

SIGNS, CITIES, AND DESIGNS OF CAPACITIES: THE SEMIOTICS OF ROAD MONUMENTS IN SOME NIGERIAN CITIES

Obododimma Oha

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The planning of cities is very much a production of cultural narratives which advertise ideologies. One site of the (re)construction of ideological narratives is the public monument, especially sculptures that are located at road junctions and roundabouts, as we find in Nigeria and in some other African countries. Using a semiotic approach, this paper discusses the cultural meanings of such monuments, and how they relate to the idea of the making of the city in post-colonial Nigeria. Viewing cities as sites of capacities, it examines how these monuments as signifiers tend to impose ideologies through the exploitation of the iconic rhetoric of the glorious past, triumphant and rugged culture, and collective destiny. It also identifies these signifiers as means through which cities advertise themselves and compete rhetorically with other cities. The paper tries to relate this ideological nature of the monuments of culture to the challenges of the creation of a coherent social philosophy in Nigeria, as the country stands at the threshold of the Third Millennium, especially the role of cultural semiotics in the reading of the signs of the time and clime.

INTRODUCTION

Visuality is one important aspect of "cityness" that enables the creation of the significance of the city and which also seems to make the latter preferable as a site of civilization and movement towards a "better" future. The city tells its story of the present-future through its "sights" and sighting: it evidences as a centre that neutralizes and transforms (the moving mass of people, the fleet of automobiles, the architectural wonders, the fashions, etc), and its forms of mediation (nightclubs, stadia, streets of action, etc.) that seem to have succeeded the village squares. In fact, one can say that, as a replacement of obscurity which the village now seems to signify, the city (re)constructs itself to be seen, and also speaks to its inhabitants and visitors through what it makes them to see.

In a paper entitled "The Visual Rhetoric of the Ambivalent City in Nigerian Video Films" (Oha, 1999), attention has been drawn to the way the visuality of the (Nigerian) city becomes a means of diagnosing and requesting the treatment of the sense of loss, violence, and exposure of the individual in the city. The visuality of the Nigerian city, however, extends to what could be called "monumental narratives"¹ – the

reconstructions of the histories and cultural values of the society in the form of monuments which are "planted" at road junctions and roundabouts. For me, the siting of these monuments reinforces and appropriates the sense of visibility, for the road is where everybody travels through, and the encounter of the individuals or mobile mass is the convergence of sights on the visual narrative of the monument on the road. The road monument is an open text that everybody reads, although everybody may read it differently.²

The questions that arise, and which are examined in this paper, are: In what way(s) does the visual semiotic of the road monument relate to the invention of the capacities of the city as a modern environment and site of creating a livable future? What do these monuments achieve with respect to the relationship between the city and the sign?

The data analyzed in the paper are the road monuments in some Nigerian cities, which were examined at close range and also photographed from different viewpoints. Other linguistic texts that sometimes accompany these monuments (normally written at the base) have also been collected and used in the analysis. This is because such texts provide useful contextual information on the monuments.

The rest of the paper explores aspects of semiotics that relate to the study. This exploration is followed by the analysis of the signifiers of the monuments in relation to the sociology of the cities. Following the analysis is a discussion on the implications of the rhetoric of the monuments for the redesigning of Nigerian cities and for scholarship on cities.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

At this point, it is necessary to clarify issues that form the theoretical basis of the paper. In the first place, what do we mean by "signs"? What nature of sign is the road monument? What difference does the city make as a context for signing and designing of capacities? And what are the capacities of the city?

The term "sign" is used in this paper to refer to "a stimulus – that is, a perceptible substance – the mental image of which is associated in our minds with that of another stimulus", or, in other words, a form that is "marked by an intention to communicate something meaningful" (Guiraud, 1978:22). It is for this reason also that Wales (1990:419-420) asserts that "signs have no significance,..., unless users recognize them as signs. The meaning of signs has to be learned by the community, and their values can change". The fact that the values of signs can change over time further indicates the arbitrariness in the relationship between the signifier

or signifiant ("the form or concept") and the signified or signifié (the thing or idea referred to) (according to Wales 1990:420) Ferdinand de Saussure calls them.

