

THE IMPACT OF THE FICTITIOUS, THE FANTASTIC AND THE IMAGINATIVE IN CREATIVE PRACTICE

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Abstract

The paper discusses meanings and methodologies of unreal, fiction, fantasy and the imaginative that fuel visual practice in contemporary Nigerian art. It underlines truths and value of illusions conjured or constructed. The unreal here expresses legitimate navigations of conscious reality through that which is imaginable. The unreal is engaged as a cross cultural element in global creative practice though western concepts and movements have been popularised through influence on education. This paper examines how artist's access orders of inclusions, exclusions and conjuring that affect audience's perception, process and imbibe ideas outside the norm. The paper also highlights analogies of artists that employ various approaches through the unreal or other strategies that embrace the fabulous, storytelling, para-fiction, or the counterfactual to explore individual creative dialogues through more conventional methods, narratives, or archives.

Keywords: Impact, Fiction, Fantasy, Creative Practice, Imagination

Introduction

Fiction, fantasy and imagination are synonymous with the inference of untruth or the unreal. This does not necessarily devalue the credence of their purpose and impact particularly in the navigation and assimilation of creativity. The unreal as such has a phenomenological quality that is experienced outside of a present tangibility (Argiro et al, 2011). It hangs in memory illusions which are a core of the inventiveness of the mind to imagine. This is navigated by reason. All areas of the unreal are illusory archives that impact artistic production and the discourse it generates. An active imagination could be interpreted as a cognitive resource employed for comprehension of our lives. This is what generates fiction which is an invention of a testimony that presents plausibility despite the projection of another truth. It is a form of make believe that garners new thought for the creator and his audience. Other forms of the unreal that implicitly impact creativity would be dream. They serve both creative ability and problem solving abilities and expose both the audience and creator to worlds beyond our knowing through creative practice.

Objectives of the discourse are to highlight the unreal as a cross cultural element in global creative practice though western concepts and movements have been popularised through influence on education. Also to highlight that these western ideologies are used to navigate other non-western ideologies though they do not necessarily correlate with them. To examine how artists access orders of inclusions, exclusions and conjuring that affect audience perception, process and imbibe ideas outside the norm. To also highlight artists' work that employ various approaches through the unreal or other strategies that embrace the fabulous, storytelling, para-fiction, or the counterfactual to explore individual creative dialogues through more conventional methods, narratives, or archives. It explores how audiences relate to concepts of the

unreal in creative practice and highlights the cognitive impact of this on the audience as individuals or a collective.

The Development of Fiction, Fantastic and Imagination in Practice

In practice, the development of new concepts and ideas transcends the physical object and the impact of the creative work is harnessed through the perceptions of the audience. In this way the work and its source are tied to the audience and their thoughts. The space of thought that houses memory and imagination is what justifies the unreal in this context. These postulations in approaching art bring to the fore the possible instability of the rationale used as an anchor for what is determined as real and perceptions of it which in turn affects actions or reactions. This is shaken by references to science in itself. Einstein's theory of relativity rattled science that had been depended upon for years¹, in that it challenged accepted reality of the previous ideas of Isaac Newton as many other researchers continue to feed the world of plausibility that the fantastic, illusionary, imaginative, fictitious bear on the mind of an audience, relativism in a philosophical context lends credence to what may be generally determined as unreal. This is because it challenges accepted norms.

The primacy of the enquiry given to the ideas of the unreal and its associations is posited in the sources of conceptualisation for creative development. Whatever the information garnered for dissemination or communication in the creative work, its source still stems from conscious or unconscious apprehension or absorption from external influences. They could be hallucinogenic, the common subconscious expository encounters, transcendence or the spiritual amongst others types of seeing like the non-visual which is akin to day dreaming. In this seeing is a subconscious effort. Glausiusz (2014) proffers that daydreaming could serve an evolutionary purpose aiding creativity as we replay variants of the millions of events we store in our brain. She further expounds that the consciousness of this and an ability to control it to some extent present even higher variables of creativity. This is done through stock taking of the experience, narrations and an ability to distinguish between beneficial and pathological imaginings.

The dream state in itself also may be assessed from another angle which is psychologically rewarding. In this, fantasy is associated with dream and highlighted for its positive attributes.

¹ Einstein's theory of relativity transformed theoretical physics and astronomy by superseding Sir Isaac Newton's previous 200-year-old theory of mechanics. His idea introduced concepts space and time as a unified entity. His focuses were on space and time, relativity of simultaneity, kinematic and gravitational time dilation, and length contraction. His theory of relativity improved the science of elementary particles and their fundamental interactions in physics. It was also the beginning of the nuclear age. With his theory cosmology and astrophysics predicted extraordinary astronomical phenomena such as neutron stars, black holes, and gravitational waves that were previously not existent.

