

SYNAESTHESIA ART: INTERPRETING FELA ANIKULAPO KUTI'S AFROBEAT MUSIC AS A VISUAL COMMENTARY IN PAINTING.

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Abstract:

Music-centred visual art interpretation, otherwise known as synaesthesia art, remains largely a territory rarely charted. This contemporary art practice lends credence to the interface of music and visual art as forms of interpretation connecting cognitive centres, such that the sense of hearing arouses the sense of sight. In context Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music experience and interpretation, into paintings, mirrors existential issues, exploring artistic conceptual creative style and content. The paper explores cross-modal correspondences derivative of perception, connecting music and visual art referred to as synaesthesia in art. The idea of Fela's Afrobeat music serves as a trigger for inducing conceptual creation aligns with conceptual art practice in developing an emergent creative process. A review of literature analyses antecedent music-centred explorations by Kandinsky (1866-1944), Klee (1879-1940), Albers (1888-1976), and McCracken (b-1990) among others, comparatively assessing disparate process-based styles, forms, and content. Visual art creative strategy adapts Jung's four-fold cognitive functions. Jung's cognitive function is an observation process connecting archetypes of sensation, feeling, intuition, and thinking as channels for creativity. A question contributing to objectives includes: How would Triptych forms adaptation conceptualise Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Sorrow Tears and Blood song? What potential forms can evolve from fabric colour tesserae forms interpretation of Suffering and smiling songs? How can spiral installation string tesserae forms allegory conceptualise rhythm and movement of forms in Yellow Fever song interpretation? This Paper recommends that further contemporary art exploration of disparate forms of music genre, and adaptation of Jung's cognitive function as a strategic process of creative unfoldment. Development of mobile installation art forms. The study findings contribute to knowledge of novel art forms. It promotes the idea of Music and visual art connection, Triptych form and Mobile installation string tesserae. Spiral fabric tesserae forms. Validation of Jung's four-fold cognitive function as creative strategy.

Keywords: Synaesthesia. Interpretive. Aesthetic. Triptychs. Cognitive. Conceptual. Archetype. Afrobeat. Gestalt.

Introduction

The search for newer paradigms, in extending visual art practice (Wolfman, 2013) posits Baudelaire's concept of 'Synaesthesia', a condition wherein the senses unite, act in harmony, awaken, and

lead to profound experience and interpretation, underpinning Wagner's 1848 ideal of the Gesamtkunstwerk the totality of the work of art- a critic of boundary and synthesis of the arts. Schoenberg's 1911 Munich classical music concert revitalised

Wagner's coherence uniting the arts, as proposed by Russian expressionist painter Kandinsky's colour and music correspondence (Buja, 2016).

Sourcing visual inspiration from music came into light in the late 19th century, with Kandinsky's (1866-1944), paintings centred on music. McBurney (2006) emphasises Kandinsky's music and visual art correlation. Ward (2006) posits synaesthesia as a cognitive experience unifying the musical with the visual. The term derives from combining two Greek words, together (syn) and sensation (aesthesia). Kandinsky's music-centred visual art expressions inspired contemporary explorations in music-induced pure abstraction, including Paul Klee (1879-1940), Josef Alber (1888-1976), and classical music interpretation in the first quarter of the 20th century. Mid-20th century, American Artist Jackson Pollock's (1912-1956) "action painting," showcased visual art forms largely influenced by the

modern jazz music of Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's, jazz tunes. Similarly, Marcia Smilack, Carol Steen, and Marina Whitemann's exploration of cognitive experience and interpretation of music-inspired visual art forms invoke feelings interpreted in colour. Thus, developing a creative style and elaborating ideas brings quality to their works of art. By inference, the evolutionary creative catharsis integrating music and visual art creation according to Cleland, (2017) is essentially grounded in perceptions from 'lived experiences' connecting subjective processes to unbounded creative capacitation.