The classification of signs into the iconic, the symbolic, and the indexical by Charles Sanders Peirce helps us further in having a better understanding of how far from or how close to a signified a signifier could be. As Wales (1990:420) further explains, the icon, for instance a photograph, "visually (resembles) what it represents", while the index, on the other hand, is "causally connected". A symbolic sign, for instance the sounds of speech or written language, arbitrarily refers to something else. Linguistic forms, however, may become iconic in the Peircean sense by mimicking the experience they refer to, as in the case of onomatopoeia/ideophones. These being the case, some signs have been described as "natural" and others as "artificial":

Icons and indices are sometimes termed natural signs (v. Symbols as artificial signs). But even icons need some form of interpretation in the way that symbols do, and may be culture-specific.... (Wales, 1990:420)

Road monuments are basically iconic signifiers, although they may include some linguistic symbols which, as Roland Barthes would say in the case of the relationship between pictures and words, serve as a form of "anchorage". The "anchorage" serves "to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs", or to act as "a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating, whether towards excessively individual regions (it limits, that is to say, the projective power of the image) or towards dysphoric values" (Barthes, 1979:39). Given that they are means of speaking to the road user and city dweller, and do possess what Clive Bell refers to as "the aesthetic emotion"³ (1966:113), the road monuments easily lend themselves to political uses, corroborating the claim by Evelyn F. Hinz (1998:iv) that 'insofar as the essence of the arts is "representation", all artistic expression is a political act...'

Moreover, Barbara Hepworth (1996:376) describes sculpture, which is mainly used as a road/street monument, as "a vehicle for projecting our sensibility to the whole world". Yet, as a "political" instrument, the monument may falsify the sensibility it projects, much as the name written on a bus in Lagos may not determine the treatment the bus conductor would give whoever boards the bus. The public monument, designed to suit the ideological 'taste' of the city authorities or philanthropic organisations, misrepresents an artist's desire, or statement to/of the city. Henry Moore, along this line of thinking, reminds us that the state that pays the artist calls the tune, in other words, determines the style.

I think it should be made quite clear that the transition from private patronage to public patronage would mean a radical reorganisation of the ideals and practice of art. We have to choose between a tradition which allows the artist to develop his (sic) own world of formal inventions, to express his (sic) own vision and sense of reality; and one which requires the artist to conform to an orthodoxy, to express a doctrinaire interpretation of reality. (1996:670-671)

As a matter of fact, the seeming commitment of the modern post-colonial city towards narrating its difference from the rural area or village, makes reinvention and divestment of style inevitable. The city environment, it seems, is being redrawn (as an artistic landscape) to satisfy the designs of money-economy. In this regard, the monuments of the city are not just commodities but also means of commodifying the city for its visitors and dwellers. The monument is part of the image as well as of the cost of the city. Georg Simmel, in an interesting essay entitled "The Metropolis and Mental Life", links the impressions of the city to its psychological effects, especially in its creation of the Otherness of the rural environment and the rural dweller. We would like to cite him at length here:

Lasting impressions, impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts – all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images – the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of on-rushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates. With each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational, and social life, the city sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life. The metropolis exacts from man (sic) as a discriminating creature a different amount of consciousness than does rural life. Here the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, more evenly. Precisely in this connection the sophisticated character of metropolitan psychic life becomes understandable – as over against small town life which rests more upon deeply felt and emotional relationships. (1996:131)

Over-crowding, as a sign of "cityness", which Ortega y Gasset frowns at in his "The Crowd Phenomenon" (1996) is all too familiar to many city dwellers in Nigeria. It also means the excitement and the provision of cover or anonymity – which "exposes" the individual – unlike the rural environment, as often supposed. The "exposure" of the city

dweller has multiple and paradoxical meanings: at one level, it represents the awareness of the city dweller about city things that are hidden from the rural dweller, the alluring city glamour and the availability of the new sites of encounter with civilization. This meaning of "exposure" partly underlies rural-to-urban migration in Africa, which contributes to the over-population of African cities. At another level, "exposure" represents lack of security – which interestingly attends the cherished individualism of the city.

