

Metaphor and Melancholy Consciousness: Enduring Efficacy and Universal Common in Obiora Udechukwu's Eight Paintings

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Abstract

This paper analytically discusses the efficacy of Obiora Udechukwu's eight paintings particularly their commonality in projecting humanity universal common, pervading melancholy consciousness, and their propensity to activate effectual catharsis. This paper also discusses how these eight paintings provide cognitive channels through which plausible interpretive attempt at psychoanalysis of Udechukwu in relation to the paintings can be attained. We are adopting interpretive approach in our attempt at coming up with plausible deductions and extrapolations of the embedded significations in the paintings. To deepen our purview on efficacy of these paintings as stimuli for emotion activation, we shall apply select theories explaining contexts of melancholy consciousness, effectual catharsis and cognitive channels of psychoanalysis in relation to paintings as texts. In the end, our interpretations indicate that Udechukwu's techniques in these paintings create perpetual atmosphere subsuming consciousness of universally acknowledged debilitating agonies resulting from wars.

Keywords: consciousness, efficacy, melancholy, metaphor, Obiora Udechukwu, painting

Art expresses far more than just personal sense or significance – it generates new ideas and reinterprets status quo perceptions about identity, lived experience, religious and political beliefs, cultural practices, material properties, ancestral and social relationships, and even the natural affinity an artist or designer possess for particular creative practices or techniques. (Rolling, 2017: 4)

Introduction

Studies elaborately espousing on how paintings can communicate in various ways to the viewers, particularly the dimensions to projection of shades and hues of emotions, worldviews, and interpretations of diversities of human environments, realities, circumstances and life's phenomena abound. However, we are yet to find elaborate scholarly publication interpretively discussing Obiora Udechukwu's eight paintings (*Lament of the Unsilenced*, *The Only Son*, *Blue Figures (Refugees)*, *Aftermath*, *The Man Died*, *Refugee Children*, *The Exile Train*, and *Lament of the Widowed Woman*) to deepen the appreciation of melancholy consciousness in them as metaphorical universal denotations and how these paintings enable plausible psychoanalysis of Udechukwu as the painter. Clearly, human attempts at understanding and adapting various forms of songs, dances, paintings and other forms of arts and humanities for the benefit of people in various capacities and circumstances in relation to health and wellbeing has being on for long and has continued to generate more interest. Thus, scholarly endeavours purposely aimed at attaining

deeper human understanding of how creative arts represent various forms of emotional release from artists, how viewers of creative arts could be stimulated, the suppositions explaining factors propelling similarities and dissimilarities in viewers' responses, and how creative arts can be harnessed in dealing with human health conditions and realities, have being undertaken in different cultures for ages (McClellan, 1988; Aluede, 2006; Miu, et al 2016). Thus, in many ways, what the coining of the term 'Health Humanities' and its development as an academic discipline, and the emergence of Paul Crawford in 2009 as the world's first Professor of Health Humanities at the University of Nottingham, after the canonization of the term 'Medical Humanities' in USA in the 1960s and its mainstreaming in United Kingdom in the 1990s did, is the formalization of an ancient practice and endeavour. Health humanities is an interdisciplinary field of study that draws on aspects of the arts and humanities, connecting branches of medical sciences, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, in scholarly inquiries about health care, health and wellbeing (Tan 2000, Lazarus 1991, Tomkins 1991, Berlyne 1971, Duffy 1934). In discussing painting as art medium capable of efficacious emotional release and affectations, our conceptual inclination is that paintings are texts which differently communicate to viewers and percipients, and in accord with Per Aage Brandt's conceptual supposition, we acknowledge that "artists are able to voluntarily achieve and intentionally communicate formal perceptions" (2006: 172). This is because artists learn and at some point acknowledge that art is universal, aesthetic, symbolic, representational, and a web of communication mediums that can be evocative, efficacious, emotional, therapeutic, inspirational, metaphorical, ritualistic, and transformational. Again, our observation is that there are several scholarly debates and definitions of 'art' and 'artist'. However, our view is that art such as paintings can be viewed as human creations, emanating not only from the exteriorization of some variables defining deep consciousness and emotions, but also through representations of human attempts at recreation and representation of things as visual and non-visual images, through chosen medium(s), according to one's ability, which is determined by natural endowment(s), quality of training and general wellbeing. In a supposition subsumed in philosophic inclination, Rudolf Arnheim observes that art "is born from man's need to understand himself and the world in which he lives" and that "the various other purposes served by art can be shown to depend on this basic cognitive function" (1969: 294). Well, beyond this dense philosophic nuance, which supposedly contemplates art as that which always emanates from deep consciousness, our interactions with artists from diverse backgrounds suggest that art such as painting can be interpreted as a conscious exteriorization of feelings, ideas, and inclinations, probably with the prime aim to share, communicate, or release emotions propelled by one or a combination of the following human emotions; rage, anger, pain, joy, delirium, and the likes, in a bid to satiate yearnings such as to declare ideological and philosophical inclination(s), portray realities, exude feelings, exhibit skill(s), obtain financial reward, play politics or even to engage in mind games. Therefore, explaining art within philosophical views, denote examination of "longstanding questions about beauty, quality, taste and judgement" of art which is "the subject area that is traditionally called aesthetics" (Dissanayake 2013: 124). Beyond the debate on possibility of a consensus definition of art, there is wide acknowledgement that art always embodies multiple meanings (Danto 1964; Goodman 1968; Berlyne 1971; Dickie 1974; Eldridge 1985; Arnheim 1986; Dissanayake 2013). In an attempt to explain how paintings create meanings, Ahu Akgün Aygül notes that during attentive appreciation, "painting creates an illusion and refers to the viewer of an object, with its light and dark areas" (2018: 1). To Ahmet Soysal "a painting can carry inside and convey the joy and the grief, sometimes both at once or identically" (2003: 14).

