

VISUAL ARTS AND INTERSECTION WITH KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

“Natural synthesis” compartmentalised the black art world. This essay unravels how the artist, EL Anatsui, in a “selective critiquing and re-evaluation of self”, dared to “wriggle out” of that quagmire. Thus, reactivating the dynamic terrain that lives and is animated from within the soul of artists, he forged a new path of creativity. With empirical analysis and the engagement of storytelling mechanisms, this essay unreels that artistry. Anatsui, in spite of his academisation and art practice, takes a detour to cloth-making craft traditions, particularly the Kente weave and its autograph, for inspiration. Hence, the “vital and enabling” intellectual paradigm “resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions” make possible an intersection with arcane knowledge, while the “uniting representation” of the synthesis in the appropriation of Memory and Interview grounds the contexts within which each artwork is experienced. EL’s “non-fixed forms” make visible the temerity of new shapes and forms forged directly from the wellsprings and fecundity of African roots as exemplars of the art of the new dawn (Ben Shahn, 198:53). A deconstruction of EL’s artworks reveals the groundings of his discourses on assemblages of “Forgotten Biography” and the engagement of “mythopoetic imagination” (Marina Paolo Banchetti-Robino, 2011) in the recalibration of personal expression in language and imageries that inflect spiritual ties to ancestry and the reality of memory. This is a sufficient basis for the historical narration of the intersection of visual arts and knowledge.

Keywords: visual arts, intersection, knowledge; compartmentalisation, “mythopoetic imagination”, forms and shapes, iconography

“Express new ideas in old wood. Mix time-furrowed experience with buoyant smoothness; the concavity of old time with the convex posture of new time. New wood has poetry locked in it. Old wood is poetry itself, time having worn off its prose what do you do with pant singlet towel buba cloth? You at least must have heard the background and inside stories narrated by the people in assorted voices”

(*Old and New EL Anatsui*, 1991).

The 1960s witnessed the flowering of the “*natural synthesis*” modernist ideology and universalistic paradigm in a plethora of varied paintings, sculptures, even performance and installation arts. Europe seemingly succeeded in the “compartmentalisation” of the black art world with that invariant label. However, the artist, EL Anatsui (Ghana-Nigeria), in a “*selective critiquing and re-evaluation of self*”, dared to “wriggle out” of the quagmire. EL’s artworks aptly described as “*non-fixed forms*” (EL Anatsui, 2015) in concert with that spirit, simulates the lyrical poetics of patterns and colour with graphic marks and symbols, the most distinctive characteristics of native *Akan Kente* fabrics. EL grounds his discourses on assemblages of “*Forgotten Biography*” and the engagement of “*mythopoeic imagination*” (Marina Paolo Banchetti-Robino, 2011) in the recalibration of personal expressions in language and imageries that inflect spiritual ties to ancestry and the reality of memory. Alagoa’s picturesque admonishment *Anya Diali Bu Anya Ekee, the keen observer’s talent resides in the capacity to patiently observe and read* (E.J. Alagoa, 1991) frames the discourse of this essay. However, the proverb *Nku Di na Mba na eghelu Mba nni, A people’s wood is their source of cooking fire*, made famous by Pat Oyelola (2003) encrypts the wonder and fascination of the “*miraculousness of the commonplace*” (Arthur Danto, 1963) that the artworks enact. Hence, with words, metaphors and folklore, legends and tradition in re-imaginings, the artist in engaging these simple tenets of language as *aide de memoires* shocked the world with artistic spectacles inspired by history, culture and myth. This reveals the role of the artist as poet in society who yields an insight into the reality of imagination in picture making.