Indeed, the two meanings rejoin, for having knowledge of certain things exposes one to danger. Even the knowledge of the need to have or how to operate a television makes one (as a viewer) susceptible to the powers of the television, especially as a means of transgressing morals, learning new forms of enacting violence, etc. The city generally makes this "exposure" a priority, interestingly subverting its claims to being a "center of civilization" (Briggs 1983:371) and not only the "road" to the future, but also a symbol of a future (for its dwellers).

Also, as an emerging centre in the post-colonial context, the city may, and does, design its capacities in a typical post-modern way – going back to rediscover and reuse those signs (of values) that it is believed to free the individual from, to recuperate a social past and make it present in the consciousness of the city dweller. Indeed, the "presence of the past" in the de/re/signing of the Nigerian city means that an anthropological study needs to be extra cautious in trying to show its understanding of the direction of life in the city.

In the section that follows, an analysis of the ways that the road monuments de/re/sign the capacities of some Nigerian cities will be attempted.

ROAD MONUMENTS AND THE DE/RE/SIGNING OF THE CITY'S CAPACITIES

Telling the capacities of the city is a political act, whether as part of building the image of the city for tourism, or as part of competing with other cities in narrating the city's Selfhood. In respect of tourism, the road monuments in Nigerian cities – as in other cities in Africa and elsewhere – tend to advertise in their mute ways the character and cultural values of the particular city. In this case, the "rhetoric" of the monument attempts to persuade the viewer (the visitor) to accept the city as a desirable environment. For instance, the monument named "WELCOME TO LAGOS", is presented as "depicting the traditional hospitality of Lagos". The monument is constituted by three human figures dressed in white (a colour that signifies peace), and who extend their hands to suggest the traditional act of welcome greeting. At the base on which the figures stand

are environmental icons such as sun(shine) symbol, palms, canoe/boat people, fishes in water, and eyo mask dancers.

Unveiled on 30th November, 1991 by Col. Raji Alagbe Rasaki, the monument presents the city of Lagos as a place where every visitor is welcome and enabled to enjoy the peaceful exotic natural life. In the first place, the hands of welcome that are extended to every visitor means that even rogues are welcome to Lagos – as indeed they are, to the discomfort of the city. The city also welcomes more people than it can accommodate and cater for. This seems to corroborate the claim by Hecht and Simone (1994:144) that:

The African city cannot absorb and maintain its expanding rural population. Still they continue to come, permanently unsettling any ready solution. Government may declare that they are in control of the situation, but they cannot even assess population numbers or precisely describe the modes of living.

After Lagos has welcomed the numerous rogues and street traders in search of the city's money, along with the individuals in search of the good life with good intentions, the city authorities turn back to attempt to identify and "sweep" away the unwanted guests. The sweeping away of the alaye boys and the street traders suggests an irony in the sign of peace and welcome in the monument. Col. M. Marwa's anti-crime squad called "Operation Sweep" (now renamed "Rapid Response Squad") even turns out to express the ambivalence in the notion of "traditional hospitality", especially with its unjust enactment of violence in the city on several occasions, as reported in the Lagos media. It is as if to say that if Lagos is capable of love, it is also capable of hate and of causing of death. It has been observed elsewhere (Oha 1999:8) that this ambivalence of Lagos city is represented in many video films on Lagos, but especially in the comedy, *Lagos Na Wah!!*, and "semiotizing Lagos as a "Jungle" – which we find in the sign "NO PADDY FOR JUNGLE" (No bosom in jungle) on a molue bus carrying both criminals and law-abiding citizens – "conjures up images of barbarism, which contrast sharply with the city's representation as a "paradise" and "Centre of Excellence".

Hospitality, which is qualified as being traditional (to Lagos), becomes an undecidable term, as its meaning has been disrupted. What is provided as hospitality turns out to be (a trap for) the exploitation of the unwary visitor. If Lagos is portrayed as a "jungle", its hospitality becomes suspect, or is cancelled out. The rendering of the concept meaningless implies that in the welcome sign of the monument, there is a silence on the character of Lagos, and this silence ought to be important in the reading of the sign. The verbal anchorage, "WELCOME TO LAGOS",

privileges one interpretation, since, in the other land, the outstretched hands of welcome become clenched fists of violent encounter (with the wild police, the thieving alaye, etc). In this case, "traditional hospitality" becomes a myth that is created and used in commodifying the city for the tourist.