In this study, we are categorizing these multiple meanings into two groups; the literal and the metaphorical meanings. Also, we are classifying metaphorical meanings in arts into two sub-categories: communally acknowledged metaphors and individually acknowledged metaphors. Communally acknowledged metaphors viewed within anthropological purview, suggests that art reflect cultural system. Therefore, art is “an instance of and repository for symbolic meaning, and embodies and conveys important cultural truths to people of that culture” (Dissanayake 2013: 124). Elaborating further, Dissanayake notes that “although anthropological views are concerned with the arts in a variety of cultures, they generally uphold a cultural relativist position that emphasizes individuality and uniqueness, and denies universality in any cultural product” (2013: 124). Furthermore, we are sub-classifying the communally acknowledged metaphors in arts into locale specific communally acknowledged metaphors and universal-communally acknowledged metaphors. We agree with Brandt that the decoding of the supposedly subsumed metaphorical meaning(s) in images contained in paintings occurs “when consciousness is awake and aware” and that “our organization of what we will call meaning is a process that occurs on many levels simultaneously” (2006: 173). This supposition subsumes the reason why Brandt observes that “art is crucial to emotional communication in the human world, and all celebrations and ritual make use of it, publicly as well as privately, from ceremonies of warfare to declarations of love” (2006: 181).

In line with our purview and application, the term metaphor implies that there are suggestions of embedded meanings and significations in a painting as a text, which means that the interpretation of such a painting will produce varied conclusions based on the point-of-views of the interpreters. On the other hand, literal meanings of images in a painting are human recognitions of the unambiguous signification(s) of such images and objects which have a commonly acknowledged plain denotation. For instance, if an image in a painting is a sleeping lion, different individuals residing at different places and time, will in accord acknowledge that the image in the painting is that of a sleeping lion and not a goat or any other thing.

Therefore, this paper through an interpretive discuss approach, attempts an elaborate explanation of some brilliant artistic techniques evident in the select eight paintings rendered by Obiora Udechukwu, which effectively propel communication of deep humanism and melancholy consciousness as universal common in similar and dissimilar ways. Also we are interested in deepening the understanding of how these eight paintings enable plausible attempt at psychoanalysis of Udechukwu as the painter. Thus, we shall examine the efficacy of Udechukwu's attempt at presenting forms of disturbing realities about humanity through these paintings and what we can adduce as supposedly, the metaphorical meanings subsumed in the paintings. In order to place our study frame and thematic areas of focus in clear perspective devoid of ambiguity, we shall start by explaining what melancholy consciousness, universal common, and paintings as texts for psychoanalysis of the painter variously mean within the purview of our conceptualization in this paper.

Painting as Universal Communication Medium and Portrayal of Melancholy Consciousness: Trajectories and Perspectives

Our observation is that there is a subsisting universal consensus among people of different socio-economic status, academic attainments and scholarly inclinations that art such as painting speaks volume, thereby affecting human consciousness at differing proportions and magnitudes. According to Dissanayake “the word ‘art’ is often tacitly restricted to the visual arts (e.g. paintings,