This essay engages: (I) a provisional gleaning of the groundings of the artistic substance that informed EL’s art; (II) an empirical analysis of principal artworks of this master to unravel the platforms of picture making he employed, and (III) a deconstruction of the works to unfold the reality of the engagement of “*mythopoeic imagination*” in the critical enfoldment of “*stolen voices*” in the dislodging of the western cognomen, “*natural synthesis*”. The emergent stylistic features of the new art debunk the western takes, however pliant their frames. Indeed, reflecting Jean-Hubert Martins’ view (1989) that the burden is on the new creator to play the role of a *social agent* who works against his own contexts in order to foist other options, and to narrate differently the link between the artist and his own society. Hence, playing the role of “*central node of the confrontation*” (Bruce Altschuler, 1989), the artist imaginatively reconstructs his identity, culture and history. This points to a new generation of artists, aptly described as “*transvanguard*” (Gerard Houghton, 1998). Affirming a true vanguard of artists that forces a disengagement from the limiting concourse of their particular cultures, such giants bestraddle the cultures to operate a futuristic system

of signs that register the urgencies of the cosmopolitan world. Transcending all cultural specificities, but assuming global visionaries, the artists direct their message to a global world. As cynosures of the new avant-garde, the new breeds foist new forms of expression capable of addressing the concourse of cultures. This is the audience, such artists serve! *Transvagarde*, is a shorthand term that aptly describes that peculiar breed of artists, who heeled in their individual cultures but are able to use that grounding as formulaic, for art-making addresses concerns and matters that affect both the local community and the world as a cosmo polis, *tout le monde!* Reflecting the global ethos of international citizenship, such artists deride cultural specifications that may tag them as ‘*Ghanaian artist*’, ‘*Nigerian artist*’, *et cetera*. That international breed of artists, by dint of their “**hybridity**”, collectively in their varied voices, speak a language that ascertains the colour and image laden metaphors of everyday speech taken from the places and spaces of Africa and the world (Anatsui, 1991). Hence, in hype-graphically articulated visual language, these oral metaphors are translated to rehearsed and caroused imageries that meet the gaze. Ben Shan (1964:53) informs that the emergent artistry in its spectacles of colour and shockingly modernistic media makes (EL, for example, creates his new art in unconventional material taken directly from recyclables and waste products of urban consumerism: flattened bottle tops, food cans and even bottle neck wraps simulated as fabric clefts. These are all stitched together with copper wire threads), visible the forms and shapes of man’s growth in artistry and aesthetic sophistication. *Transvanguard* artworks sophistication reflect legendary artistry in larger-than-life sculptural, graphic, architectural spectacles. In fact, the artistry even incorporates re-visualisations of the image laden metaphors encrypted in everyday pigeon of the marketplace in its imageries. Indeed, post 1960s art of this genre, was affective inspiration for the stained-glass paintings in the boundless images of ecclesiastic religion. The works of the Nigerian glass masters: Y.C.A. Grillo and David Herbert Dale, and the other artists, Frank Ugiomoh and Nsikak Essien in the post Vatican II Church are the ready examples that come to mind (P. Nelson Graves, 2014).

I

Gleaning the Groundings of Artistic Substance

Disaggregation of the colonial world was initiated with the assumption of independence and self-rule by the former colonial territories. The intellectual leadership of the world, however, remained in the hands of the former masters. But conscience and the collapse of the enlightenment paradigm forced emancipation and a new revelation of truth: the Black contribution to the dynamism of the intellectual new world order was a *sine qua non* to the future. It is on this threshold that immanent philosophical posture *Negritude* rebounds! I hope to show that the engagement with literary paradigms, specifically, Texts that inflect black resistance, such as the philosophy of *Negritude*, with inspiration from Philosophy and

Poetry, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre's ground-breaking preface to an Anthology of African and West Indian poetry, edited by Leopold Sedar-Senghor *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et Malagache de langue francias* (1948), and Aime Cesaire's *Poetry and Knowledge*, in their anti-Cartesian epistemologies, inspired the significant cultural roles of poetic imagination. In order to accomplish this, I would briefly discuss Sartre's aesthetic historicism and its response to the Enlightenment Cartesian paradigm that informed the *natural synthesis* of the 1960s. I will then bring Sartre's ideas regarding the place of imagination, poetry and myth-making to bear on my discussion of the inflection of Cesairean poetry and Sartre's essay *Black Orpheus* (1967). Indeed, this paper situates *Negritude* at the heart of the fight for Black consciousness and points to its entrenching of poetry and myth in the creation of awareness, culture and community.