Indeed, other subordinate signs – sun(shine) symbol, palms, canoe/boat people, fishes in water, and eyo mask dancers – narrate the natural and cultural capacities of Lagos. However, as in most tourist discourses, these are taken for granted, and are part of the evidence in the logic of the desirability of the city, as presented by the government of Lagos that hired the sculptor. Generally, every government behaves like a business enterprise when it comes to tourism – and must sell the city to the tourist, using the most persuasive iconic elements.

Perhaps one of those "sellers" of the post-colonial city is the cultural value, which presents the sense of the exotic. It is such exotic cultural element that Western tourists would particularly want to see, to justify their imaging of Africa. In Lagos city, Eyo masquerade provides this relief, and is one of the evidences in the logic of the welcome-to-Lagos sign at the toll gate in Lagos. Downtown (at Idumota), the monument of this sacred masquerade is located. A text at the base informs visitors that Eyo is a cultural play of Lagos Island: it is a day's festival staged for the final burial obsequies of a Lagos Oba or Chief and also in honour or memory of a deceased person who has contributed to the progress and development of Lagos. The play takes place only in the streets of Lagos and does not extend beyond its boundaries and 7.30 p.m.

The statue, whose sculptor is unnamed like the "Welcome to Lagos" monument, was unveiled by Capt. Okhai Mike Akhigbe, a one-time military governor of Lagos State, on 11th April, 1987. The Eyo "play", as it is referred to in the text, is obviously an event for a tourist's clicking camera, just as the monument itself is for the tourist and for researchers like me. But there are other "plays" that are never articulated monumentally for the tourist, for instance that of alaye boys who were found, during the course of this research, demanding money from people and robbing freely. There is also the play of lynching of the "ole" (thief) that has been caught in the act. Lagos, thus, has the capacity for different kinds of entertainment, even if the entertainment ends in the watcher's pockets, which reminds us about the interesting assertion by Patrick Geddes (cited in Briggs 1983:376) that "A city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time."

In some other Nigerian cities, for instance Benin and Owerri, the cultural element narrates a persistent traditional political icon. At Uselu in Benin City, we have a multi-dimensional icon of Edo cultural heritage.

Tactically captioned "Heritage", the monument, which was produced by Greg Agonkonkon and commissioned by the Benin City Development Fund as "Project 1", was unveiled by the Benin monarch, Omo N'Oba N'Edo uku Akpolokolo Erediuwa, on 29th May, 1993. The monument narrates the Benin sense of the presence of their past, which is itself symbolized by the presence of the Oba, as revealed by a plaque supplied by the sculptor, Greg Agbonkonkon: a spillover of our cultural and historical past. The egg shape depicts the delicate esteem in which the Edo people hold their traditional heritage. The hole represents the bridge between the ancestral past & the present, ensuring cultural continuity, and the crown affirms the supremacy of our royal father over his subjects.

The past that "spills" over into the present disrupts the reading of the latter as a "new" and self-sufficient cultural moment; it also interrupts the voice of modernity in Benin City, so that both the ancient and the modern compete in trying to express the city.

Interestingly too, shape matters in the monumental narrative of the culture of the city (as indeed it does in all art forms). The egg shape – the shape of delicacy – may alternatively suggest the delicacy of the conversation between the ancient/traditional and the modern. Every modern city is, in a sense, in a delicate shape (an "egg city", we might say), not only because of the interruptive nature of its conversing cultural elements, but also because of its conflictive ideological constituents. The "hole" is not only a channel of continuity as Greg Agbonkonkon tells us, but also exposes the perforation of ideology that underlies the privileging of the monarch over every other person and over every authority in the modern city.