sculptures, drawings), especially to ‘fine art’” (2013: 121). According to Thomas Adajian “the definition of art is controversial in contemporary philosophy” thus “whether art can be defined has also been a matter of controversy” and “the philosophical usefulness of a definition of art has also been debated” (2018: 1). Scholars have published attempts at defining art which are categorized in paradigms such as conventionalist and traditional definitions. Conventionalist definitions are sub-categorized as institutional, historical, functional (mainly aesthetic), and hybrid (disjunctive). In his explanation, Adajian notes that “conventionalist definitions deny that art has essential connection to aesthetic properties, or to formal properties, or to expressive properties, or to any type of property taken by traditional definitions to be essential to art” (2018: 17). Thus, the definition of art within the institutionalist conventionalism, or institutionalism purview is a synchronic view, which essentially suggests that for a creative work to be an art, it means that it qualifies to be an artefact of a kind created by an artist, worthy of presentation to an ‘artworld’ public (Dickie 1984). The term ‘artworld’ was introduced by Arthur Danto which in his view represents ‘an atmosphere of art theory’ and the laying of the groundwork for institutional definition of art is attributed him. Other major contributors to the institutional art definition are Davies (2004), Goodman (1968), Abell (2012), and Searle (1995, 2010). The definition of art within the paradigm historical conventionalism is a diachronic view which “holds that artworks necessarily stand in an art-historical relation to some set of earlier artworks” (Adajian 2018: 17). Projecting traditional definition of art, Monroe Beardsley explains that an artwork represents “either an arrangement of conditions intended to be capable of affording an experience with marked aesthetic character or (incidentally) an arrangement belonging to a class or type of arrangements that is typically intended to have this capacity” (1982: 299). Another major scholar in this group is Eldridge (1985) whose definition predominates on sufficiency of aesthetic quality. Thus, the traditional definitions of art “take some function(s) or intended function(s) to be definitive of artworks” whereby “different aesthetic definitions incorporate different views of aesthetic properties and judgments” (Adajian 2018: 23-24). In summary hybrid definitions of art, place art as that which falls under an art genre or art form established and publicly recognized within an art tradition, which shows excellence of skill, and realizes significant aesthetic goals. Again Adajian notes that “hybrid definitions characteristically disjoin at least one institutional component with at least one aesthetic component, aiming thereby to accommodate both more traditional art and avant-garde art that appears to lack any significant aesthetic dimension” (2018: 27). Other major scholars adding to definitions of art in this category are Stecker (2005), Longworth & Scarantino (2010), Lopes (2014), and Davies (2015).

In Aleksander Potebnya’s observation, “art is creative thinking, in other words, it is thinking through images” (1990: 163). This articulation by Potebnya clearly describes art as a communication medium, thus the definition of art by Potebnya as a form of creative thinking through images suggests that most painters, particularly imaginative painters, through inspiration, usually come up with ideas which they represent as images in a bid to communicate and exteriorize subsisting interiority. Similarly, Viktor F. Petrenko and Evgeniya A. Korotchenko observe that “both consciousness and imagination run through the works of both writers and artists” (2012: 532). Therefore, a painting is expected to lead the viewer beyond the painting itself, so that he or she may find plausible meaning(s) as he or she dwell upon the subject matter(s), its significances and metaphors. Thus, we can say that in some cases “when fine art spectators view art, they feel as though they have witnessed history and build upon their knowledge of the nuances within the image” (Deuel 2013: 4). Consequently, beyond the aesthetic allure, to sufficiently appreciate the metaphorical and representational meaning(s) subsumed in a painting is the foremost task of a viewer (Arnheim 1994, Petrenko & Korotchenko 2012, Deuel 2013).

Illuminating further on the communication value of art, Petrenko and Korotchenko note that at the time a viewer is appreciating an art (a painting), naturally he or she is “experiencing the atmosphere depicted in the painting, such that a misty river propels the arousal of feelings of neglect and sedation, whereas a mountain tends to arouse the feeling of grandeur” (2012: 534). In response, our appreciation of the idea highlighted in the above illustrations by Petrenko and Korotchenko is that the visual symbols in works of art representing the genre of landscape, environment and other human realities, usually subsume both locale specific and universal common denotations and significations. An example of such a universal common denotation is where “peacefulness can be depicted as a serene sea and a bright sky, but it can hardly be depicted as a crowd of people in an urban context” (Petrenko & Korotchenko 2012: 534). At this point, let us digress slightly to espouse a little bit on the place of encoding and decoding dynamics in relation to a painting and the viewer in a bid to buttress on the above illustration. Our view is that the human capacity and ability to decode a serene sea and a bright sky in a painting as a metaphor depicting peacefulness is not automatic to every human, rather such capability depends largely on the cognitive variables of each viewer. The viewer, who is the decoder, is powered by his/her brain and it is the brain that enables the decoding processes of the image(s), subject(s) and object(s). Therefore, the decoding of visual stimulus by an individual's brain depends on that person's brain's recognition density and propensity, which will propel the complex neural mechanics leading to signification and meaning-making. Thus a child who has never seen or experienced a serene sea or has never been educated on the locale specific interpretive community denotations or universal common significations as well as metaphors of a serene sea, may not be able to produce plausible decoding because he or she lacks the required data in his or her memory which naturally will instigate sufficient recognition and definition process. Therefore, the metaphoric meaning(s) of such a painting is most likely to elude such an individual to a large extent. What this explanation indicates is that a painting as a non-verbal communication medium is a text which yields differently at varying degrees to different people, although in some cases, the result of the decoding may be similar, again to a varying degree. Thus, the shade of meaning(s) the viewer decodes thereof in many ways depends majorly on the viewer's related and relevant knowledge depth and density. Conceptually, we can say that a viewer's related and relevant knowledge depth and interpretive density, depends on the aggregate propensity of subsisting innate cognitive prowess, the quality and quantity of related and relevant knowledge assimilated and stored, which are retrievable from the memory, and lastly, the rate of information retrieval elasticity, otherwise the cognition profundity makes the difference.