Sartre, like the anti-Platonic philosophers, supposed that to understand earlier societies, a study of language and myth were indispensable, while emphasising the role of imagination and mythopoeic creation in the development of history. That vision can be appropriately called "aesthetic historicism". A. T. Grant (2018) claims that such a man-made method of historical criticism offers another view of history that connects mind's eye, metaphor and myth to the creation of the gods by the poet. This suggests ways of knowing that implicate reason. Like the anthropologists and psychologists that emerged in the 20th century, the unconscious communicates that which is unknown by way of symbols, and some of these symbols purchase a social function. Living symbols compel unconscious participation and bestow a life-enhancing effect. Symbols of this latter kind, woven into mythic structures are the functional influences that shape culture. Myth is the ruling element of the individual and society, as it has been worked over, explicated by awareness and group processes. Myths, poetry, and art are the momentous means for understanding the spirit of a culture in a given epoch (Shahn, 1965). Hence, in the search for truth, it is imperative to begin with imagination. This is the search for and the figural significations whereby they are epitomized in their **iconical transformations** in history".

The Texts and Poetry

Let us now explore the foregoing notions of poetry and myth to see how they aid an insight into how the poetry of *negritude* accomplishes the task of imaginatively reconstituting the identity, culture and history of people in spite of geographical and colonial domination. I hope to show that this poetry fits the model of a myth-making poetic. Hence, the visual artist in attempting to "reinvent" himself/ herself engages the force of lyrical language akin to the manner of the myth-making power of the *negritude* poets, who actively evoke and elevate black identity and effectively undermines the domination of the colonialist *natural-synthesis* dicta.

Suffice it to state that the Rationalist paradigm of the Enlightenment, imposed a certain epistemic picture of *Man the Rational Knower facing Nature, the Unchanging Object of Knowledge* (). Natural synthesis was a residual product of that epistemic shift. This paper takes the view that the rationalist notions of scientific rationalism goes against the grain of a modernist analogy. Instead, the humanistic study of language and its undercurrents of poetry give the study of man and nature a fuller discursive frame. Coupled with poetic imagination, with its profound knowledge, lyrical language digs deep into the nature of being. Césaire asserts that “at the heart of poetic knowledge, lies an astonishing mobilisation of all cosmic and human forces. This governs the poem in the entirety of experience that it unravels. Further claiming that myth binds us to the source of being, and the mythopoeic imagination connects us to nature, to our ancestry and history. Césaire points out that the unconscious, which all poetry appeals to, is the receptacle of the kinship which connects us to nature. Poets have long known that life cannot proceed without symbols and myth (J. Morse Settery). Great poetry, like Léopold Sédar-Senghor’s *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malagache, Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry* (1985) and its introductory essay *Orphée Noir* culled from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *What is Literature? and Other Essays* (1988), and the Poetry of Aimé Césaire create a living counter-myth from the insights, sentiments, thoughts and visions of black poets.

Patrick Hutton (1972) reminds us that it is not man’s existential involvement with the physical world that is crucial for the way man fashions his own nature. Instead, he insists that the process of creation is entirely the product of imagination. Indeed, imaginative creation is the means by which man’s consciousness of the world unfolds. Reminiscent of the Negro Renaissance, Poet Langston Hughes’ *A Dream Differed*, the black artists’ dream of a positive renaissance does not die but manifestly explodes in ground-breaking spectacles. However, these feverish reincarnations are foisted momentarily in Foucaultian feats “*resumptions, disappearances, and repetitions*” (Michel Foucault, 1987). These are captured and metamorphosed in spite of their evanescent memorials, in the structure of a symbol (Beat Wyse, 1987).

How Did EL Do It?

Hence, the artist in Sartrean language, is likened thusly:

“*Orpheus going to claim Eurydice from Plato...it is by letting himself fall in trance, by rolling on the ground like a possessed man tormented by himself, by singing his own anger, by exhibiting his wounds, his life torn short, by becoming most lyrical, that the black poet is most certain of creating a great collective poetry*” (Jean-Paul Sartre, 1967).