Indeed, it is not only that the Oba monarch, represented by the crown, the beads, and the royal cutlasses, provides meaning and a centre to the monument and to the city, but also, the dominating presence of its icons tends to suggest the power of the real presence of the traditional authority in Benin. This authority is highly revered, and thus, the monument immediately reveals to the visitors (as well as reminds the Benin dwellers) that they are under the shadow of this presence (of the Oba). Visitors who ignore this fact very soon discover that they are not welcome, as the city is capable of making their stay a miserable one. The recent experience of the Military Administrator of Edo State, Navy Capt. Anthony Onyearugbulem, who suspended the Oba from the chairmanship of the state's Council of Chiefs, shows that, indeed, the icon of the

monarch is a serious statement about the political and spiritual power of the traditional ruler in the city of Benin.

In the case of Owerri, the icon of the Ikenga, the traditional signifier of spiritual and political authority in Igboland, attracted mixed reactions when it was installed at Okigwe Road roundabout in Owerri. For some people who resisted its erection (mainly Christians), it signified a return to a "pagan" past – which a "city of God" should not be associated with. Yet this return to a value system that is dying away tells of the predicament of the post-colonial Igboland generally. Colonization and Christianity came with a contrary logic – one about the barbarism, the other about the demonism, associated with the presence of Igbo spiritual and cultural icons like the Ikenga. Yet Igbo persons, like other Africans, find that they are forever strangers to Western culture and spirituality. Thus, a return to the Igbo past – as a part of the Igbo mind – completes a picture of the Igbo person's post-colonial hybridity. The Ikenga icon, until its removal recently, was located less than half a kilometre from Assumpta Catholic Cathedral, thus competing with the Christian icon for both physical and spiritual spaces in Owerri, just as the Snake Temple in Ouidah, Benin Republic faces a Catholic Church in an eternal dialogue over authority.

The Ikenga icon also seemed to constitute a cultural text, which a conventional western library cannot accommodate. It was also a text of cultural knowledge that must be read by all, without any need for registration procedures, and so it was exposed to public gaze, whereby it also exposed our sentiments as we read it and quarrelled about its being there.

Controversies over the icons that narrate the city suggest the instability of the meanings of those icons, and the posture of redesigning the city. Such a redesigning act depends on the authorities that govern the city. The authorities necessarily impose "texts" of monuments on the city, indeed acting the roles of gatekeepers and (re)producers of ideology.

One interesting evidence of this redesigning of the city and the city's capacities is the substitution of a monument at the State Secretariat Roundabout in Ibadan with another one in 1998. The earlier monument, a cart puller transporting some bags of goods, was named "Ise Loogun Ise" (Work is the medicine for sloth), and was erected by a sculptor who simply identified himself as ULK. The cart puller (normally referred to as "truck pusher" in Nigeria) is an important image in Nigerian city life. Among the less skilled persons who emigrate to the cities from the villages, "truck pushers" are known to be very aggressive, tough, and hardworking. Indeed, the "truck pusher" presents an image of suffering in the post-colonial city, and is rightly referred to in parts of Igboland as "Ego

di n'ogwu" ("Money is in the midst of thorns") because of his maximum exertion of raw energy to get the city's money. Also, "truck pushing" experience already provides an idiomatic expression in Igbo discourse – "O naesi onwe ndi troku" (s/he displays the aggressive spirit of the truck pushers). Thus, the "Ise Loogun Ise" monument is reread as a text of suffering, instead of being a text and philosophy of productive labour. For the city's authorities that substituted the "truck pusher" monument, the city of Ibadan must not be seen as a context of suffering. Further, for the text of suffering to exist in front of the State House could become a signification of accusation or indictment of the government whose duty and pledge it is to eradicate such suffering. Interestingly, the eradication of suffering in the city now begins with the eradication of signs of suffering like the "truck pusher" monument.