Emphasizing on the efficacious variables and melancholy consciousness as visual metaphor, Terry A. Rustin observes that “the thoughts, beliefs, values, and emotions of artists are inescapably represented in their works – and on some occasions, intentionally depicted” (2008: 2). However, we observe that viewers of a painting can come up with slightly or largely differing interpretations and still have their interpretations be acknowledged as plausible and tenable. This is because some categories of paintings tend to propel near similar or different interpretations because of the typology of technique employed by the painter, which are subsumed in the phenomenon of the visual metaphor in such paintings. Espousing on this, Petrenko and Korotchenko observe that the “metaphor in painting is a source of bright ideas” which “creates figurative works” (2012: 539). Furthermore, they explain that “a visual metaphor is always a mystery for a viewer” because “it often combines incongruous attributes of various objects, immediately reversing the usual perception” (Petrenko & Korotchenko, 2012: 539). Espousing on the different realities of visual and verbal metaphors they observe that these two kinds of metaphors should be distinguished on the basis of their different representations, how “a verbal

metaphor can be reflected in visual terms” and still be easily recognized, even though a “purely artistic visual metaphor is more difficult to recognize” (Petrenko & Korotchenko, 2012: 539). Furthermore, Rustin observes that “three of the more familiar connections between art and the functions of the mind are the ways in which artists express their own thoughts, feelings, and mental distress in their paintings” (2008: 2). An exciting quality of painting is that it can be a source of several inclinations and trajectories of information, thus in these eight paintings by Udechukwu we feel the presence of nuances of melancholy consciousness with multiple denotations.

Efficacious Variables and Melancholy Consciousness in Udechukwu’s Eight Paintings

According to Robert L. Solso “there are as many ways of looking at art as there are viewers of art” hence the “huge diversity is one indication that we humans are a highly distinctive lot of creative people” (2003: 1). However, the notion that individuals interpret art differently does not mean that “there are no universal principles of perception and cognition that apply to all of us as we view and appreciate art” (2003: 1). Espousing on the mechanics of decoding an art by people which involves viewing, recognition, definition/denotation, and interpretation, we believe that what individuals make-out of an art they are viewing, how long it takes them to arrive at an interpretation and how plausible such interpretations appear, is a complex process propelled by variables of an individual’s nature, nurture and subsisting mental condition. Also, we agree with Solso that when we focus (or direct our perception) on parts of a painting, that both curiosity and intimacy mean that our past knowledge and interest direct our attention hence “each of us brings to the viewing of art an entire set of past experiences and expectations that largely influences what we perceive and how we interpret what we see” (2003: 3). However, in relation to scholarly interpretation of art, interpretations are driven by research based informed ideas. Thus, in this section, we shall be looking interpretively at the eight paintings rendered by Obiora Udechukwu in a bid to explain how the images, the surroundings created around the images, the artistic renderings in the paintings, enhance the encoding and decoding of the literal and metaphoric denotations. However, before we commence our analysis, let us familiarize ourselves with some relevant parts of Udechukwu’s biography and profile, which we believe will enhance our appreciation of how his nurture, nature, and subsisting psychological state are subsumed in the eight paintings. Our inclination is that works of art in many ways represent the creator’s worldview, philosophy, training, nurturing, environment, defining life realities, subsisting emotional conditions and even the painter’s aspirations and dreams.

Obiora Udechukwu grew up in Onitsha where he was born in 1946, whereas his parental home town is Agulu, both in Anambra state, southeast Nigeria. Udechukwu studied for a year at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in Kaduna State (northwest Nigeria) before he joined the Biafra side in Nigeria’s civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970. After this war, Udechukwu enrolled and completed his BA and MA degrees in fine arts in 1972 and 1977 respectively, at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Thereafter, he was employed by University of Nigeria, Nsukka and subsequently rose to the rank of professor of painting in 1986. After Prof. Uche Okekeⁱ retired, Udechukwu who had become an internationally acclaimed art scholar and painter assumed the mantle of leadership and continued the development and expansion of Nsukka aesthetic horizons. In a good number of Udechukwu’s works, the *uli* motifs which are Igbo indigenous forms are considerably applied. According to Udechukwu in a personal communication with Nneka Stella Odoh, his early and continuous contact with the *Uli* motifs in his environment and his close experience with Prof

Okeke's works rendered with *Uli* motifs enhanced and propelled his interest towards exploring ways of embedding them in his works. Udechukwu notes:

At one level, my work has benefitted immensely from, and owes a lot to the forms and aesthetic strategies of Igbo *uli* drawing and painting, and to a lesser extent *nsibidi* writing. What these two systems have done is to provide me with a reliable vocabulary for articulating and presenting my responses to life various environments, events and phenomena. In the same way that my grounding in Igbo and English informs my creative writing, my encountering the arts of various parts of the world has broadened my outlook and practice. (2015: 12)

Udechukwu is known to experiment with interlacing specific motifs with explorations of general linear style. More so, Udechukwu experiments with a great variety of media and print techniques in his works reflect a broad spectrum of subject matters. Again, Udechukwu notes that his horrendous experiences in Nigeria's civil war are unambiguously subsumed in his paintings particularly the eight paintings we selected for this study. Udechukwu's description of his war-time experiences as significant influence in these eight paintings is aptly captured in the following comment he made as documented by Simon Ottenberg:

I as a person, I had to move from one town to other with virtually no property, just a coat and a bag, occasionally sleeping in the open. So I know firsthand what it is to suffer. I have known hunger. I have also seen people suffering. I have seen air raids where human beings are dismembered in under two seconds. So this has left a big mark on my psyche and over the years, I find that images of pathos that one associates with Biafra, keeps surfacing from time to time. (1997: 116)

The above insight affirms our supposition that paintings are to varying degrees, recreations of the painter's subsisting psychological state, consciousness, worldview, convictions, inclinations, perspectives and emotions. Thus Udechukwu's paintings include portrayals of his memories of the travails of the common man, their strivings, pains, doggedness, and the melancholy in human realities which in many ways represent true realities he witnessed during his stay in northern part of Nigeria and the realities after Nigeria's civil war. In his assessment, Ottenberg observes that "Udechukwu is a highly regarded Nigerian artist, who creates in a range of two-dimensional media with a rich background of experience in drawing" (1997: 111). Furthering, Ottenberg observes that Udechukwu is a highly productive artist who frequently exhibits in solo and group exhibitions, and is a person of wide scholarly interest evidenced in his published written poems, critique and commentaries on contemporary Nigerian art (1997: 111). Some of Udechukwu's works at the same time captures as well as project the undulating enchanting topography and climatic beauty of the local environment where he had dwelled such as Nsukka, Agulu, and Onitsha.

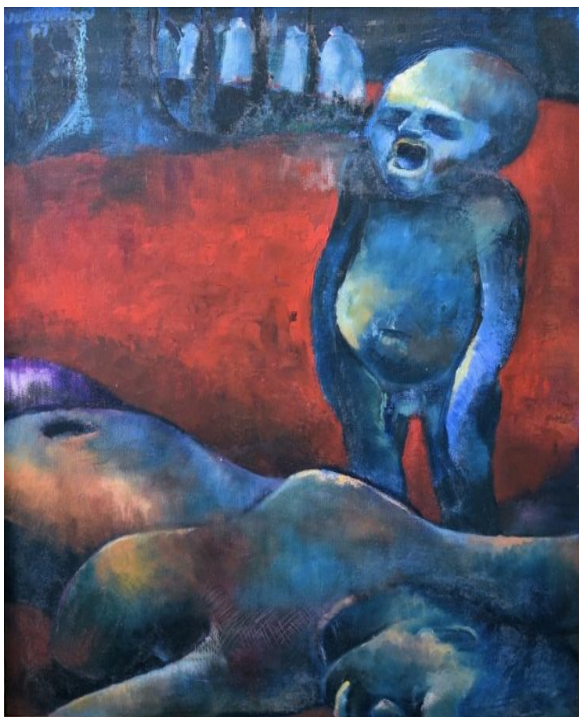


Fig.1, *Lament of the Unsilenced* 1967,
oil on board, 94 x 66.2 cm.

Source for both paintings: *So Far* (exhibition catalogue), Bayreuth: Boomerang Press, 1993.