Hartmann (2000) suggests that a possible function of dream is weaving new material into the memory system in a way that both reduces emotional arousal and is adaptive in helping us cope. We imagine what we have subconsciously absorbed in the attics of our mind then work it through creative output. It is a circle that derives and gives to itself. These ideas all relate to Freud's theories of the subconscious and dream which are found in his theory of the Unconscious Mind² and his Analysis of Dream³. These ideas heavily impacted the ideas of the surrealist movement made popular by western influences in art history and academics. Kleiner & Mamiya (2005) in their distorted, condensed and many a time displaces visuals. They however are not exclusive to these ideologies in that there are several ideological influences by other cultures which engage indigenous theories in the approach to creative production. Examples of influences by non-European cultures to mention a few are the art of Creole influence. This is seen in the perspectives of the imaginative works of Jean-Michel Basquiat who had an influence of Creole Parents that played a major role in the development of his creative practice as a youth. His untitled piece (1981) (see figure 1) displays qualities of the surreal and psychoanalytic references but has its roots in the influence of his early Creole orientation.

² In Freud's theory of the unconscious mind he divides the mind into the conscious mind which is the ego and the unconscious mind which he further categorises into the id which are instincts and drive and the superego which functions as the conscience. In the context of this theory, the unconscious refers to the mental processes that people are unaware of. In his idea Freud proposed an overlapping of consciousness where the conscious, the preconscious, and the unconscious mind are super imposed by one another. He asserted that significant psychic events take place beneath the unconscious mind. Here hidden messages from the unconscious tend to have both symbolic and actual significance. The unconscious mind is viewed as a storage for unacceptable ideas, wishes or desires, traumatic memories, and painful emotions put out of mind by psychological repression though not a space for only negative expressions. The unconscious here is not directly accessible for ordinary introspection, but it can be sourced by methods such as meditation and free association for creative use (Geraskov, 1994).

³ In Freud's theory of the analysis of dreams, the subconscious activity of dream is prompted by thoughts and occurrences of daily life. In this theory Freud proffers dream activity as Primary and secondary processes that attend to unconscious thought and repressed childhood sexual scenarios first then wish fulfilments governed by the guidelines of language and reality (Freud, 2004). The activity is described as the dream work, it functions to preserve sleep by disguising the repressed content of the dream in an interplay of displaced, condensed and distorted words and images. These are the manifested content of the dream which get recounted as the dream narrative. Freud proposed that the interpretation dreams could provide valuable insights into the formation of neurotic symptoms and help deal with negative pathological situations (Gay, 2006).



Figure 1: Title: Untitled. Acrylic and Mixed media on canvas, Artist: Basquiat (1981)

Another example is the ever expansive world of Asian and other Oriental art which traditionally are devoid of western concepts yet present fantastic and imaginative tendencies. This is such with the Bali art which is influenced by Asian cultures which include Indian, Hindu, Japanese, Chinese, Buddhist, working in groups or anonymously under the patronage of the priests and ruling classes, decorating palaces and temples with heavy aesthetic and religious guidelines such as seen in figure 2.

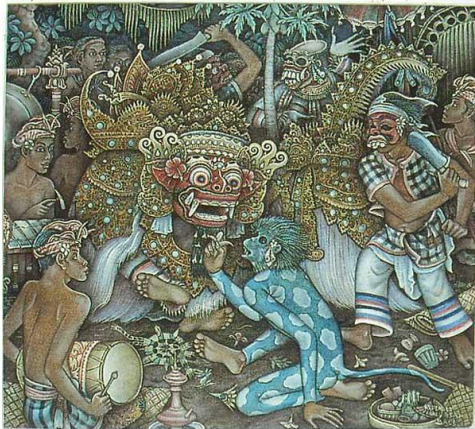


Figure 2: Title: Unknown (Traditional Balinese painting). Artists: Unknown (1970s)

African art is not left out of the examples though they are too numerous to attend. African art is also very expansive in influences as there are several ideological philosophies that span and influence through the cultures on the continent. Prominent Nigerian artist, Twins Seven Seven referred to the ideas of dream as an element in his practice, however his approach and apprehension of it was heavily influenced by Yoruba philosophy which in many ways is parallel and alien to western concepts of the dream state.



