

Comparative Aesthetics and African Sculpture

I. THE “PILOT LOOK”

To Victor Goldschmidt

In memoriam

*Just as sharks are preceded by
their pilot fish, our gaze is preceded
by a “pilot look” that suggests the
meaning of what it is looking at. . . .*

*We very mistakenly believe that we are
free from this look.*

ANDRÉ MALRAUX, *L'Intemporel*

Orientation: Research and Results

A study of African sculpture begins quite naturally with some general considerations. Enough studies have been published that an ensemble of commonplaces has been established; one can neither simply reject them nor take them up again. The present inquiry will orient itself differently, drawing attention not only to objects but also to the mental constructs that are employed and the processes that are taken in approach to these objects. Thus, this essay will be, partly, methodological and epistemological. Its exposition will not separate the results of the investigations from their evolution, from the concepts they utilize, the methods they apply, or from the hypotheses or theories to which they lead or which they more or less openly presuppose. Besides the concern with avoiding the repetition of commonplaces, three reasons justify this approach.

Our knowledge of the African arts has grown considerably over the course of the past decades. On-site studies have multiplied, while research into and analysis of secondary sources—writings from various periods by travelers, missionaries, merchants, explorers, colonial administrators, and even military men—has developed considerably. This dual approach—contextual and textual—following the formula of Daniel Biebuyck (1975), has enriched the available data so spectacularly that it became clear that a synthesis that would be both complete and scientifically serious had become practically impossible. (J. Fry, 1985, W. Fagg, 1973, p. 151) The study of African art has thus experienced a common fate: the important,

speedy development of a discipline has led to its explosion and to specialization that has increased the difficulty of synthesis. Thus it has been noted (F. Willett, 1971, pp. 156–7; D. J. Crowley, 1971, p. 327) that “generalizations about Africa are almost inevitably false.” More specifically, any general proposition—claiming to be true for all African styles—is either trivial or false: trivial because it states only vague generalities; false, because there is presently enough data that exceptions can always be found, cases that weaken any claim to generalization. Thus, wood sculptures are not *always* of one piece of wood: the jaws of certain masks are hinged on, as are the limbs of certain figures, and the panels of the Ijo indicate techniques of assemblage have been used.

On the other hand, the diversity of concepts, methods, and theories is less, by far, than that of the materials under study and, hence, less difficult to master. The concept of expectations (Chapters I and II) thus allows an important number of different questions to be treated in a related and coherent fashion. Methodological and epistemological research related to art history and especially to art ethnology is surprisingly rare. Thus we propose to begin to fill in that gap.

The third reason for our approach is of a didactic order. The methodological orientation of this essay intends to ease the entry of the enlightened amateur into these specialized disciplines. Generally speaking, the results of research are more readily, and also better, assimilated when one connects them to the methodically conducted process that permitted their discovery and establishment. To cut them off from this process often prevents their meaning and range from being grasped correctly. Readers must be brought into the inquiry itself, having the concepts, methods, and hypotheses that are at work within these specialized investigations revealed to them. This association of the reader with the researcher in the evolution of the research has the Platonic dialogue as its unsurpassed model. (V. Goldschmidt, 1947) That it is ancient does not make it obsolete: “It would undoubtedly be simpler to teach only the result. But the teaching of the *results* of science is never scientific teaching.” (G. Bachelard, 1947, p. 234) Isolated results run the risk of being misunderstood by being badly assimilated with prescientific representations. And so we intend to avoid most particularly the more-or-less erudite compilation which, without a method, accumulates isolated and often fragmented results.

Research and Encounter

When we do research and expect something, then find that what we encounter is *different* from what we were expecting, we can react in three different ways.

Perhaps we transform that difference into negation. If, for example, we encounter a work of art that is different from what we were expecting, we might declare, not that it issues forth from a different kind of art, but that *it is not* art. The encountered work is thus thrown out of the realm under investigation. It is not recognized—recognized as a work of art—but misread. Such is the first form of misreading.

Or we might transform the difference between what we encounter and what we were expecting into an identity. But this assimilation is abusive; the difference, specificity, or originality of the encountered work is, this time again, misread. This second form of misreading is certainly less serious than the first one, for the encountered work is not rejected, but it is abusively integrated into our knowledge in such a way that we, quite wrongly, believe ourselves excused from considering it as an object of research and study. Thus, the research is thought to be finished before it has actually begun.