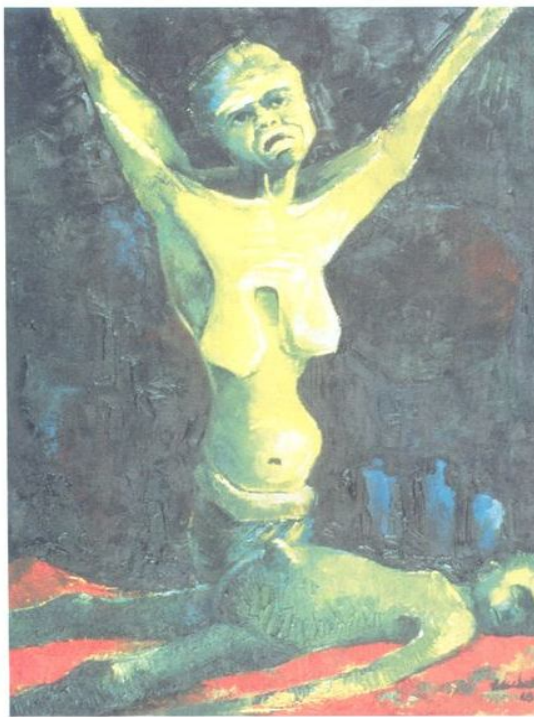


Fig. 2, *The Only Son*, 1968,
oil on plywood, 60 x 42 cm

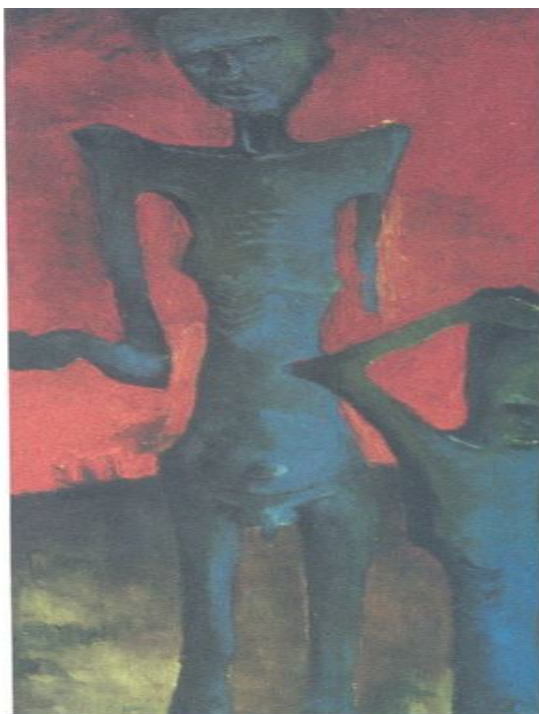


Fig. 3, *Blue Figures (Refugees)*, 1968,
oil on plywood, 89 x 47 cm.

Source for both paintings: *So Far* (exhibition catalogue), Bayreuth: Boomerang Press, 1993.



Fig. 4, *Aftermath*, 1966, oil, dimension unknown.



Fig. 5, *The Man Died*, 1970, watercolour,
26.2 x 21 cm.



Fig. 6, *Refugee Children*, 1970, oil on board,
59.8 x 61.3 cm.

Source of both paintings: *So Far* (exhibition catalogue), Bayreuth: Boomerang Press, 1993.



Fig. 7, *The Exile train*, 1968,
linocut, 34.7 x 24.6 cm.



Fig. 8, *Lament of the Widowed Woman*, 1967,
linocut, 15.4 x 11 cm

Source: *So Far* (exhibition catalogue), Bayreuth: Boomerang Press, 1993.

These paintings represents Udechukwu's creation of solemn scenes projecting ambience of agony in seven, atmosphere of grief and bereavement in two, images of gravely starving and disturbingly infirmed individuals in four, atmosphere of dejection, travail, agony and forced excruciating transhumance in one, and pictures depicting agony of death in three. So the question is from where comes these shades of ideas? Many scholars have adumbrated on the link between an art and artist, and prominent suppositions suggest that arts such as painting denotes the exteriority of the artist's psychological disposition, thus in line with "a Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, art is a product of delusion or lack – a symptom of neurosis" (Dissanayake 2013: 123). Though scholars may not have consensus on the quantum dynamics of variables that propel creation of top quality arts, however they are in accord on the premise that artists through their arts engage in exteriorization of feelings, views, inclinations, aspirations and experiences. Hence, Petrenko and Korotchenko observe that artists in their works "seek harmony between their thoughts and their emotional state" (2012: 532). Espousing, Solso notes that "as science helps us understand our experience of art, so too does art give us a view of the mind that comprehends it" (2003: 1). Therefore, paintings can be viewed as reflections of the artist's mindset and feelings; hence Udechukwu observes that, Nigeria civil war was a major turning point in his art career. Unambiguously, his paintings relay his memories of the horrendous happenings in the war, where the people from southeast Nigeria faced ethnic cleansing agenda and a brutal campaign of extermination through cruel blockade which led to devastating hunger by the Nigerian army. Thus, Udechukwu's paintings are densely embedded with layers of metaphors projecting melancholy, anguish, deaths, human sufferings which are not restricted to Nigeria's civil war experience but a universal common. Furthermore, scholars are of the view that dense and painstaking analysis of arts of a given artists can help at appreciating the mindset, social inclination and emotions subconscious configurations of the artist. Hence, psychiatrists and related therapists adopt "the use of art to help individuals with mental disorders" (Rustin 2008: 2). Rustin also observes that "several notable artists with psychiatric disorders have expressed their thoughts and moods in their artwork" among whom are Mark Rothko, Edward Munch, and Bernard Buffet who have stated that their artwork reflected their depressed mood (2008: 2). According to Asta Sutton "the unconscious mind is a fascinating subject in art production as well as in many scientific fields" because "this hidden part of the mind, being understood as the source of creativity, constitutes an important foundation for many possible and valuable inquiries in multiple areas of knowledge" (2004: 12). Espousing on this, Ahu Akgün Aygül observes that "melancholic attitude of the artists tends to bring along the urge to create" and "this urge may come from the melancholic emotions" (2018: 1). Furthering, Aygül observes that "it is important to consider that the work of art is a reaction that shows itself as a melancholic attitude for the artists who sometimes hide the feeling of melancholy in a profound expression" (2018: 1). In line with the views of Sutton (2004) and Aygül (2018), we can say that the understanding of the interconnectivity of a painter's worldview, inclination and philosophy can be gleaned psychoanalytically from the rendered paintings. Well, the popular opinion from the artists (painters) and (non-painters) we interviewed in the course of completing this study, suggests that artists are not essentially delusional, however, some of the respondents add that some artists exhibit weird psychological depositions. Espousing on the description of artists in line with the earlier mentioned Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, Dissanayake explains that this tendency which "arises from psychological defence measures such as sublimation or projection" are describable "as the disguised fulfilment of a forbidden and repressed (unconscious) wish, a substitute for something else" (2013: 123). Also Dissanayake observes that "psychological views consider art more positively as self-expressive or therapeutic rather than palliative or neurotic (2013: 124). The artists that we interviewed suggest that their art cannot be far from representation

of self, hence their “art is a means to personal individuation, to creativity and fulfilment” through which an artist “expresses and communicates mood and personality (Dissanayake 2013: 124). Thus, our conviction is that Udechukwu in the selected eight paintings in many ways tried to exteriorize his feelings and melancholy consciousness.