This paper heralds the exploration of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music legacy, as a source of transformation, and the creation of visual allegories. The use of conceptual art style and synaesthesia in processing and conversion of Fela's narratives visually into paintings. Painting in context, as visual rhetoric, is a cognitive

medium for responding to issues in a given society. This is often done with the idea of implementing or promoting change by informing the general populace about a given problem and appealing to the collective social sense of justice. Therefore, social commentary according to Salib, (2015) assumes alternative methods of presentations, ranging from types of communication, including printed forms, conversations, computerised communication, and visual art forms. Banksy (b-1974), a notable visual artist and political activist known among others for producing street art, specifically visual murals that raise awareness of social issues, as social commentary, spotlighting human rights deprivation including themes on Slavery, loss of childhood and the devastating effects of war, exemplified in his works including *Stop and search*, 2007 (Hepner, 2021).

Fela and Afrobeat Music

Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat at most is a revolutionary and philosophical ideological music promoting social awareness through interactive dialogues and diatribes on institutional stereotypes. An adaptation of Fela's Legendary "Purple period" music legacy creations that focuses on the 1974-77 category of songs considered by Bodunrin, (2019) as charged with politicised lyrics and awakening rhythmic compositions. Fela Anikulapo Kuti (1938-1997), an iconic Legendary Multi-instrumental Nigerian songwriter /Musician, pioneered a unique music style called Afrobeat, addressing the exigent revolution of consciousness. Euba (1989) describes Afrobeat as a unique genre defined by the fusion of indigenous and foreign elements, a distinctive, eclectic genre style, combining Jazz, Salsa, Calypso, Funk, traditional Nigeria pidgin and Yoruba chants. (Dougan, 2021) posits Afrobeat music as combining blazing horn sections, drums, and antiphonal

operatic vocals. Afrobeat's hallmark identity is characterised by emancipative lyrics and rhythmic compositions advocating for conscious liberation from oppression, using rhetorical lyrics in musical compositions of protest narratives. Gillette (2002) describes Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat as one of the best music genres evolving from the continent of Africa, with the narrative's subject matter spotlighting existential dilemmas in Nigeria. Afrobeat is characterised by a large band with many instruments, vocals and musical structures featuring jazzy, funky horn selections. Dubenion, (2017) considers Afrobeat as eclectic and mesmerizing. Its roots stem from divergent geographical, social, and musical backgrounds.

Afrobeat Music derives its popularity and fame from Fela Anikulapo Kuti's creative ingenuity forged from the unique configuration of instrumental sound, textual context, and social fusion. Notable scholars

in Africa and diaspora believe Fela's endowment with special instincts or sacred fire, grants the ability to unite variations of theoretical constructs, and environmental adaptation as factors contributing to the emergence and development of the music genre, (Moore, 1982; Graham, 1992; Floyd, 1995; Veal, 2004; Olorunyomi, 2005). The political intensity of Fela's Afrobeat music, coupled with the intellectual orientation of the style relied significantly on a sophisticated compositional style in which foreign musical elements were woven with traditional African music, thereby constituting a larger original form. This paper conceptually interprets music through the creation of visual art forms, based on subjective perception of music in the form of visual structure, harmoniously composed within context. Omibiyi (1981) and Akpabot (1998) imperatively advocate that African popular music should attract, to a very large extent, scholarly enquiries on analysis of its

content, forms, and styles. Oguigbe (2003) defines Afrobeat as an infectious musical genre, which combines American funk and Jazz with traditional highlife as a weapon of social justice.