Figure 3: Title: Sea Ghosts 3, Ink on plywood. Artist: Twins Seven-Seven (1968)

These different ideologies at many times however display similar characteristics of the fantastic or imaginative in their appearance and impact. A plausible reference to this can be seen in the character presentation of *The Greek god Thor son of Zeus* (figure 4) and the Yoruba cultural *Legend of Sango* (figure 5). Both concepts lend themselves to a certain form of engagement of spirituality and engendering of the fantastic in the concepts and presentations of their ideas. They both represent gods in Greek and Yoruba culture who similarly wield power over lightning and thunder. They are both revered in these two cultures as warrior gods and defenders of justice. Not only that the physical depictions of them and their paraphernalia are similar. They both carry objects like a huge hammer or axe that is used as a connection point to the weather. Both their legends are accessed as both cultural history and as cultural lore. The two cultures in which have these traditional histories do not currently present any historical connection. This is the same with many other cultural philosophies that have similar ideologies of either a character or a norm that is accepted within societies. This is common in ideas of gods and goddesses of different phenomena such as love, fertility, death and the like.



Figure 4: Title: Unknown (Poster depiction of Greek god Thor). Artist: Unknown



Figure 5: Title: Unknown (Poster depiction of Yoruba god Sango). Artist: Unknown

The influence of documented western ideologies of philosophy is unavoidable in that they have become the global context of interrelation. Also popularly it is these ideologies of western cultural influence that is used to navigate ideologies of other cultures. It is the norm that the image or creative production be viewed through postulations relating to Plato's reasoning of the impact of the image, in his recognition of the formative potential and power of art (Oliveira & Abreu, 2015). Plato advised that art be taught to all in all forms but only to reflect the good to the youth because its power to influence how people think is much too strong. According to O'Gorman (2005), Aristotle views the 'outward show' (Phantasia) and its intended effect on an audience in relation to their psyche as a presentation process. Also, Chiaradonna & Rashed (2010) discuss Plotinus' ideas of reflexivity which indicates that audience look inward upon being confronted with an image or creative piece and generate ability to navigate or mediate the imaginative from the encounter.

These ideas are passed on in the 'accepted' contexts of reference to ideologies through academic orientation. This is navigated employing indigenous ideologies by positing their concepts alongside western theories. As such concepts of spirituality are engaged like the ideas of Hegel and the embrace of freedom, Hobbes ideas of mental displacement are approached in the fantastic and how tangible and intangible spaces create new meaning. Kant's thoughts on transcendentalism are explored as a meeting ground of which more is plausible, the more that is searched, the more that is found. This is related to alongside individual creative and cultural propensity alongside a wider pool of philosophical ideologies that may be encountered for creative development.

Relations of an Audience to Concepts of the Unreal in Creative Practice

Contexts of phenomenology and existentialism of the fantastic and imaginative in creative production present a whole field of reflexivity in engaging an audience. This is considering that the basis of creative production is that of communication of an ideology, or simply put; thought sharing or postulating.

These are engineered in the engagement of phenomena like the imageless, feeling, intuition, fascination, reflection and introspection amongst a myriad of others. All of these are based on the psychological impact or appeal of the audience to these types of phenomena in the creative process or product. An example of this could be found in the impact of melding fact with fiction in the work of the Nigerian artist Victoria Udondian (2012) titled *Amafu Fabric-1878* which she informs in an interview. In this she generates work from fictitious archives that are closely related with documented history hereby blurring the lines between reality and imagination. In the interview Udondian intimated that she was once confronted by a designer Glenda Kirkiridis for creating fake history about a fabric, and keeps the documented version of the correspondence in place on her blog. An excerpt of the exchange is outlined below:

Glenda August 3, 2012 at 3:07 PM

Where did you dream up this rubbish about Amafu Fabrics?

I am the owner and originator of Amafu Fabrics and I take great exception to these fabrications!

Nomsu Buthelezi is not and was not my mother and its impossible for any Zulu woman to have been producing hand dyed and hand printed fabric in 1878! IF she was "producing fabric" in 1878, she would have been in her 90's when I was born. I can assure you my mother was NOT in her 90's when I was born and she was NOT ZULU but of Austrian origin.

From what I have seen of your photographs- none of the fabric comes from Amafu. It's either West African or ShweShwe- produced by the thousands of meters in the Da Gama mill in King Williams's town, South Africa.

Please correct the "mistakes" in your text. I suggest that you go to my website www.amafu.co.za and get the correct information.

Victoria Udondian August 3, 2012 at 5:58 PM

Hello Glenda,

Am so glad you stopped by my blog to drop your comment, I tried to reach you while in Johannesburg but all effort turned futile.

Am not surprised at your comment, I am aware that the history have got here is so not real, pardon that, The idea is to basically question history in my work but had to use your real names being the originator of Amufu fabric.