In figures 1, 2, 4, 5, and 8, titled *Lament of the Unsilenced*, *The Only Son*, *Aftermath*, *The Man Died*, and *Lament of the Widowed Woman* respectively, Udechukwu presents poignant scenes of deep agony and death, which differently depict the metaphors of melancholy consciousness. In *Lament of the Widowed Woman*, Udechukwu depicts an elderly woman apparently wailing and lamenting her deep loss, although without clear designation of what actually provoked her behaviour which exudes deep agony. Even though the title of this painting designates the woman as a widow, it is difficult if not impossible, to accurately place her within a specific locale, race and ethnicity. This achievement is an outstanding and deliberate artistic technique aimed at depicting the painted woman as a universal common metaphor. Thus, the woman in this painting can be described as a woman from practically any part of the world, because Udechukwu carefully avoided embedding her with definite locale specific denotation(s), icons and signifiers that are not universally shared and acknowledged. Therefore Udechukwu succeeds in removing the consciousness of otherness from viewers. Again, we can observe that the woman's posture, gestures and expressions are metaphoric. Her hands clasped on her head, in combination with her distinctive facial expressions are widely acknowledged universal denotations and typical symbolisms of exteriorizations of immense agony and despair, which are metaphors of melancholy consciousness. More so, this depiction of an image of a gravely fatigued and gaunt woman who is not covering her sagging breasts but is merely tying wrapper around her waist, depicts nuance of her age range and metaphorically projects ambiance of her mood subsumed in her apparent disinterest about eyes gawking at her delicate femininity. Udechukwu through *Aftermath* an oil painting he rendered in 1966 depicts the mood metaphor and archetype of a man in melancholy. Again, it is difficult to declare emphatically from the painting the reasons behind the man's agony. However, our postulation is that the painting reflects the traumatized state of many Igbo men of southeast Nigeria origin residing in northern Nigeria, who had lost virtually all their properties, businesses, and relatives in the ethnic cleansings typified as Nigeria's civil war. In *Aftermath*, Udechukwu presents a man appearing exceedingly disturbed, pained and agonizing. Compositionally the man's expression – shut eyes, face tilted downwards, and hands clasped on the ears and fingers pointing upwards – suggests a form of deliberate pain containment mood, which appear to negate overt and loud exteriorization of emotions as exemplified in *Lament of the Widowed Woman* where a woman helplessly allows exteriorization of agony beyond gestures, posture and facial expressions to the level of unhindered vocalization. The striking thing in the above analogy is the subtle projection of gendered shades of individuals' reaction and exteriorization of excruciating pain and suffering. The title *Aftermath*, suggests that the man is saddened because of a very sorrowful experience. Our supposition is that the painting *Aftermath* suggests Udechukwu's melancholy consciousness generated by wanton destructions life and livelihood in the pogrom. In *Lament of the Unsilenced* rendered in 1967, Udechukwu presents a picture depicting a nude woman lying down on the floor supposedly non-responsive, either dead or dying, and an equally nude child agonizingly wailing beside her. The painting metaphorically depicts abject circumstance, penury and melancholy for the child, who has become orphaned at a very tender stage in his life. In another painting, captioned *The Only Son* rendered in 1968 which is more or less, a reverse reality of the depiction in *Lament of the Unsilenced*, Udechukwu portrays a woman wailing beside her son who lay on the floor either terminally ill, dying or already dead. Both paintings *Lament of the Unsilenced* and *The Only Son*

present painful scenes of lone mourners, thus both paintings conjure the kind of atmosphere that envelopes individuals who happen to be in life-altering loss or sudden traumatic tragedy. The enduring efficacies in the two paintings are their propensity to represent global realities that can befall people from all corners of the world, if wars and terrorism are allowed to occur and fester. Evident rendering techniques which Udechukwu applied in the paintings *Lament of the Widowed Woman*, *The Man Died*, *Aftermath*, *Lament of the Unsilenced*, and *The Only Son* is semi-abstractness. Other artistic approaches visible in these paintings are Udechukwu's depiction of human images with universal common gestures and expressions, attempt at converging and focusing more of the attention of the viewer on the rendered humans by blurring the surroundings around them, and the effectual attempts at reducing locale specific denotations in the paintings. Thus, Udechukwu applies the technique of blurring the surroundings around the woman and boy in *The Only Son*, *Lament of the Unsilenced*, and *Lament of the Widowed Woman* as a means of converging more visual interest of the viewer to predominate on the depicted humans. This technique encourages the viewers to concentrate more on decoding the metaphoric messages embedded in the images for effectual emphases.