Fela's ideological dictum: "Music is the Weapon of the Future," encapsulates his view of music as an oppositional tool, his enactment of which led to frequent violent confrontations with the Nigerian state. Throughout his lifetime, Fela held hegemonic sway over Afrobeat's stylistic and ideological trajectories. Popular opinion describes Fela's music as "revolutionary;" soundtracks of resistance that continue to serve as beacons giving Nigerians hope during the dark era of military dictatorship. The Nigerian Daily Times,(1970) argues Fela's music as "intriguingly one of the greatest achievements by any Nigerian popular musician of the century." With widely popular hits such as "Jeun Koku," "Open and Close," "Shakara" (Oloje),

"Lady," "Gentleman, and 'Go Slow' This paper purposively selects songs including Gentleman, Go Slow, Yellow Fever, Authority stealing, No Agreement, Sorrow Tears and Blood among others as relevant commentaries. This paper brings folklore to the light of visual art interpretation by adapting it to colour symbolism.

The Statement of Problem

Despite Steve Rhode's (1926-2008) contextual exegesis of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat structural combination of foreign and traditional modal scale consisting of West African traditional ensemble stratification, modalism and hocketing, Tejumola Olaniyan's (1959-2019) book, Arrest the Music!: Fela, his Rebel Art and Politics, impact as a literary critic and historiographic analysis of context. Lemmy Ghariokwu' (b.1955) visual portrayal of Afrobeat epic heroic storytelling album covers. Actor and choreographer Adesola Osakalumi, (b.1975) and Sahr Ngajuah's

(b.1976) Fela on Broadway performances. This article upholds synaesthesia, as a creative art paradigm, centred on the synthesis of style, media and cultural references for contemporary visual art reflective practice. Thus, is the revitalisation of Wagner's harmony engendered via Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music-induced colour correspondence, a perceptual gestalt of variety, proportion, pattern, repetition and harmony of elements, towards the realisation of visual rhythm and movement in allegorical portrayal of cultural references of existential dilemma themes in Nigeria.

The study aims to visual interpretation of music, via allegorical portrayal. The objectives explore figural representations of themes. Geometric symbolic exploration. Creation of a three-fold structure.

Research Questions

- i. In which way can the Triptych forms conceptualise Fela's Sorrow Tears and Blood song?
- ii. How can material adaptation of fabric tesserae form the interpretation of the Suffering and Smiling song?
- iii. How can spiral installation string tesserae form an interpretation of the movement principle in the Yellow Fever song?

Methodology

This article adopts qualitative methodology characterised by flexibility of process, pushing boundaries as the ideal structure for creative artistic inquiry within the context of 'lived' experience and interpretation. The main impetus for this paper is the association of visual archetypal elements with Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music conceptual genre as a process, of subjective inquiry, corroborating Bhandari, (2020) non-numeric methods and

Surbhi, (2016) unstructured method's suitability to studying the complex phenomenon. Selected Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music narratives, with themes of social commentary such as Kalakuta Show, Sorrow Tears and Blood, Yellow Fever, Suffering and Smiling among other songs are conceptualised into paintings. The process emerging from the immersive, subliminal, experiential perception of music melody interpretation is characterised by a unique set of aesthetic values including line, shape, forms and texture as foundational and functional principles. Music perception is conceptualised, by adapting visual principles of pattern, proportion, balance, rhythm, and harmony of visual elements composition of melody in colour. Creative design strategy incorporates the idea of cognitive gestalt as an underlying principle of Jung's fourfold cognitive structure of information sensing, accessing and transformation, in conceptual processes of the human mind.

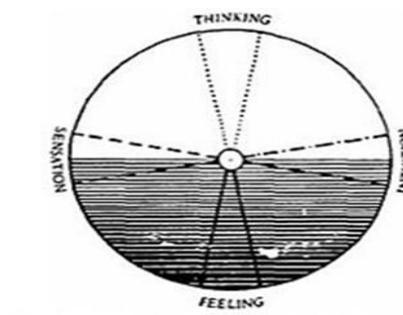
Visual interpretation of melody is uniquely a transformational process from a given auditory structure. Sullivan (2005) agrees that the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is potentially sufficient as art. Borgodoff, (2012) points at artistic exploration as imperative for developing human aesthetic faculties leading to the creative capacitation of vocational abilities.