Or, finally, and this is the only scientifically correct attitude, the difference between what we encounter and what we were expecting is noted and respected; it is taken seriously and becomes itself the target of inquiry. But in order to then embark upon the research, it is indispensable that we be conscious of what we were looking for and expecting, that is to say concepts which, existing in *anticipation of* the object of the research, were making that research possible. But the well-known fact about the difference between our expectations and what we encounter invalidates our anticipatory concepts. These have, of course, served as *detectors of difference*, but they must now be abandoned and replaced, we must find alternative descriptive or explanatory concepts. That is when the scientific work truly begins.

This chapter proposes examples of these three possible reactions in encountering sculptures of traditional Black Africa. They have been chosen in such a way as to treat the themes that usually appear in introductions to works on African art. This brief description of the three reactions possible—negative misreading, assimilation, or recognition of and respect for difference—presupposes an understanding of the aesthetic perception generally accepted today that André Malraux summarizes by the metaphor of the “pilot look.” The examples of misreading will allow detection of tenacious prejudices that create so many obstacles to our knowledge of African sculpture in its rich diversity, as well as to the pleasures that it offers us.

Misreadings

The Invention of African Arts

The discovery of the African arts by the West has been described from an historical perspective. It can also be described from an epistemological perspective, placing the emphasis on the forms of research; it then furnishes examples for the kinds of attitudes which we have just described. There is no coincidence, of course, between the stages of the historical account and the epistemological figures: history is not so easily reduced to a logical framework. But, *grosso modo*, the three figures follow one another.

The initial anticipatory system is set up by the conception of art that dominated in the West at the end of the nineteenth century: naturalism in its academicist form. It is obvious that African objects are quite different from works anticipated in this form; one begins, moreover, by judging the former *not to be* art, while they are only different from the art one was expecting. This negative reaction has been aptly named “denigration” by Jean-Louis Paudrat (unpublished thesis, 1974) in a study of the colonial discourse surrounding African arts. This transformation of difference into negation was institutionally translated into a refusal to include them in the fine arts museums collections and by their acceptance instead into museums of natural history, where, as in La Rochelle, France, they sometimes still remain.

The second attitude is illustrated by the relationship of certain European artists of the early twentieth century to so-called “Negro” art. Jean Laude (1968) has shown how some artists were considering African objects as solutions to plastic problems identical or close to those they themselves were trying to resolve. Ethnographic information did exist that would have allowed a respect for the differences and for their interpretation, but these artists did not turn to it. The advantage of this misreading through assimilation forced upon the negative misreading is clear: African works definitively acquired artistic status.

The Absence of History

It has been maintained that the African arts, like the societies in which they were produced, did not have any history. Not only was it said that the Africans had not developed any historical knowledge, but that their societies were fixed, unchanging over the course of time. Malraux in his *Musée Imaginaire de la Sculpture Mondiale* (1952–54), still placed the African arts “outside history.”

Arts without history produced in societies without history: an illusion whose mechanism Claude Lévi-Strauss (1952) has dismantled. The observer belongs to an historical society, ours, that changes rapidly; but the societies being observed change slowly. An observer in a rapid train will have the impression that the slow train that is passed is immobile. Similarly, the Western observer who belongs to a rapidly changing society will have the impression that the more slowly changing societies are unchanging. In other words, expecting a rapid change in the name of history, but encountering a different kind of change, one would then negate, in this way, the historical character of that which one is attempting to define.

Thus, these societies and their arts were classified in a seminegative dichotomy: historical societies and arts or not. This dichotomy demarcated the respective domains of art history and art ethnology. Abandoning this dichotomy causes this manner of distinguishing the two disciplines to crumble.

In order to redirect the investigation, we must modify our preconceptions about historical time and change. The history of a society does not always involve rapid change. Culture within a society is not a simple thing; various cultural forms do not necessarily change either all at the same time or in the same rhythm. The so-called *Revue des Annales* school of history teaches us that historical change, rapid or slow, must be studied under its different cultural forms, over short or long periods of duration.