Hyped on the unconscious, but in a playful dream-like fashion, the artist's decent into himself dares like Sartre's "*Orpheus to claim Eurydice from Pluto*" (Sartre, 1967) transposes the pictorial elements in traditional Ewe Kente fabrics (literally simulating the "weave and weft processes" of Kente and its design elements onto his new artworks by becoming lyrical in thoughts and imaginative in creation), the consciousness of his world unfolds. In rejection of the rationalist "*natural synthesis*" but embracing the mythopoeic imagination, EL plunges deep into his true actuality (world of "dream and childhood innocence"), connecting to nature, culture, ancestry and history. True to the *Sankofa* dicta, a resort to "*the aesthetic principles and values of the past*", as a ground well for understanding the intuitions of modern expression (Kofi Antubam, 1963; Kwame Nkrumah, 1965; Leopold Senghor, 1963); the master tapped into the "*collective consciousness*" (Carl Jung, 1927) to reformat cultural memories employing the strategies and media of modernism. Thusly, enacting a personalised discursive space for the narrating of postcolonial visual production that shocked the world, EL made Africa's contribution to "*universal civilization*" (Leopold Senghor, 2010).

In order to demonstrate the context of black resistance *Sankofa* ("*go back and pick*") is imperative to peruse the exhaustive works of Kofi Atubuam, Kwame Nkrumah, both Ghanaians and Leopold Senghor's Negritude and the poetry of Aime Cesaire. These are the inspirations and texts from which EL's artworks accomplish that spectacle.

Anatsui's art offers nuanced commencements in surfeits of fleeting memorials that bracket a ground-breaking *pictorial turn*. Challenging the neocolonial power games, *BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN* and *OLD MAN'S CLOTH* (Figs 1 & 2), among his many works in the new genre, unveil and devastate the traditional western compartmentalisation system of **signs**. In fact, the artworks discuss African artistry as the overarching mechanism of change that affects a de-centering point **of view** from the erstwhile "*natural synthesis*" cognomen. In real political terms, these positions-taking framed in artistry symbolically recast the Sartrean and Foucaultian metaphor of power through the opposition *invisible/ visible* in a political assertiveness. In fact, these images inflect on Black arts contemporaneity by simply "*unpacking*" coloniality (Sallah Hassan & Ifitiker Dadi, 2001:6). Indeed, these works replete the framing of the expectations of ambitious articulations of visions of consciousness recited in international global exhibitions like *Magiciene de la Terre* (1989) and *Africa Remix* (2007).

Historical and Geo-political Contexts

Articulated in the Texts: *Revue Noire* and *NKA* (henceforth, *RN & N*) EL's *oeuvres* inspired the collapse of the 1960s "*natural synthesis*" paradigm. Achille Mbembe (2015) intuit that

in seminal dialogues of cultural identity in the African artworld, the framing of the African body, urban sites and the dynamics between African aesthetics and the western outlook, RN & N while aiming at the widest possible international art world and its media, affected the “tourist gaze”. In the same vein, the simulacra of Kwame Nkrumah’s *Sankofa* ideological *cultural turn* (1965), with its idiosyncratic notions of consciousness in self independence, project the plurality of the personality of the artist. In fact, the master in singular expressions forced to the notice Simon Njami’s distinctions between Africa and Africans, between identity and nationality, between expression and politics (2016). Hence, by dint of artistic intuition and “*the critical light shed by anthropology on cultural relativity and intercultural relationships*” (Annie Cohen Solal, 2018), the *Magicienne de la Terre* Show (1989) heuristically legitimised and synchronically established the direction of the *oeuvre* of the new artist and the discourses of art. It is significant to allude to the new shuffled geo-politics order of the time (in Berlin, Beijing, Kabul, New Delhi, and Johannesburg) that permitted the exchanges and interactions with other territories, which until then had been impossible (Solal, 2018). Parting ways with the French academy and set traditions of exhibition-making, but implanting a narrative foisting embedded peculiarity of artistic slants reflecting idiosyncratic *oeuvres*, contexts, history and styles emerged. Hence, with perspectives that recognised the former colonial places’ sovereignty, and the critical lenses of academe’s leading philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and a host of other dynamic actors, who debunked western arrogance, the west made gestures supportive of art and artistic styles from the third world, specifically Africa and Oceania. Well-travelled artists, therefore, became the meteors of the new artworld canvassed by RN and N. Crucial to the role of providers of essential changes and of contemporary transformations heralded by the Shows and the Texts that they recited, there was the urgency to take a critical look at the complex phenomena represented by hybridization.