The substitute monument – a farmer with his crude implement (hoe and cutlass) and a basket of farm produce (yam tubers) – which was produced by a sculptor called Okey Nweke in 1998, resigns the city as a context of productive labour, of plenty, and of absence of hunger. Yet, the area that the authorities would want to maintain silence on – the existence of suffering – still underlies the text of the monument. A farmer suffers – especially with crude implement – under rain and sunshine, to produce foodstuff. Thus, just as the deconstructionists would insist, the text already contains elements that undermine meaning/messages that are authorized. Further along this line of thought, the caption of the substituted monument signed by ULK has not been removed. Its retention shows the multi-voicedness of the substitute, and an interaction of texts – the old and the new, whereby the old becomes the new, paradoxically. Similarly, Ibadan city is an intermarriage of the old and the new in many ways: old traditional authority coexisting with post-colonial democratic and military authorities; traditional philosophies coexisting with modern Western philosophies; past historical affiliations and attitudes persisting in current political arrangements; ethnic loyalty competing with loyalty to federal Nigeria; highrise architectural structures in the neighbourhood of poverty-stricken slums, etc. In fact, this irony in the life and environment of Ibadan city has been captured in a very poem full of imagery by J.P. Clark as follows:

Ibadan,
 running splash of rust
 and gold – flung and scattered
 among seven hills like broken
 china in the sun. (1986:57)

The interaction of "rust" and "gold", of death and life, of pain and pleasure, etc. – which an aerial view of the city interestingly presents (analogically) – is also available in the visual rhetoric of the presence of the city's past in some monuments at the city's roundabouts. At Total Garden Roundabout – which is a few metres away from the University College Hospital – we have the ancient Ibadan Warrior Structural Monument, while at Bere roundabout, there is the imposing statue of Basorun Oluyole, an ancient Ibadan warrior and leader, in battle gear. Clearly, the monuments narrate the pride in "the ancient Ibadan warrior", and may become means of remembering and rekindling the spirit of resistance in the Ibadan person and city dweller. Narrating past military capacities of the city towards the end of the millennium, when military rule in Nigeria has been a nightmare the nation is wrestling to get out of, reveals the difficulty in the reconciliation of the pride in past traditions and present aspirations. We seem to move towards a future, but are not certain about the role of the past. We invoke the past to be able to imagine the superiority, and engineer the preference of, the pre-colonial nationhood over the post-colonial; and this further complicates our journey to the future.

Interestingly, Basorun Oluyole's statue, which was made by Tiri Oladimeji, was sponsored by the 1987/88 National Executive Council of the Federation of Ibadan Students' Union. Students' unions in Ibadan often invoke the history of "the ancient Ibadan warrior" polis in their articulation of their activism. In fact, the students' union bus at the University of Ibadan bears the sign "Ibadan Warriors", which not only derives from a sense of Ibadan history, but also tells of the nature of the uses of (city) history by the city youth, and why the future becomes a construct from readings of the past.

The significations of the culture of violence in the warrior statues in Ibadan seem to tell realistically about the endemic violence in the western part of Nigeria (the "Wild Wild West") where Ibadan has remained an ideological and a cultural centre. But violence is something that many cities in Nigeria and elsewhere are familiar with. It is probably against this background that we also have some monuments that signify and promise peace in some Nigerian cities. In Lagos, one monument located at the Murtala Muhammed Airport Road, Ikeja, promises this peace to those arriving in the city by air (which coheres with, and is part of, the "welcome" rhetoric in the city), especially when these arrivants may have heard so much about violence and crime in Lagos and may be coming with images of fear on their minds. The monument – a dove carrying a piece of twig with leaves – is a universal symbol of peace, tranquility, and

restoration, which alludes to the Biblical narrative on the sign of an end to the Deluge. This trope of the building of the city of peace (not of violence), is similarly enlisted in a monument at a major roundabout in Uyo in Akwa Ibom State. Unlike the Lagos case, the Uyo monument of peace is constituted by four doves carrying twigs, a plurality that not only makes it possible for people, who are approaching from the various roads that meet at the monument, to be "hailed" and challenged by the sign, but also makes the rhetoric of the image reiterative and emphatic.

There is, however, a shift of interest to the narration of technological capabilities in some industrial cities, for instance Aba. Aba, just like Onitsha and Nnewi, is a fast-growing industrial city with numerous "cottage" industries that manufacture or refurbish spare parts of vehicles, engines, tools, shoes, textile, etc. One monument at Owerri Road junction at Aba very interestingly represents this industrial and technological inclination of the city. The monument, which at the time of this research had been knocked down (probably in a road accident), is that of a giant holding industrial tools in his hands.

