

ANALYSIS OF MODERN AND POSTMODERNIST TRENDS IN THE ARTS AND CULTURE OF SELECTED EDO-NORTH PEOPLE

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Abstract

An Analysis of Modern and Postmodernist Trends in the Arts and Culture of Selected Edo-North People discusses the views of several scholars who have variously defined art as comprising of methods used in transmitting knowledge from one generation to another. It discusses "modernism" as a period in which artists made paintings with any material that were available. This led to the development of other art forms such as conceptual and performance art. Thus, the definition of art expanded to include ideas, actions as well as all physical objects used in production of art objects. The article proffers that "postmodernism" is a style developed in reaction to "modernism." Even as a Western art movement, it rejected preoccupations with modernism as it prefers issues related to "technique" over "content." Consequently, this paper is a voyage into selected festivities of the Edo-North People's Arts and Culture which according to public opinion seems to be gradually fading or becoming eroded. It notes that, the Edo-North People propagate their cultural values and development through festivities; hence an analyses that focuses on selected festivities of the "Ora" and "Ogori" peoples in Owan East/Owan West and Akoko-Edo local government areas, the Oduhumo Uhonmora-Ora in Ora kingdom of Owan West Local Government Area and the "Ovia-Osese" initiation rites into womanhood in Akoko-Edo local government area of Edo State. It concludes that the Arts and Culture of the Edo-North People are an apt remainder of the Postmodernist times that we are experiencing which, Lyotard (1984) refers to as "modernist" aesthetics of the "sublime" that deals with the "un-presentable" in "presentation."

Key Words: Modernism, Postmodernist, Art, Culture, Festival, Rites, Edo-North

Introduction

Yunusa (2013), believes that "art is as old as man and it is the methods of transmitting knowledge from one generation to" another. He states that, "Art is science [because] it is logical, systematic and rational in both process and product. It is part of the organic process of human existence." He also notes that it is "the means that expresses the characteristics and attitude of the people of an age. He submits, further, that it "should be understood firstly "as heritage testifying of every man's creative spirit and thus guaranteeing its continuity (and secondly) as a "creative activity of every human being (which enriches) man and his nation".

This may be the reason why art is not static as it changes (forms) with time. Egonwa (2017) is of the opinion that, "art is thought of as something concrete to the visual and tactile senses." He adds that by its very nature, it deals with past human actions but the events so recorded tend to persist." It would, therefore, be foolhardy to expect that the art forms of today must be similar to those of yesterday (Ozara and Omokpo, 2015). In Africa, works of art were "usually created as products that cannot be separated from vital concerns of living." Such concerns "can be historical documentation of an event, set goal, sources of inspiration, covenant or product for socio-political or spirit force control (Egonwa, 2017). This is, perhaps, the reason why Ozara and Omokpo (2015) maintain that, "societies use art to visualise their cultural values for all to participate." this view is shared by Egonwa (2017) who posits that "African visual arts are often conceived as concretions capable of influencing some practical situations in addition to being a feast for the eye".

Such art is said to "influence the people's thought process. He believes, for instance that, "rites of passage (such as) preparation for motherhood and adulthood provide avenues for instruction in art and its production and use." He maintains that "age grade ceremonies in African communities are veritable art carnivals which emphasize the axiom that art adds quality to life." Even when changes are noticed to be taking place in how most rites of passages are being carried out by people who still uphold their traditional and cultural essence, irrespective of whether the processes are eroded or not, they regard them to be unchanging. We would find a good analogy of this in what Egonwa (2017) refers to as African ritual objects. He observes that, even though superficially art, may be in good physical condition...if it seen as failing in serving the non-artistic purpose for which it is created, it is destroyed or thrown away and a new one is commissioned to take it's place. In like manner, an effective piece could be replaced several

times when it is accidentally impaired or stolen. And yet, it will not be considered as being a new piece. It will be regarded as the very old piece.

Again, this may be one of the reasons which makes Egonwa (2017) submits that, “in assessing the value of artworks from any place, one must not limit oneself to those of the past, or those of the present”. Art, as an element of culture is dynamic because it is subject to the laws of change and continuity. He notes that “African art like the arts of other peoples is contagious as it can be infected by the arts of any group or race it encounters via the artist who creates them.” He maintains that, “African art is not static: it began in the past, runs through our times and forges ahead into the future. It is our duty as Africans to preserve and promote its valuable central stylistic tendencies. It is on this note that the paper brings to the reader’s attention an Analysis of Modern and Postmodernist Trends in the Arts and Culture of Selected Edo-North People.