EL Anatsui should be perceived as a qualified individual straddling the hypothesised new tracks of artistic globalisation initiated by RN & N but hemmed on the tapestry of key European sponsored exhibitions of the time, for example, *Seven Stories about Africa* (1969), *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) and *Africa-Remix* (2007) offer a provisional garnering of that artistic substance.

Preceding the details of this essay, it is important to situate EL Anatsui’s biography. George Kubler (1962:6-9) notes that artists’ lives knit together the fleeting mementos of traditional and progressive art practices, while forcing them into the framework of a symbol. The biography of the artist, offers a provisional gleaning of his artistic substance.

Kofi Emmanuel “EL” Anatsui

“EL” born in Ayanko, Ghana, in 1944, but was bred in Kumasi, the historical capital of the Asante Kingdom. A globally acclaimed sculptor, Anatsui was trained at the College of Arts, University of Science & Technology, renamed Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana (1965-68). Tutored in western canonic art and practice but eclectic and Africanist, he majored in sculpture and art education. Anatsui is Professor Emeritus of Sculpture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Ph. D *honoris causa*, Legon, Ghana (2017).

II

ART WORKS

BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN (Fig. 1)

The concurrent 1978 shows at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Grey Art Gallery, both in New York (Christopher Spring, 2012) ebulliently show the phenomenal inspiration of textile traditions as foundations for the artistry of El Anatsui. Both exhibitions demonstrate that the field of artistic practice on a global stage had been expanded. For in both Shows the artist used textiles traditions as a means towards discussing ideas, and concepts which had no natural or even continental limitations (Spring, 2012).

Anatsui’s employment of cloth as theme taps into the worldwide cognizance of its cultural power and value as a commonplace material and symbolic item of African culture. In *Gawu*, Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales (2002) Anatsui’s installations attained global recognition. In unique metal foil creations, Anatsui pursues a theme of transformation, challenging the tag of metal as a stiff and rigid medium, but rather showing it as a soft, pliable, almost sensuous, material (Anatsui, 2012). Created with “many hands”, these metal sculptures, for example, *Men’s Cloth* and *Between Earth and Heaven* constantly (Figs. 1 & 2) change in shape and luster according to the different curators who install them. Indeed, the *simulacra* variations of metallic folds virtually transmute into spools of new shapes and forms depending on the handling. The *Kente* narrow-strip cloth is an all-encompassing presence. Anatsui’s cloth makes metal a unique fluid medium. EL simulates the string of wrappers as insinuations to the narrow-strip bands of the *Kente* yarns. He positions the narrow strips of metal foil (simply wrappers) in elaborate alternate formations then “sews” them up “selvage to selvage” with metal strings creating *reinterpretations* of typical *Kente* yardage. The finished piece is either in alternate-pattern format or in random idiosyncratic layout. The use of varied colourful metal wrappers allow *Between Earth and Heaven* palette to be dramatically intensified. Created by Anatsui in the 1990s, this metal tapestry, defies a *facile* classification.