The techno-semiotics of Aba as an industrial city may obscure the characteristic that Lewis Mumford (cited in Briggs 1983:381) ascribes to the new cities resulting from the Industrial Revolution: "manheaps, machine warrens, not agents of human association for the promotion of a better life". Yet, they reveal how art has begun to engage the dreams and realities of the Nigerian city as a possible agent in the technological growth of the nation. The technology of the Nigerian city would, expectedly, target and also generate the powers of capital for which many people emigrate to the city. In another sense too, the monument could be seen as a means whereby the city of Aba boasts (to other Nigerian cities) about its capacity, and through which it advertises itself and invites the many business people who come from parts of Nigeria (and from neighbouring countries) to buy goods. In other words, what a city says about itself through its (monumental) signs may partly determine the type of patronage it gets from the world that visualizes it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

So far, the paper has tried to show how sculptures that are placed at certain road junctions and roundabouts in some Nigerian cities could be viewed as being more than mere decorations of the cities. It has argued that even as decorations, the monuments play important roles in the articulation of ideologies and may also involve the suppression of what makes the city contrary.

The road monuments tend to reinforce the powers of the city's visuality. If the city is a picture of civilization or a picture painted by civilization, these monuments further indicate the complexities of such civilization; the discontinuous nature and multiple meanings the city could have, especially in a post-colonial milieu where the visions of the past still challenge and perforate those of the present.

Furthermore, the commercialism of the city also means that the monuments on the roads must sign and resign the city as goods and services. The city road (or the road to the city) is the road to "pride" and to an environment that must be experienced, it seems. But as Peter Smith (cited in Briggs 1983:375) has asserted, "Experiencing environment is a creative act. It depends as much upon the subject interpreting the visual array as upon the disposition of objects in space".

A study of the city, and of the signs of the city, is a study of the future, and of statements about the future. The city as a force in the making of a future in a post-colonial nation poses a lot of challenge to African anthropology as we stand at the threshold of the millennium, especially in terms of the re-evaluation of the city as a place of survival, often precarious, highly vulnerable survival; the city as center of civilization or rather of richly varied civilizations in time and space; and, not least, the city as metaphor, with the metaphor itself twisting and turning through the centuries into old and new shapes (Briggs, 1983:371).

Perhaps, such re-evaluation would contribute to the redesigning of African cities that seem to have emerged as bad copies of villages.

Cultural semiotics, as a reading of the signs of the time and clime, undoubtedly, has an important role to play in improving our awareness of how the various signifying practices in culture contribute in making the city mean. The meanings of the African city that are generated have implications for African civilization, especially as cities have been configured as not only "centres" of civilization, but also as sites of infecting civilization, a "cancer" that may eat "to the heart" of the "laws and constitution" of a republic, as Thomas Jefferson (cited in Briggs 1983:376) configures it in his Notes on Virginia.

NOTES

1. "Monumental narrative", in this case, could also mean "very significant narrative", as a visual entity and as a form of communication.
2. Roundabouts and road junctions narrate realities of human contact, of inter/action, of interference. In a curious sense, the meeting of roads metaphorizes the meeting of people. People that meet are already always a plurality of texts, some of which are naturally in opposition. The meeting of

texts, as Yury Lotman argues in his essay, "The Text within the Text" (1994) is necessary and does enable the production of new meanings. Roundabouts thus appear to signify contact and separation in a very special way. But contact and separation of carriers of culture are not one of those social semiosis we can attribute only to colonial interferences with colonized spaces. Such contact and separation have always been available in Nigerian cultural semiosis, for instance in the idea of *orita* or road junction (*aba* in Igbo). In some Nigerian ethnocultures, the *orita* has a lot of spiritual and social significance. In Igboland, it is viewed as a meeting point of the living and the dead, it is thus a site for the offering of sacrifices to the spirits of the dead. Sacrifices are symbolic forms of communicating with the living dead, which is typical of African traditional religions.

In a sense, roundabouts are reinventions of *orita*, signifying the ritual of the meeting between the rich and the poor, the sane and the insane, the citizen and the stranger, etc. It would seem that, in our modern metropolitan culture, town planners and organisations, who site monuments, have returned to the significance of the meeting of roads and the meeting of people, whereby in place of the sacrificial platter normally left at road junctions in traditional African societies, the roundabouts now carry monuments that narrate, remind, challenge and control the imaging of the city.