The paintings designated as figures 3, 6, and 7, titled *Blue Figures (Refugees)*, *Refugee Children*, and *The Exile Train* respectively, depict acutely malnourished children, women and men, with evidences of infirmities and deformities. In the oil painting tagged *Refugee Children* which was rendered in 1970, Udechukwu presents four children in semi-abstractness. He depicts children who are skeletal with disturbingly emaciated body frames, with their ribs practically visible, while their heads appear disproportionately large because their limbs, shoulders, necks and chests are gravely emaciated, except their protruding stomachs, which denotes kwashiorkor, a form of severe protein malnutrition characterized by an enlarged liver with fatty infiltrates and 'edema'. Similarly, in *The Exile Train* rendered in 1968, Udechukwu indicates that consequences of wars and violent crisis are borne by all including children who are painfully forced to embark on gruelling transhumance to uncertainty as refugees, whereas in *Blue Figures (Refugees)*, also painted in 1968, Udechukwu depicts two individuals who appear physically and emotionally debilitated. Again the style is semi-abstractness evidenced in elongation of forms. The three paintings, *Refugee Children*, *Blue Figures* and *The Exile Train* all conjure feeling of prolonged severe hunger, acute infirmity and severe malnourishment, which are universal common. In *The Man Died*, a watercolour painting rendered in 1970, Udechukwu presents a picture of a dead man whose corpse suggests infirmity, apparently Kwashiorkor, exemplified by the swollen stomach which appears disproportionately large for the skeletal limbs.

Although Udechukwu's inspiration mostly emanates from his personal experiences from the monumental human misery and deaths during the Nigeria's civil war, these eight paintings in many ways relays poignantly the commonalities of realities brought about by wars which immediately remind most adult viewers of tales of agony in history and on-going in several parts of the world. Practically, in all the eight paintings, Udechukwu deliberately applied colours that accentuates as well as project gloomy and melancholy mood. Furthermore, these eight paintings project universal common because his deliberate none inclusion of defining environment in the eight paintings help to negate possible and clear locale specificity of the image(s) in the painting. More so, the paintings represent Udechukwu's portrayals of efficacious propensity to provoke subliminal interest in the viewers. In the result of our field interaction study involving artists and non artists, most of the viewers readily attest that the eight paintings by Udechukwu which we showed to them are effectual in disrupting their conscious and unconscious continuation of detachment from 'the unfortunate others'. Similarly some of the viewers after viewing the paintings observe that the paintings activated their psychical alignment with the existence of

agony of others. Thus, their responses indicated that these paintings by Udechukwu are efficacious means of imbuing effectual catharsis for enhance feeling of oneness of humanity. Therefore all the eight paintings in different ways subsume Udechukwu's memories of the war which remain a factor that arguably influenced his portrayals, and it supports our theoretical inclination that artists (painters) in many ways are driven by past experiences, personal ideologies, philosophies, and worldviews.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates how the selected eight paintings, as similar texts made available, cognitive channels enabling plausible psychoanalysis of the Udechukwu's creative vision, worldview, philosophical inclinations and emotional state. Also, we adumbrated on the remarkable rendering qualities of the paintings which aided effectively the embedding of multiple interpretive communities' nuances while they remain representations of archetypal universal common. More so, we explained how the application of select theories helped in espousing contexts of efficacy of Udechukwu's paintings in projecting melancholy consciousness, embedded propensity to activate effectual psycho-catharsis, and empathy. In the end, our interpretations explained how Udechukwu's techniques in these paintings created perpetual atmosphere subsuming consciousness of universally shared debilitating agonies of human accommodation of violence. We also explained that dense interpretive cognitive immersion by viewers of art is not usually a straight forward conclusion of the encoded information by the artist. We as well espoused on instances of divergences in interpretations by various categories of viewers by discussing the following variables: the degree of consciousness activation achievable by different works of arts on each individual; how long these activations can last in different individuals; the reasons behind the attainment of greater or lesser activations in different people; and how the efficacy of works art can be properly harnessed. Using Udechukwu's works, we demonstrated that art can speak to all categories of viewers and each viewer naturally attempts to decode art his or her subsisting interpretive and cognitive capacities. We observed also that no two individuals have provided exact interpretive analysis of the same art in our many years of scholarship and workshop experiments. However, there is possibility of similarity in the results of interpretations of the same art. Again, an art as a text is a language and because individuals' knowledge of a language varies, it is logical and plausible to say that the metaphor and density of a text will not yield exactly to the same degree to the concerned viewers, due to the reasons we adduced above.

Note

ⁱChristopher Uchefuna Okeke, a highly celebrated professor of Fine & Applied Arts was born on 30th April 1933 and died on 5th January 2016 at Nimo his native home in Anambra State, Nigeria. Okeke espoused and extended the ideas of *Uli* patterns, an ancient Igbo symbols, mostly used in body paintings and pottery decoration. He also opened a cultural centre at Kafanchan, which later became the Asele Institute, Nimo, which contains a collection of artifacts, objects, and artwork, and remains one of the most important repositories of documents, artifacts, and mid-20th century African art (Okeke-Agulu 2017).

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