From thousands of liquor bottle tops flattened then positioned in an *anatsuistique* colour scheme, and stretched together with copper wire, his remarkable overarching composition emerged. The completed luminous free-standing installation has a pliability that the artist subsequently exploits. Impressing seamed “creases and folds” into the surface and bestows it with an animate billowing quality, writes Christine Giuntini (2008:66). This I call the standard Toga effect! Anatsui challenges the notion of metal as stiff and unyielding, thusly offering endless possibilities for reshaping and reconfiguration. Christine Guitini at the Met installation overseen by EL himself (January 6, 2008) describes *BETWEEN* as dazzling and vibrant tapestry expanding outside from the gallery wall on which it hangs. This spectacle in deep radiance suggests the magnificence of *Kente*, in gold tones attributive of high royalty, warmth and aglow with long life and prosperity. In *BETWEEN EARTH*, the predominant gold foil represents a phenomenal elevation of the commonplace accumulation by its artistic conversion. At the same time, it alludes to the precious mineral resource exported from old Gold Coast to the world. In hindsight, it is fascinating to recall that the same networks that evolved to exploit West African gold eventually shifted focus to trade in slaves. In exchange for the human cargo, merchandise and commodities like liquor and textiles were imported into the region. All these associations converge in *BETWEEN* with other worldly resplendence strengthened by allusions of human shortcomings. The sheen of the expensive silk threads obtained by unraveling imported fabrics incorporated in the *Kente* at the beginning of the 18th century is here formally evoked by the artwork’s shine and its passages of multicoloured **weave**. The alcoholic spirits poured as libations honouring ancestors and also consumed in large quantities are concretely manifest in this work, composed of bottle caps discarded by a single population. Anatsui uses the *leit motif* of *Kente* cloth as a means of engaging a conversation with his audience. Simulating different textures, different forms, that seemed highly pixilated “*complexsification*” offers innumerable possibilities in embryonic envelopes and vistas of wonder for the aesthetic pleasures and enjoyment of viewers at any show.

OLD MAN’S Cloth (Fig. 2)

Made of foil liquor bottle wrappers linked together in a technique that EL describes as part of the “nomadic aesthetic”, *MAN’S CLOTH* reflects the artist’s open offer to the curators participating in the creative process. Hence, with the emergent fluidity of forms and share indeterminacy in the envelopes and shapes that characterise his works, EL breaks new ground in artmaking. Thus, the curators and their handymen are authorised to try their hands at forming what the artist has provided as a starting point (Anatsui, 2011). The mosaic of brands of liquor labels and their inscriptions have names linked to events, people, hallow allusions to *Kente* congruent traditions of same practice.

History in Africa finds its “dialogue” in cloth! Despite the conversion of real bottle top wrappers, the grim realities of the Middle Passage, in which liquor was a primary merchandise exchanged for the human cargo of slaves, is memorialised. For Anatsui, the bottle tops were iconic to a history. “Bottles capping” fashioned in Europe for the transfer of drinks from European merchants to African markets (transformed to flat wrappers, as artifact) is symbolised as a historical ground-breaking technology. Borne out of the currency of trade, Anatsui draws attention to the important development of trade and merchandising in Africa from Europe, beyond the slave trade: “*So I think drink has a lot to do with the link between the continents. That is a historical fact!*” (Anatsui, 2011).

A contemporary master, EL has mined his landscape for locally available materials and idioms of expression, and reversed them into personal creations with an entirely new syntax. Embracing a visual language culled from the colours and patterns of Ewe and Asante strip weaving, swarmed in *Adinkra* motifs, he appropriated the glittering legacy of those regional millennial textile traditions with echoes of their cultural significance. In virtual reality of classic Ghanaian *Toga*, monumental in scale and highly sculptural in the way they drape the body as the apparel of leaders, resplendent in undulations that evoke tactility, EL renders freshness (Fig.2B). The artworks resplendent colour scheme of gold, red and black transmogrifies the fancy of finely woven silk into the medium of base metal. *HEAVEN* is a tribute to the grandeur of West African aesthetics grounded in strip-woven textiles and reflects upon the sculptural nature of cloth. Anatsui’s transformation of base metal is fresh and enchantingly original!

Conclusion

EL, in dynamic organizations of lines, colour and ephemera, grounded in the playfulness of art (Gadamer, 1986:123-6), emphasised in the textures of his artworld, keyed into the discursive frames of the RN & N texts. Daring to create a bridge from the invisible to the visible and from the specific to the universal, the artist affirmed the unique contributions of the poetry of Negritude to “universal civilisation”. In forms that permeates through myths (in fact, dreams and fancies), a historical milieu emerged. In concert with the kin-folk consciousness of the erstwhile cultural policies of Senghor and Nkrumah, Anatsui utilised endogenous imageries, manmade factory products, even direct engagement with modernist *oeuvre* keen on artistic agency grounded in African epistemeologies, culled from the “*privileged contact zone*” (James Clifford,1997) to create artworks.