3. Clive Bell (1996:113) argues that one thing common to all visual arts (pictures, sculptures, buildings, pots, carvings, textiles, etc.) is that they "provoke" what he refers to as "the aesthetic emotion". He presents the hypothesis that the quality in the work of art that provokes this "aesthetic emotion" is the work's "significant form". He pursues the argument – which is not totally acceptable – that works which are merely representative and descriptive do not provoke such emotion mainly because their forms are not made significant: "Portraits of psychological and historical value, topographical works, pictures that tell stories and suggest situations, illustrations of all sorts, belong to this class... Of course, many descriptive pictures possess, amongst other qualities, formal significance, and are therefore works of art: but many more do not. They interest us; they move us too in a hundred different ways, but they do not move us aesthetically. According to my hypothesis, they are not works of art. They leave untouched our aesthetic emotions because it is not their forms but the ideas or information suggested or conveyed by their forms that affect us." (p. 114) Bell's distinction hinges on the view that the aesthetic function is manifested when in a text or work the orientation is to form, in other words, getting to a message through the form that is made prominent. But this prominence of form is not always created as we have in "primitive" art, which Bell uses as an example. A work does not have to be distorted or made extraordinary in form in order to affect us. There are other factors that contribute to the capacity of a work to "provoke aesthetic emotion", such as its location in the environment, its temporal value, etc.; in fact, all conditions relating to the temporal and spatial syntax of the work, semiotically speaking.

4. The "truck pusher" (who is transforming to wheel barrow pusher now) transports commodities that are not his own. He may not only convey the idea of suffering, but also represents the lower class person who labours for the wealthy and middle classes in the city.

REFERENCES

- Barthes, Roland. 1979
 "Rhetoric of the Image". *Image MusicText* (2nd Imp), pp. 32-51. Trans. Stephen Heath. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins.
- Bell, Clive. 1996
 "The Aesthetic Hypothesis". In *Art in Theory, 1900 – 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Rep.), pp. 113-116. Eds. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Briggs, Asa. 1983
 "The Environment of the City". In *How Humans Adapt: A Bio-cultural Odyssey*, pp. 371-394. Ed. Donald J. Ortner. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Clark, J.P. 1986
 "Ibadan". In *West African Verse: An Anthology* (18th Imp.), p. 57. Ed./Ann. Donatus Ibe Nwoga. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Guiraud, Pierre. 1978
Semiology (Rep.). Trans. George Gross. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hecht, D. and A.M. Simons. 1994
Invisible Governance: The Art of African Micro-Politics. New York: Autonomedia.
- Hepworth, Barbara. 1996
 "Sculpture". In *Art in Theory, 1900 – 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Rep.), pp. 374-377. Eds. Charles Harrison & Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hinz, Evelyn J. 1998
 "Introduction: The Politics of Representation". *Mosaic* Vol. 31, No. 2, Special Issue on "Cultural Agendas", pp. iii – vii.
- Lotman, Yuri. 1994
 "The Text within the Text". *PMLA*, Vol. 109, No. 3, pp. 377-384.
- Moore, Henry. 1996
 "The Sculptor in Modern Society". In *Art in Theory, 1900 – 1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Rep.), pp. 669-672.
- Oha, Obododimma. 1999
 "The Visual Rhetoric of the Ambivalent City in Nigerian Video Films". A paper presented at the International Conference on "Cinema and the City", Centre for Film Studies, University of Dublin, Ireland, 12-14 March, 1999.
- Simmel, Georg. 1996
 "The Metropolis and Mental Life." In *Art in Theory, 1900 – 1990*, pp. 130-135.
- Wales, Katie. 1990
A Dictionary of Stylistics. (Rep.) Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Y. Gasset, Jose Ortega. 1996
 "The Crowd Phenomenon". In *From Modernism to Post-modernism: An Anthology*, pp. 219-225. Ed. Lawrence Cahoon. Oxford: Blackwell.