Jung's cognitive functions of Perception (Studio strategy)

Jung's concept of four-fold cognitive function underlies systematic progression, from initiation to completion of the task, in qualitative methodology of creative development. Comparative examples abound of four-fold progressive divisions, or four categories or compositions belonging together, including the four cardinal points (North, East, West, South), the four seasons (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall), the four temperaments (Sanguine, Choleric,

Phlegmatic, Melancholic), four-fold symbol of spirit (Earth, Air, Water and Fire), Jung's transcendent functions is a four-fold psychological structural interface, mind processes, initiative application in visual interpretation of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music.

Jung's transcendent cognitive functions:



Sensation:

Jung presented sensation as a psychological function identifying physical forms to perceive outer and inner stimuli. Primarily this process of perception confers physical representations of stimuli, through the harmonisation of psychological aggregates, representing the experience of

the phenomenon, via presentations, of archetypes of perceived images of the outer or inner stimulus in purely objective terms. This stage interrogates representational and abstraction paradox, evident in (Fig. 1) *Kalakuta Show*, the visual composition process of melody in colour chords progression. Sensation functions associate definition to experience through interpretation of the idea of music perception as visual elements permute and combine principles of design in creation from active imagination to exquisite compositions in colour.

Feeling:

Jung defines feeling primarily as a fluid perceptual response. Accordingly, this stage of the process is typical of liminal feedback that takes place between the observer and a given content, a process that imparts to the content a malleable subjective value in the sense of acceptance or rejection.

The feeling can be considered as a cyclic flow

of form, with judgment-based subjective criterion. In context, (Fig .ii) *Go Slow ii* features the interaction of liquid colour combination of visual elements. Thus, interpretation leverages nostalgic recollections of live experiences of Fela's Shrine Performance as a catalyst for developing visual concepts of perceived music melody.

Intuition:

Intuition presents a basic psychological function combining hunches and visions of heightened perception beyond sensation. Intuition as a psychological function transmits variables of perceptions in an unconscious way, presenting outer or inner objects or their associations with objects of perception. As studio strategy, intuition mobilises peculiar qualities of combined creative elements of colour, shape, line, forms, and space in creating holistic rhythmic compositions wherein the whole adds up to more than the sum of its parts. The

surpassing element of intuition within the context of visual creativity lies in its dynamic overreaching capacity of counterintuitive functions, harnessed in the invention of unique visual art form, (Fig. iii) *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* Triptych installation, emergent evolutionary forms defined by blurring of functions.

Thinking:

According to Jung, psychological function by its laws brings given presentations into conceptual connection. Jung further argues that thinking is synonymous with the conceptual connection of information, considered intellectual judgement, a result of definitive cortical activity, in exploration, selection, simplification, abstraction, analysis and synthesis. As comparative sequence, combining and separating, and putting in context process. Visual thinking in context, Arnheim (1969), argues, is the ability to see and process by way of mental reasoning, and

logical deductions, through identification, categorisations, and generation of images as foundational. (Fig. IV) *Yellow fever IV* showcases the qualities of creation based upon combining, separating, and putting into context, simplification, abstraction, and synthesis...as characteristic of forms.

The creation of works for discussion within the context of this paper is based on visual analysis of music melody, perceived as colour processes. The conceptualisation process is initiated via listening to select songs under observation, contemplations, and theoretical readings of information considerably effective in building up visual thinking, outline imaging and sketching.

Artworks.

Visual exploration of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music melody is a creative initiative based upon unique trends emanating from contemporary explorations

of qualitative practice. The visual interpretation of music positions artworks created alongside critical and theoretical analysis in the visual art area and other relevant fields of Symbolism and Philosophy. This approach furthermore advances qualitative methodology values as steeped in the search for meaning, characteristic of subjective experience and interpretation of the vibratory phenomenon. Visual interpretation of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music mirrors Jung's cognitive functions through a process wherein the whole is more than the sum of the parts, a gestalt, creative visual evolution of colour processes from music experience. This paper embarks on the evaluation of cognitive and emotional attributes of reflective-action practice in developing visual art forms. Emergent visual forms symbolise operative harmony of contrasts, variety, and movement of the melodic interplay of fast, staccato, and

slow legato rhythms of pitch, amplitude, and duration.