With Sartrean audacity, harped on the privilege of visibility and debunking *natural synthesis absolutism*, the artist made strides in the new world order. International bienniales set the pace of a normadism with its hipper-connected artists (such as EL) report the transnational

flux while defining new intercultural identities. These shape the advent of the writing of Black art into history.

Reflecting the effects of the *R N & N* proposals, Anatsui's seminal works focused on the imperative of an undiluted nationalistic consciousness wheeled on independence and freedom. This, thus, breaks away from the Universalist dicta of the *Negritude* 1960s, but foists a new reconstructive "seeing process" with ingenuity in sync with a synthesis (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1945). In varied portmanteaus, the artist bestrides the tracks of development in the hybridisation of art for the purposes of a "seeing process" in a postmodernist paradigm. That seeing process took on a dual role (i) a retooling process in the present and a resurgence of own *oeuvre*. Thusly, the artist dared a reconciliation between so called African identity and a certain idea of worldliness reflective of cosmopolitanism in language, colour and native imaginary, as a mastery of that orphic descent.

Moving forward with line/lines, colour, voice and iconography that elude "*globalisation and uniformisation*", Anatsui re-appropriates the moment of consciousness, countering education and training; but engages in a production of individual vision. The intellectual feat affected newness through conceptual frames that schemed ancestral authority, continuity within egalitarian principles and consensus building. Artists, therefore, inflected an epistemological shift in a progressive outlook that inscribed new contemporary experience with meaning. Deeply investing in African locales, the artists discussed in this paper draw attention to the entrenchment of histories that have wetted the imagination and narratives of the African artworld. Without rigidifying Euro-centric paradigms, but de-centering from the avowed natural-synthesis cognomen, these artworks make critical statements that point the way forward for the emergence of a decentered cultural aesthetics. Okwui Enwezor (2010) intuits that the artists of the post-colonial time like EL, engaged in a process of disaggregating the frames of colonial modernity such as the ethos "*natural synthesis*". In a word, "*sankofa*" called for a return to the aesthetic principles and values of the past as grounding for understanding modern expression. The artists reinvented and developed art forms that emphasised a new personality. In the process, they created counter narratives that defrocked the machinations of outside forces.

In a graphic retort to the mythical "*eternal return of the same*", in palling to polytemporal analogy (Bruno Latour, 1993), I engaged the metaphor and legend of the "Python's all-seeing Eye" (Alagoa, 1997), to kernel the discourse of the new imaginary. Insisting on the discovery of their own way of "seeing", EL gave meaning to it in his work through the realisation of this new gaze that Sartre (2017) alludes to. Beset, therefore, in deconstructing a past and daring to invent a future in a present time that is synced to perpetual renewals

like the symbolic python movement, Anatsui created art that symbolised the times fusing a new language that reflects that aspiration in a lexicon logy that would be readable by all, irrespective of history and milieu. Inured in a *Foucaultian* template (Michel Foucault, 1987), this visual artist dared to get out of the cosset and affect that new spirit of independence!

Accepting the visual artist means being able to decipher the original language in which each artist's narrative addresses the world. Communicating to Africa and the world, the artist attempts to express the "puzzles" that constitute narratives in language, "*one of the instruments that transform the frenzied world of sensations into a world of objects and representations*" (Henri Delacroix, 2016). The work of art is an ample exegesis of the relationship between artistic creation and creative consciousness.