This pluralization of the preconceptions about time and change is not enough to resolve the difficulties encountered by the historian of African art. Over a short period of time, it is easy to recognize recent or present changes in the African arts. Unfortunately, through the fact of colonization alone, one notes either a loss of authenticity in traditional African art, or its disappearance pure and simple. The object vanishes under the scrutiny of the historian. In the long term, the difficulty is of a different nature. Traditional African societies are not familiar with the written word (*see* p. 11); direct, written documents, richer than oral traditions and above all lending themselves to methodical treatment, are lacking. The ethnographic data demands a specially adapted historical treatment. (J. Vansina, 1968) Archeological sources remain relatively poor. For various reasons, economic ones in particular, African archeology is developing slowly; “unauthorized” digs, aimed at contraband, compete all too efficiently with scientific digs. Thus, at this very moment, the terracotta pieces dug up in the Djenne region of Mali are appearing without any scholarly documentation on the Western art market.

Despite these difficulties, the history of Africa and the history of its arts does not cease to progress. An example, already classic, is furnished by an art history of the kingdom of Benin (Nigeria) undertaken by William Fagg and inserted by Frank Willett (1967) into a longstanding sequence that begins with the art of Nok, includes the art of Ife, the three periods of Benin art, and that ends with the art of the Yoruba, still very much alive.

But history can be negated in another way, implicit this time, by terming the arts and cultures which ethnology studies as primitive. (*see* p. 46) The

presupposition of an absence of history still weighs heavily on the study of African art. Catalogues, even the most scientific, only rarely mention the dates of objects. This "omission of the dates indicates how much art history in Africa, especially south of the Sahara, remains in its infancy." (J. Vansina, 1984, p. 21)

Societies Without Writing

"One should not define a given culture by what one refuses it, but rather by the peculiarities one recognizes in it that justify the attention one devotes to it." (C. Lévi-Strauss, 1973, p. 28) However, today the label "society without writing," manifestly associated with a negative idea, is given preference over the terms "primitive" or "without history." But this is a counterexample; for it's not that writing different from what one was expecting is encountered—thus there is no difference whatsoever to be transformed into a negation. A "statement of fact" is formulated (*ibid.*): the negation is direct and correctly declares a state of things.

Here the risk of error comes, rather, from abusive assimilation. The absence of writing is associated with positive traits: it seems "to exercise a kind of regulatory influence on a tradition that must remain an oral one." (*ibid.*) The risk is one of confusing elements of the oral tradition with written documents. Ethnology is inseparable from writing; oral information is transcribed and published. This transcription runs the risk of transforming that information into *texts*, in such a way that in the end we might think we will find what we were expecting. In this regard, the case of the myth is revealing. Pierre Bourdieu stresses (1987, pp. 99, 138) the risk of assimilating myths whose original status is an oral one with the written myths of our classical cultures and treating them abusively as texts. Lévi-Strauss observes on several occasions that field investigations most frequently collect *diverse* versions of a myth, not one of which ought to be treated as a canonical text. Jack Goody (1979) has undertaken the study of the forms of "domestication of savage thought," concentrating on "the effects of writing on the modes of thought . . . and the most important social institutions" (p. 31). In other words, our initial expectations are affected by their origination in a society that attaches great importance to the written word; they have, therefore, every chance of being ethnocentric.

This difficulty does not concern only myths. The latter serve as documents in the iconographic study of African art. In France, the students of M. Griaule, doing investigations among the Dogon, privileged mythology when they depended primarily on data furnished by a unique and exceptional informant named Ogotemmelé. (M. Griaule, 1966; M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, 1965) Their interpretation of Dogon statuary caused hesitation on the part of the Anglo-Saxon specialists. We shall show later on (Chapter III) that this kind of interpretation, favoring myths and their autochthonous exegeses at the expense of the words of rituals, tends to bypass the ritual usage of plastic objects. But it is in their ritual usages that the plastic object and the word are directly linked. And ritual speech, because it is oral, fragmentary, and linked to a context that is extra-linguistic, is much more difficult to deal with as *text* than is the myth and its exegeses. One may wonder whether this type of an interpretation of Dogon sculpture does not fall apart in view of the preceding remarks.