The above statement aims to assist viewers, visual artists, commentators, critics, and analysts with underlying aesthetic principles as springboards to interact with select created works. This may enhance the visual, psychological, and emotional response an individual may have as one encounters creations of visual art forms. The artworks created for this paper are considered symbolic paintings, based upon visual perception and interpretation from personal experience of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music melody. Artworks created followed a systematic order according to Jung's transcendent cognitive functions of sensation, feeling, intuition and thinking mode of actualisation of the ideal.



Fig. i, Kalakuta Show, Oil on Canvas, 130x 120 cm, Salako Adebayo. Source: Artists Collection, 2021.

Fig. I titled *Kalakuta Show* starts as resonant coherence of high-pitched serenading alto-saxophone tunes, drums and treble bass guitar groove and keyboards unfold as music melody experience perceived and interpretation as rhythmic lyrics of Fela's polyphonic music composition representation in colour. The experience of melodic music informs the perception of stratified ensemble squares and spirals portrayed as interacting overlays of chords. Harmony of variations and combinations of

colour, line, shape, and form organise asymmetric visual balance. Physical response to perception is symbolised by facial representation, identifying with the cognitive function of sensation, evocative of intense and sensational response to existential issues. The lower visual field incorporates an overlapping proportion of contrasting colour repetition with the implication of visual dynamics of rhythm.



Fig.ii. Go Slow. Oil on Canvas, 130x 120 cm, Salako Adebayo. Source: Artist's Collection, 2021.

Fig. ii is a visual adaptation of liquidised oil colour combined polychromes. Complementary blue, orange, green and red overlay of notes interact with aesthetic

elements combined as scenic overlapping of automobile forms highlights the existential theme. Principles of movement and rhythm are portrayed by the stratification of chords progressing and counterpoint play of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music structure. Tonal values harmony of variations effects implied proportion, rhythm, and movement of visual forms. The optimum use of overlapping and juxtapositions aids in merging elements of design in accentuating the idea of flowing rhythm and movement adaptation via visual imagination.



Fig. iii Sorrow, Tears and Blood, Salako Adebayo. Source: Artist's Collection, 2021.

Fig. iii Sorrow, Tears and Blood, is a Triptych format portrayal of a three-piece combination unit. Triptych form emerges from a combination of three equal section planes, in connection from one to the other. The overall idea renders abstraction, non-representational creation of contemplative forms blurring functions of representational figural perception. Flowing liquid colours and shapes in red, white, black, brown, lilac shades and tints fiercely interact creating the bizarre emergence of high-pitched polyphones visualised in colour. At this stage, intuitive perception functions are deployed towards aesthetic diffusion, evoking blurry movement, and rhythm. The threefold support space, is allegorical of linear time, merging a sequence of intervals, obtained from musical structure of notes as chords.



Fig. iv Shuffling and Shmiling III Salako Adebayo.
Source: Artist's Collection, 2021.

Shuffling and Shmiling III, Fig iv, is an installation art form. The Triptych form, metamorphs into a fold-up hinged vertical structure, guaranteed to induce observer participation in movement around the conceptual form. This stage combines fabric tesserae chords emphasising a set of three-note arrangements in developing an abstract sequence of fluid aesthetic combination allegoric of rhythmic flow of forms

incorporating visual elements and principles in compositional arrangement harmonics observed in the notal structure of forms. Thinking: as cognitive functions modulate process based on conceptual connection through subtraction and addition of fractions, establishing wholeness via synthesis, harmonising variety.



