledge through the Wikipedia, Bing, e-library, the social media (Facebook, Whatsapp), which have brought connectivity and social networking and a lot of sales in the cyberspace.

Looking at visual culture beyond the shores of Nigerian, one noticed a sharp difference between Nigeria and France. In terms of cultural history, its depth and advancement of theatre amid performance right after the Franco-Prussian war, the aftershocks impacted positively on the performances. Moreover that took centre stage on the streets in Paris adding value to the visual culture, this could be likened to our numerous cultural funeral performances in Nigeria.

The visual culture in Nigeria is rich and the developmental strides in areas of Civil Engineering, Architecture (See Figure 6), Sculpture, Fashion (See Figure 7, 12), Graphics galaxy and Television and media spaces (See Figure 12) have added visual value in Nigeria. Though the bases of comparison with other advanced countries could be misleading because of the disparity in sense of value and age of a country (Hargrove & McWilliam, 2012) [6].

Conclusion

In this study, some areas of visual culture in Nigeria were engaged, such as City Sculptures, fashion Statements, Architecture, Civil Engineering, Computer/cyber, Digital Graphics, and Television/Media Art. In the area of City Sculptures more of the commemorative naturalistic works pervade the southern part of the country while the predominantly Islamic northern part arborees them. Still in architecture two major influences were traced to the Western world and the Islamic world. Again in the Fashions in Nigeria Western world and the Islamic interjected on the afro fashions in the country. In other areas too one notices the influences of both worlds in the indigenous culture.

In visual culture the centrality of images cannot be ignored. This present era is not just new cultural turn but an era that could be described as that of “visuotracy” due to multiple visual windows and increased visuality aided by many visual communication platforms presently available in all nooks and crannies in Nigeria. The younger generation are comfortable with this era the older generation are struggling to tag along but one thing is very clear though this era has come to stay and will move from one level to another. The sooner this is taken in and educational curricula in Nigeria quickly follow suit and reevaluate in cognizance of this era the present curricula in institutions would become obsolete

The walls of compartmentalization education are giving way to inter disciplinary studies and this has paved way to new vistas of knowledge. A postmodern interfacing study like this is a futuristic looking and seeing that will eventually change University education curriculum and open new areas of study in Nigeria. A situation where textile will interface with civil engineering, sculpture with anatomy, and architecture with nutrition. Visuality interfacing with areas that are visual borne, it is a new age of multiple visuals and more windows of enhanced seeing like it is said in Nigeria “the eyes have it”.

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