If we now move on from iconography to the study of artistic production, it is proper to call attention to the existence of a link—which seems to have been studied very little—between writing and design. We are not talking about design on the surface of a figurative or utilitarian object, but on an independent base, like our sheets of paper. In the history of Western civilization, the passage to writing took place in Greece. In

ancient Greek, the same verb (*grapho*) means to engrave, to design, and to write. The equivocal “to design—to write” persists in modern European languages: in the “graphic arts” it means design, but in “graphology” it means writing—not to mention “calligraphy” or the metaphoric use of the word writing to designate one aspect of the style of design, as well as the recent term “graphism.” But design on a separate surface plays an important role in the West in the process of artistic creation, as a recent exhibition, entitled *Première Idée [First Idea]* (J. Ramade, 1987) demonstrates, in which various kinds of design are shown, done as preparations for paintings and sculptures. In traditional Africa, the absence of design on a separate surface intervening in the process of artistic production corresponds to the absence of writing. What might be seen as preparatory design is not only reduced to a very simple form, it is executed on the material itself and limited to the beginning of the cutting of the wood. This suggests how the absence of writing may account, at least in part, for the forms of the artistic work that are different from those to which we are accustomed. This observation could be applied particularly to the question of proportions: the absence of “squaring,” practiced in ancient Egypt (E. Panofsky, 1969, p. 60 and figs. 2 and 3), permits us to understand the absence of a systematic conception of proportions that very probably requires writing.

Anonymity of the Artist

In catalogues of African art, captions mention the names of artists as rarely as they do the dates of works. Until very recently, it was thus that “songs without singers, tales without storytellers, and sculpture without sculptors” (W. D’Azevedo, 1973, p. 1) were exhibited. Popular books and sales catalogues still speak of the anonymity of the African artist.

But the terms “anonymous” and “anonymity” have several meanings that correspond to various uses of the word “name” from which, by negation, they derive. The name in question here is the proper name, applied to one individual only, a specific artist in this case. But in “making a name for oneself” or “having a name,” the word is equivalent to “renown.” In our society, the proper name is not just spoken but written, and when it is written by the author’s hand, it is called a “signature”; in this sense a work without a signature is anonymous; but art history teaches us that the practice of signing one’s name is not a constant. In the end, then, anonymity may simply be the result of our ignorance.

When one speaks of the anonymity of African artists, one does not mean that they are not individuals, nor that they have no proper names, nor that we do not know their names. Nor is the absence of a signature, attributable to the absence of writing, the point. One means that the artists, as individuals or, more precisely, their artistic individuality manifesting itself through works, cannot be assigned and that, consequently, no renown can be attributed to the artists or their works even within the framework of their social group.

But it is obvious that, this way, all we are doing is describing the negative of artistic individuality as we have conceived of it and evaluated it in the West since the Renaissance. Searching in the African domain for artistic individualities thus conceived and encountering different forms of artistic creation and of the social status of the artist, one transforms these differences into a negation once again. The development of research has invalidated these ethnocentric representations.

In Africa, as elsewhere, the works demonstrate the individualities of their authors to a varying degree and with varying success. The first individual style recognized as such, that of the Buli Master, occurred

thanks not to on-site inquiry, but to a comparative study of forms inspired by the attribution method of Giovanni Morelli. It was only thereafter that field investigations researched and studied individual artists. This sequence emphasizes the fact that the prejudice against anonymity must be abandoned and that individual works must be researched in order to discover artists' identities. Such research has been particularly developed in the realm of the Yoruba under the instigation of Fagg. Attributions to individual artists, based either on on-site investigation or on formal comparisons, are today increasing rapidly in catalogues. As is the custom in art history, the proper name is used, or lacking that, a name that has been agreed upon.

Even examples of a "signature" can be mentioned, but in forms other than that of alphabetic writing. According to Fagg, the sculptor Olowe has the habit of "signing" his work with a rectangular, crosswise motif. (1981, p. 106; cf. p. 102) In the Yoruba town of Abeokuta, the *ibeji* (twin images) sculpted by Akinyode have marked three concentric squares on their base, while Ayo used to "sign" the great majority of his *ibeji* with a triangle cut into the inferior side of the base. (1982, p. 37)

In Africa, as elsewhere, certain artists enjoy renown that may well extend far beyond their group and call for foreign commissions and travel. Such renown and the capacity to recognize individual styles can be utilized by investigators in establishing individual attributions. (W. Fagg, 1981, p. 123) The functionalist approach (Chapter III) tends to favor use at the expense of production and producer, and to define object-types by their function at the expense of the individual elements of their style. The recognition by users of individual styles thus furnishes an argument against a functionalist interpretation tending to unite a doctrine with a method.