Fig. v Yellow Fever IV Salako Adebayo.
Source: Artist's Collection, 2021.

Yellow Fever IV, Fig. v, is a spiral installation art form composition of multiple colour chord progression at intervals. The fabric-wrapped spiral support is characterised by ratioed intervals of stringed colour fabric components consisting of lightweight polyvinylchloride bits composition of visual dynamics synonymous with Fela's Afrobeat music structure. The cognitive function of the thinking process isolates combinations of three sets of contrasting colour bits shapes and forms in fostering conceptual connection. Visual art principles of movement, rhythm and harmony engage design elements adaptation to enhance the creation of installation art forms with emphasis on a string of contrasting arrangements in mutable connection. The objective of this exploration is the creation of actual movement, induced by proportion patterned repetition maintaining rhythm as fabric strings are provoked by air stimuli and thrust around in

perpetual motion, time and time, much as it remains hanging by central rope.

Findings: Social, Philosophical and Psychological interpretations

The qualitative nature of Art practice reveals intrinsic open-ended creative procedure, conferring artistic freedom of interpretation of forms as portrayed in the interrogation of music from a visual art perspective. Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music narratives border on existential dilemma themes. Okeke (1992) argues artistic process is akin to the visual documentary of trends in society. In essence, artistic creation mirrors social experience, as symbolic forms, and documents of events, addressing social issues, raising questions, and gratifying visual and aesthetic experiences.

Towards the creation of conceptual artefacts inspired by, an idea-based interpretation of Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat music structure, as social, philosophical, and

psychological inquiry. The creation of artworks as a form of social inquiry engages artist and observer in thematic monologues and dialogues based on matters arising, calling for social attention, mediation, and justice on existential dilemma themes of social commentary. Artworks as a form of psychological inquiry allude to the experience and interpretation of music phenomenon. Jung's creative process exemplifies the integration of cognitive elements, relating parts to parts and parts to whole. The systematic visual art creative progression as a process requires meditative unification of thought and feeling functions, drawing inspiration and meaning from disparate elements, and instinctual archetypal patterns as action engages reflection. The act of creation can be argued as a robust form of intellectual activity as well as transformational engagement with the potential for newer insight and understanding of the subject matter. Furthermore, art in

general has the property of revitalising human creative faculties and developing memory, cognitive and emotional tools. As a Philosophical form of inquiry, the exploratory interpretation of music makes elaborate use of visual elements for aesthetic interpretation through active imagination of forms inspired by combinations and permutations of elements and principles of design. The abstract creation of forms follows a visual structure characterised by the play of variations of colours, proportion, repetition, and patterns constituting organic and geometric forms elaborating rhythm and movement. The visual artistic compositions of triptychs, installations and mobiles are testimonials of creative progression and artistic ingenuity, contributing to development and psychological wholeness, promoting improved memory, cognitive development, and creative art methodology.

Conclusion

The use of music as a source of inspiration through the synaesthetic experience in the study and practice of visual art is a territory rarely explored, albeit Schoenberg, Kandinsky (1866-1944), Klee, Albers (1879-1940), and McCracken (b-1990) among other predecessors have created artworks through immersion in classical and jazz music experience, perception, and interpretation. The paper visually explores some of Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afrobeat (the purple period) ethno-musicological fusion. This is the interpretation and adaptation of musical arrangements by employing visual aesthetic elements and principles. Dynamic music interface combination in colour adapts Jung's cognitive functions as interpretive methodology, materials, tools, and equipment employ the creation of visual structure. Works created have the potential to introduce the viewers to the innate aesthetic

characteristics existent within music-centred visual art phenomenal creation.

The array of interpretations of Fela's Music address discussions within context are considered forms of social, psychological, and philosophical inquiry. This paper adduces the fact that this exploration is a

robust form of intellectual and emotional engagement creating novel knowledge as well as leading to further evolution of cognitive interface facilitating forms of visual art innovation including triptychs and spiral installations.

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