Visual Arts and Intersection with Knowledge attempts a reading of artistic narratives, typical of storytelling. Indeed, EL expressed visions in metaphors and idioms which acclaim personal contents and styles that are readable to the *elan vital* and persons with an education undergirded in a *concienciicento* (Paulo Friere, 1964). Declaiming the *1960s natural synthesis*, EL presents expressive images of renascent African philosophy emphasising embodied essences that encapsulate notions of "at-homeness" rather than the avowed abstraction of a world expressed as an equation. Debunking the template of the *Negritude* tradition, the master, thusly, achieved a "seeing power" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1984) demystified in a spiritual experience, "born again"! Deconstructing perceptions and assumptions of universalisations, but imploding ideas of identity, revision, nomadism, cross-culturalism became the *leitmotif* in an endogenous definition of self (Njami, 2012). With the revolutionary literature of the 90s, principally *Revue Noire*, as instrumentality of growth, development, and change, artists made momentous the experiences of that time actualised "*by forcing what was ever fleeting into the calm framework of a symbol*" (Beat Wyss, 1988).

Grounded on the word "gaze", in terms reminiscent of Alagoa's *The Python's Eye* (1981) but asserting the *Faucaultian* myth that nothing is new, only an "eternal return of the same". *The Python's Eye* validates the view that once the artist captures histories as pits of real inspiration in present imagery, it becomes automatically frozen in time. The future, therefore, reflects an extrapolation of the lived instant, a projection that holds only through the strength of the artists' personal vision, in the light shed by the gaze. This is the real essence of the artistic works. Little wonder that the artists delve into the domain of metaphor and legend. **A work** of art remains a record of an activity set down or reincarnated! Henry Focillon (1995:20) intuits that a work of art awaits reactivation. The artist dared to activate that tense and dynamic terrain that lives and is animated from within. Gaining mastery of

one's own image translates comfortably to mean introducing individual version of self, in accordance with our cultural codes and aesthetics, while re-appropriating the measure of time, *The Python's Eye* (above).

Distinguished by the reality of intangibility, reincarnating a living collective memory, with its rituals and sacred experiences of commencements, however, modern-day art and its artists face the reality of the credibility of the reinterpretations of endogenous history. That is the task for future work: keeping history intact in the spate of reinterpretations of oral history and tradition in their continuous re-workings to suit the codes of artists. To give meaning to individual works, a deconstruction of the past and inventing a future is a hard nut to crack!

However, Simon Njami (2016) draws attention to the ethos validated by Hayden White, Alagoa *et al*, emphasising every approach as fragmentary, illustrating that we are simply part and parcel of the puzzle whose general delineations escape us to the very end. In *nouvelle* imaginaries borrowed from both extant histories, even fancy imageries and vignettes culled directly from the twentieth century masters re-embodied in *BETWEEN EARTH AND HEAVEN*, simply put in a metaphor that undergirds the universal truth that every artwork is an incarnation of some earlier form. Overwhelmingly enduring is the fascination with presence, the banalities of life, and the recognition of the spiritual connectedness (Bruno Latour, 1993) of everyday objects as the stuff of art, while entrancing the playfulness of art with unprompted creativity. Anatsui, in a poetic "reincarnation of the same", imaginatively recreates the mythical and mystical ethos of African artistry. His goal is not an ontical description but an ontological summoning of originary being!

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Fig. 3, *OLD MAN'S CLOTH*, 2003, EL Anatsui, Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida, aluminum and copper wire, 487.7 x 520.7© El Anatsui. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

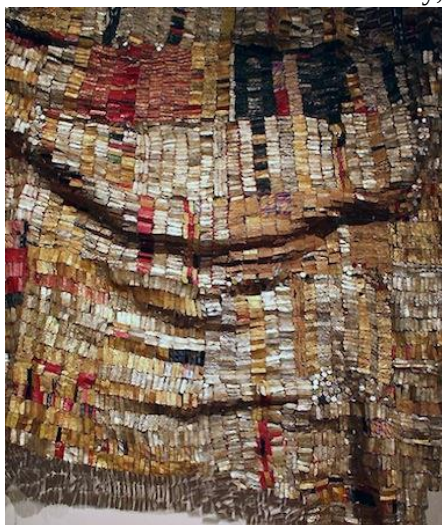


Fig. 2B *OLD MAN'S CLOTH* (detail) EL Anatsui



Fig. 1: *Between Earth and Heaven*, El Anatsui, Medium: Aluminum, copper wire, H. 86 3/4 x W. 128 in. (220.3 x 325.1 cm), 2006. ©El Anatsui. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.