Goody (1979, p. 35) observes that a certain number of dichotomies, of which the second part is often negative due to ethnocentrism, coincide with the opposition between "us" and "them." The dichotomy individual renown-anonymity must not be used in this manner. For if the existence in Africa of individual styles and artists must be recognized, cases of anonymity must also be noted; but these should not be viewed in a negative and uniform manner. As a matter of fact, anonymity is a result of various factors.

In certain cases, artistic production is collective; Paul Bohannan (1971) describes an example of this which was observed among the Tiv; but anonymity is then no longer presupposed through ideology.

Cases can also be mentioned where identity has been usurped, such as when a traditional chief (*fon*) of the savannas of northern Cameroon attributed the works of a sculptor in his service to himself. But usurpation of this sort is of interest only by reason of the value of the renown attached to an individual work.

Two other factors may carry the anonymity of individual works in their wake; one concerns the usage of plastic objects, and the other the idea the users have of their origin. Quite a number of cases have been reported in which the artistic object, most often a mask, is held not as the representation or image of a sacred entity but as the entity itself. There is no representation here, but presentification. (*see* Chapter III) But if the mask *is* the spirit or the divinity, then one cannot ask who has produced it; it is not attributable to an individual artist. The same goes for the artistic object not attributed to a human producer. Among the Nyonyosi—an autochthonous part of the Mossi people—"each family has a myth that explains the origin of its masks. All the myths begin with a triggering event: when catastrophe threatened, an ancestor was given the mask by a ghost, by an animal, or by the God himself." (A. Schweeger-Hefel, 1981,

p. 34) According to Christopher D. Roy (1979), the Nyonyosi absolutely refuse to speak of the age of the masks and of the sculptors' identities; these are among the secrets most ferociously guarded by the members of the family and the clans, who do not want to admit the intervention of the human hand in the creation of these sacred or mythic beings. Christian iconography used to call these images not made by human hands "acheiropoietes." (see p. 53)

What these two types of anonymity, associated with presentification and/or the acheiropoietic image, have in common is the secret and the existence of a segregation inside the social group between those who know and those who are ignorant of the secret. In turn, this segregation is the result of various factors: of belonging to a so-called secret society, of initiation, or of sexual difference. Anonymity is thus institutionalized, but it may be said to be partial. These few examples suffice to demonstrate the deficiency of the negative concept of anonymity and its ethnocentrism; in a dichotomy it can only serve as a hold-all and cause the misreading of the rich diversity of observable facts.

Depreciations

When an initial anticipation is not a descriptive but a normative concept, it is matched to a positive value and the corresponding negation enters into a judgment of negative value: the encountered object is disparaged.

DEFORMATION AND AWKWARDNESS African sculptors have long been regarded as deforming the human body and, generally speaking, the things they were representing. "Deformation" is ambiguous: the word designates an operation and its result. The work is reproached with the deformation-that-is-result, the artist with the deformation-that-is-operation: they are accused of awkwardness, of lacking technique, of negligence, of an inability to faithfully imitate or represent the model. Of course, these reproaches are not directed only at African objects and artists but at all objects that come from a conception of art other than Classicism and imitation of nature. However, even though Classicism's claim to universality is henceforth held to be inadmissible, these reproaches escape, so to speak, from serious authors still.

The form-that-is-result is nothing but a form other than what one was expecting. One was expecting a form that faithfully imitated that of the human body; in encountering a different form, one transforms that difference into negation. Similarly, as the encountered form presents proportions that are different from those of the human body, one declares them to be disproportionate or ill-proportioned. (see p. III)

If one goes back from the result to the operation, from the work to the artist, one relates the encountered form to an intention attributed to the sculptor. Supposedly, the artist wanted to imitate nature faithfully and was not able to, through technical incompetence, lack of craftsmanship or ability, or negligence.

But attributing an intention to imitate to the sculptor has no empirical basis whatsoever; it is not made legitimate by any ethnographic information; prior to the encounter with the object lies its anticipation, since one confuses this intention with that of a Classical or academic European sculptor. The double depreciation—deformation and awkwardness—thus links up with the two forms of misreading described previously. How and with what to replace these ethnocentric expectations?