Modernism

It would be difficult to understand “postmodernism” without firstly understanding “modernism.” While Cernuschi (2008) submits that scholars have always disagreed on the precise date that modern art began, he states that the term modernism is generally used in referring to the 20th Century art in Europe and the Americas as well as other regions that are under Western influences. He observes that it was a period that experimentations were carried out, using a wide range of artistic techniques and materials which in turn opened up several boundaries regarding what were conventionally thought to be art. The works of Grant Wood (American Gothic, 1930) and Jackson Pollock (Black and White, 1948) are good examples of works produced in this period (See Figs.1-2 below).



Fig. Artists: Grant Title: American Year: 1930, Source: Cernuschi, C. (2009). “Modern Art.”



Fig. 2, Artists: Jackson Pollock, Title: Black and White, Year: 1948, Source: Cernuschi, C. (2009). “Modern Art.”

Cernuschi, (2008) believes it is possible (whether the works are representational or abstract) to find astonishing varieties of works within the two examples of the works mentioned above. He

explains, on the one hand, that in as much as Grant Woods *American Gothic* is representational, so also is Jackson Pollock's *Black and White*. He maintains that modernism tends to have been "rebellious" because artists sought to be original in their productions which they intended should shock their audiences. In this sense, one of the important characteristics of modern art was in its attempt at making Painting and Sculpture, ends by themselves, from those early forms of art that paid attention to religious and political institutions. It has been observed that Modernism was a period in which artists made paintings with any material available. This led to the development of other art forms such as conceptual and performance art. This expanded the definition of art to include those physical objects in which works are produced or conveyed in terms of the "idea" and "action" behind such works.

Postmodernism

According to the Microsoft Encarta (2008) dictionary, "postmodernism" is "a style developed in reaction to "modernism." Lyotard (1984) notes that "postmodernism" is "another moment in modernism whereby the past is cast aside." He explains that "a work can only be modern if it is firstly considered to be "postmodern." In that sense, Uhumwagho (2008) refers to postmodernism as the Western art movement that rejects a preoccupation with modernism. Instead, it gave preference to "techniques" over "content." Citing Jegede (1999), she argues that Postmodernism in art means "a variety of things to a variety of people." She maintains that postmodernism seeks to critically mirror modernists theories in a bid to generate "new" discourses that could make others feel they are behind even though they are working at their own pace at the same time as the others. This is why, perhaps, Cernuschi (2008) states that postmodernism "rejects the notion of high art" because it references architecture, art, literature and criticism in a self-conscious way.

In yet another view, Lyotard (1984) believes that postmodernism is not modern(ism) at its end. Instead, it is nascent and constantly evolving because an existing idea is either "self-consciously" pushed further or out rightly rejected. Postmodernism embraces the creation of new phenomena in order to generate discussions. In this sense, a postmodernist creation or work is not in principle governed by pre-established rules, neither is it judged according to a determined judgment by applying familiar categories (Lyotard 1984, in Akprara, 2015). Put differently, "postmodernism" deals with rejection of certain views that tend to portray or interpret all things by some established rules, instead of the rules with which some of those things were created and which, they do not even yearn for.

Postmodernist Trends in the Arts and Culture of Selected Edo-North People

Analysis of Modern and Postmodernist Trends in the Arts and Culture of Selected Edo-North People is a "postmodernist" voyage which takes a look at some art and cultural festivities that public perceptions seem to believe are gradually being eroded. Even though festivals remain a worldwide affair, they are common in Africa because they are tied to the beliefs and traditions of the people. Just as festivities are carried out through drumming and performances once in a year, the Edo-north people propagate their cultural values and development through festivities. For instance, a variety of cultural festivities are part of the ways of life of the "Ora" and "Ogori" peoples in Owan East/Owan West and Akoko-Edo local government areas that live in the Northern part of Edo State. *Oduhumo* is one of the festivals celebrated in Uhonmora-Ora in Ora kingdom of Owan West Local Government Area.