I was interested in Amufu fabric being about the only hand dyed and hand printed fabric in South Africa.

Thanks for this wonderful comment; I do hope to get some real Amufu fabric sometime soon.
Cheers

Glenda August 4, 2012 at 1:06 PM

Sorry, I dislike "made up history" and an e-mail to me would have gotten a response. Please either correct the "mistakes" or take all reference to Amafu off your blog- especially since there is no Amafu fabric in your work. At least give credit to the ShweShwe fabric - and get its origins correct.

It is apparent in the conversation that the aggrieved is not informed about the concept and context of the work thus the reaction is to be expected. This is evidenced in her references to improbable dates and her not being Zulu. Even then, the absence of apprehending the subjectivity of the history portrayed leads on to its non-acceptance. It does however highlight the impact and influence of the work in Udondian's employment and manipulation of archives in the creation of fictitious histories that reflect in other works that she has created.



**Figure 6: Title: Amafu Fabric - 1878 Installation, mixed textiles, paper, fabric paint, thread
Artist: Udondian, V. (2012)**



**Figure 7: Title: Second Hand Museum Installation, clothing, mixed textiles and wood,
Artist: Udondian, V. (2011)**

The castigation of truth and its subjectivity are high players in this conceptual process. For this, reasoning of the truth and reality are weighed in context and apprehension. This is supported by concepts of the

correspondence theory⁴ of truth in which truth is evaluated by its relation to the state or context of which it is concerned (Hanna and Harrison, 2004). These ideas may be apprehended from both philosophical and psychological standpoints, with non-dissociative patterns. These are merged through the projected influence on the audience through contact with the creative piece. As much as the concepts are paradoxically bound to the subjective reality of the individual who apprehends the creative piece, the ideas relatable to personal navigations of the audience become characteristically mutable, permeable and fluid as situated within the freedom of the imaginarily fantastic (Bachelard, 1964). This is the same from an angle of Philosophical 'presentism' in which neither the future nor the past exist and are screwed into the context of the now (Crisp, 2005). The absence of a continuum presents a whole new set of plausibility that defy commonly accepted logic. This includes the intent of the artist and the perceptions of the audience. This is exemplified in the work of Nigerian artist Odun Orimolade titled *Abinibi* (see figure 8). In this work, she posts plausibility in all ramifications in her presentation of her drawing. She employs a mixture of the different textures of the acrylics, ink, charcoal, pastel, pencil and pens to create an active dark space, not as just an empty void but a generative space. This leaves the perceptions of the space open for the audience with the erasure of structured or linear thought. The work also posits time within that space. It is not a lineal space but an actuality that she suggests in her portrayal of overlapping realities.



Figure 8: Title: Abinibi, mixed media, collage, charcoal, ink, pen, graphite. Artist: Orimolade, O. (2012)
Conclusion: A Cognitive Impact

Perplexities and obscurities encountered in the interpretations confronted by the audience with creative productions lead up to what is construed as the influence of the creative piece on an individual. These interpretations are the impact of the creative production. This impact may be activated without a visual

⁴ In the correspondence theory, truth or falsity is determined only by how it relates to the world and whether it accurately corresponds with that world that it refers to. In this way the truth is related to a state of affairs which separate thoughts from what is deemed as fact. This way truth is determined by how it relates with a particular reality. (Hanna & Harrison, 2004)

image. In that other means can be employed to conjure images in the mind, such as words, taste, touch, sound, smell and so on. Words wield their metaphorical value in interaction that activate and intimate thought processes. An example can be simply evaluated in an experiment employing a spoken or written word such as the word "red". The subconscious immediately engages cognitive processes that relate with the archives in the mind of that one individual audience. It is tailored to images in the mind relevant to that individual thus impacting audience in different ways. The generated image in thought could vary in a myriad of ramifications like red food, flowers, clothes, cars and so forth. The list could be endless as much as there is the individuality of the audience to feed their subjective truths.

Discovery and reflection audiences find new navigations of reasoning, intuition and comprehending feeling. These discoveries and reflection can enrich learning and problem solving in contemporary situations. In this view reason is not polarised from the effects of the fantastic and imaginative.

Personal extents of influence that are accrued through the appeal to the individuality of the audience is what here affects perceptions and the illusions generated. As spectators and other times participants, the audience can immerse themselves through the emotionality of the experience. These experiences evoke emotions which in turn affect the audience's reactions to non-metaphorical states. It is not necessarily a state of liminality but the audience assumes a stance between the determinable and otherwise (Hirano 2013:62). The fictitious, fantastic or imaginary here generates a space of the undefined for the audience, that is born of a cross confluence of meaning.

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