First of all one must be attentive to the work encountered. One notices then what might be called, in the early stages, and in order to correct the notion of deformation before replacing it—*coherent deformations*. This way,

one moves from the comparison between the forms of the sculpture and those of the human body to a comparison of the forms of the parts of the sculpture among themselves. These then often impose the feeling of similarity, while their respective models should render them dissimilar. It is as if a single rule of deformation or, rather, of transformation had been applied by the sculptor in the rendering of the parts of the supposed model. This rule, unique for one work, varies with different works. There are as many coherent transformations of extra-artistic reality as there are styles. The coherence of deformations is a symptom or a manifestation of style. Thus we have moved from the (imitative) representation of (extra-artistic) forms to the (artistic) form of the representation. This process will be dealt with on several occasions in Chapter III.

Thus, certain masks or sculpted faces of the Bamileke [figs. 138, 556] show all the parts of the human face by means of clear-cut ridged patterns, and they all have the shape of segments of curves, arcs, and tightly spaced dimensions; a mask reproduced in fig. 11 shows this very clearly; it will be noted that the median ridge above the nose which, facing front, seems rectilinear, in profile shows itself to have a curvature comparable to the bridge of the nose. The Warkum hairdo (*Sculptura Africana*, catalogue, pl. 43) suggests the same observations. Certain Dogon masks [fig. 26] present upright segments laid out at a right angle in such a way that partial rectangular shapes represent parts of a face that are both nonrectangular and dissimilar. One can discern in a Baga object known as *nimba*, reproduced in profile, similar and variously oriented curvatures of the crest, the bridge of the nose, and the notches where the bearer's shoulders go. The profile of a *tyi wara* hairdo, of Bamana origin (Musée National des Arts Africains et Océaniens, Paris) [fig. 302] presents a variation on the curve of the axes of all its plastic elements having different figurative values. One can easily find other examples.

In order to describe the similarities between partial forms having different representative values [figs. 38, 247], one may borrow Daniel H. Kahnweiler's (1946, p. 201 ff.) notion of the *plastic rhyme*. This metaphor is justified by an analogy. Identical sound forms (verbal rhymes) are associated with different significations and referents just as identical or similar visible forms (plastic rhymes) are associated with different representative values. A Baoule statuette [fig. 61] assigns to the face, to each of the breasts, to the outlines formed by scarifications above each breast, extended along the internal edge of the arms, and, finally, to the axes of the legs extended by the converging feet, the shape of a stretched-out heart, easily perceptible in these different values of representation.

The preconceptions, or initial expectations, are most often not isolated concepts but belong to more or less systematically conceptualized constellations (just as with the notions of fetish, idol, and idolatry). If the negative diagnostics of deformation and awkwardness thus mobilize the imitative or naturalist conception of art, into what conceptions of art can one integrate alternative concepts, introduced to correct these inappropriate diagnostics? Later in this essay we will show that we have three other general conceptions of art at our disposal that allow us to account for forms considered to be deformed in terms of naturalism, in order to account, in a positive way, for the gap we notice between African objects and the forms we all too often tend to expect. We are referring to the functionalist (Chapter III), the expressionist, and the formalist (Chapter IV) concepts of art.

IMPERFECTION AND PERFECTION Every depreciation, every flaw for which African objects may have been reproached, constitutes the same number of imperfections. In classical aestheticism

beauty and perfection are indissolubly linked. The imperfections of African art, then, run the risk of being nothing other than the negative formulation of the gap between aspects of African artworks and characteristics of classical beauty. Of what exactly does this perfection one expects and does not encounter consist?

The notion of perfection is elaborated by Aristotle within the framework of a philosophy of *technè*, a philosophy that does not distinguish between what we do with our two words "art" and "technique." (R. G. Collingwood, 1960) Just so, for Kant the judgment of perfection is not a judgment of taste; perfection is not an aesthetic value but a technical one. Artistic production is divided into two phases, conception (*noésis*) and execution (*poiésis*). The good technician conceives of his or her production clearly and completely before beginning its execution. If the conception or the project is a thought, then the execution is the making of it, and its perfection [Trans. note: per = thorough; facere = to do] is the result of a "thorough-making" or "making it through and through," a perfecting; for the execution, the making, is perfected, finished, when the executed product conforms to the conception, plan, or intention of the agent; if the latter stops the execution before this end or this goal, the product—still inadequate in relation to the plan—is im-perfect, incomplete.