The Uhonmora people of Ora, who celebrate this festival, believe in one supreme-being that they refer to as "Osellebua" who they worship through several gods and goddesses in the form of deities. Some of them are "ikute", the guardian of farm products and "imoikhin" the patron of the farmers and so on. They propitiate these gods through festivities in celebrating successful ending of the year as well as signaling bumper harvest of yams. The festivals attract large followership as the people stop whatever they are doing to either be witnesses or participants. While various "new" modes of celebrating the festivals have gradually developed due to modernity brought about by Western influences, the intent of the festival which is to propitiate the gods as well as serve as rallying point for the continued unity of the people has remained unchanged (Orumen, 2010).

Another instance is the pre-Colonial times where various stages of initiation rites into womanhood (Ovia-Osese) festival were very clear in the current Akoko-Edo local government

area of Edo State. However, Post-modernist tendencies occasioned by modernism have continued to bring changes that have affected various aspects of the festival. For example, "chastity" is no longer seen to be sacrosanct for the young girls. This has made it possible for girls who have been defiled to be initiated. Again, one of the postmodernist twists that have overwhelmed the festival is that, girls to be initiated are categorised into three. The first category comprises of young girls who upheld the traditional value by remaining virgins before and after the festival until they formally get married. The second are virgins whose virginity were voluntarily or involuntarily terminated during or after the festival before their marriages held. The last is those who lost their virginity before the festival and who ought not to have participated because they did not uphold the traditions of remaining chaste (Ikubaje, 2013).

During the festivities, the virgin girls who are in the stage of procreation are taught how to cook, learn the practice home making by cleaning their surroundings and making sure that her husband and children's dirty linens are washed. All these activities are to ensure that the girls become responsible wives and mothers to their husbands, children, family and community (Ikubaje, 2013). These modernist activities have taken a postmodernist twist because with advancements in information and technology, such virtues are currently passed on with a variety of retrievable communication gadgets.

Again, the true nature of the festival has been eroded when people encountered Christianity and its Western predisposition. For instance, the church condemned its members who got involved in such festivals because it was seen as paganism. It also condemned the killing of young girls who were found to have lost their virginity. The act of consulting the oracle before the commencement of the festival was also condemned. These various attacks by the churches affected the existence of the festivals. Nevertheless, the shocking aspect of these "modernist" concerns is the "postmodernist" angle which time brought about because the church began supporting the festival when it realised that what they were preaching (chastity) are the same with the values of the festivals (Ikubaje, 2013).

Whereas, festivals are age long events that are practiced by every society, those in the northern part of Edo State as we have mentioned have witnessed lots of changes. This can be attributed to modern practices occasioned by the advent of Islam and Christianity which have contributed greatly to the erosion of the "true spirits" behind the various art forms of the people of Edo-north. Currently, their festivals and other cultural activities such as celebrations in music, dance, sculpture, body/wall decorations, initiation ceremonies have been affected by "postmodernism." Even when Islam and Christian condemned the festivities to be fetish, they neither commerce nor end without the citizens calling prayers or holding thanksgiving services in mosques and churches (Ikubaje, 2013).

Conclusion

If we agree with Lyotard in Kleiner (2011) that postmodernism is nascent and constant, then, the changes in the Edo-north people's art forms fall within these postmodernist claims. This is why the art and culture of the Edo-north people have in time immemorial been the means used in internalising and visualising their tangible and intangible material culture during such festivities. In spite of this, the art and culture of the Edo-north people are a remainder of the postmodernist times we are experiencing that, Lyotard (1984) in Kleiner (2011) refers to as "modernist" aesthetics of the "sublime" that deals with the "un-presentable" in "presentation." It denies itself the solace of good forms or consensus of good taste that makes it possible to share collective nostalgia for the unattainable as it searches for new presentations, not in order for it to be enjoyed but to impart a stronger sense of "un-presentation" in "presentation" (Lyotard, 1984 in Kleiner, 2011). As earlier observed, Modern art is set aside from other forms of art that convey "ideas" behind any powerful religious or political institution. The reason is that it is seen as an art form which is rebellious against the art traditions that existed before it. Conversely, postmodernism took these ideas further as a "self-conscious" style by rejecting anything "higher" art in order to create new phenomena towards generating newer discourses.

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