From the technical character of perfection thus defined result the limits of the correct application of its concept and its use as criteria. Objects coming out of forms or types of production different from technical production ought not to be assessed according to the criteria of perfection. To this former category belong all creations in which the project is not shaped intellectually and completely before execution. That is the "bricolage" which Lévi-Strauss makes reference to. (1962, p. 27) But it is also artistic creation as well, precisely to the extent that we distinguish it, as opposed to the custom of the ancients or the people of the Middle Ages, from technical production. Delacroix speaks of creative execution; for Braque "the idea is the cradle of the painting." The result is that the criteria of perfection can only be applied to the African arts once their modes of production and, in particular, the status of the plan or the nature of the artist's intention in this process of production, have been determined. This entails very specifically directed ethnographic investigations. But there is no reason whatsoever to assume that all African artists produce in the same manner. Moreover, the distinction between art and technique, as Greek *technè* and Latin *ars* already demonstrate, is not applicable to every period of art history. During certain periods and in certain places, technical perfection is inseparable from aesthetic quality. The refusal to consider perfection because it is technical as an aesthetic value comes from the conception of a *pure* art, cleansed of its technical elements. Now, no reason whatsoever permits us to assume a priori the existence of a pure art in Africa; quite the contrary, we award the status as a work of art in Africa to functional objects and to those whose function, in particular, is a practical one. (see Chapter III)

The judgment of perfection, *stricto sensu*, assumes a previous knowledge of the plan or intention of the artist. We have already seen, in addressing deformation, the conditions to which our appreciation of African works is thus subjected. We will resume these observations in examining another form of imperfection, the non-finished.

THE NON-FINISHED When the finished is conceived of as a perfection and the non-finished as an imperfection, this pair of concepts is integrated into the general conception of art as elaborated by the Greeks. But if we encounter works to which this conception of art is not applicable, and their non-finished character does not in any way prevent

our appreciating them, how do we justify this appreciation as an alternative to the depreciation that seeks perfection? Two paths are open: recourse to ethnographic data, or to the inventory of the theories of art that justify the non-finished. These latter solutions can only serve as alternative expectations that remain to be confronted with ethnographic data.

According to the classical theory of art, finishing, or finish, is the final stage of execution. To finish means, according to the French dictionary *Robert*, "to bring to its point of perfection," "to put the finishing touches on. . . ." It is chronologically the last condition of the perfecting process. According to Paul Valéry, this consists of "making all that shows or suggests the producing of a work disappear"; the artist must "sustain his effort until that point where the work has erased all traces of work." (*Degas, Danse, Dessin*) Since the nature of the work varies with the materials and tools, finishing operations vary with the arts. But one aspect of that which is finished seems common to all techniques: the traces of work are erased when the surface of the piece is regular, even, smooth, polished, "licked clean," or when it presents tangible properties, visual or tactile, as close to this as possible. In certain cases (*see* L. Perrois, 1972, p. 145), the African sculptor uses particularly rough-surfaced leaves as an abrasive with which to polish the hewn surface; this is the case, for example, with the Dan masks which are, indeed, called "classical." In other cases, though, the sculptor does not use these abrasives but finishes the work with a knife by very delicately and very evenly cutting minuscule facets that are to a smooth and continuous surface what a polygon, regular on a thousand sides, is to the circle it inscribes. Even though, by all rigorous standards, such a surface is not perfectly smooth, it must be allowed that it is finished and perfect insofar as the artist has clearly created what he or she had intended to create.

The classical theory of art conceives of art as a technique that imitates nature. Technique concerns the relationship between the work and the artist, imitation the relationship between the work and its natural model. From these two points of view, traces of work must be erased. The natural model obviously presents no trace whatsoever of human effort, since this did not create it; that trace must, therefore, be erased in the work in order that it be true to its model. Imitation tends to sever the relationship of the work to the artist in favor of the relationship of the work to the model. In the second place, all through its production the work still depends on the artist; it is only once it has been completed, perfected, that it becomes independent from the artist. Now, the Greeks accord more value to the work than to its production and, generally speaking, to a substance (*ousia*) than to its genesis. But, to the extent that African art does not come out of this naturalist conception of art, this justification of the finished is not pertinent.

The observation and comparison of certain African works of art, associated with ethnographic data, allow us to remove the naturalist justification of the finished and to give, as an alternative, at least two positive explanations of the non-finished.

The non-finishing of certain works originating in various regions of Africa may be described as partial. In one sculpture certain parts are finished and others are not. This aspect is enough to eliminate a diagnosis of awkwardness—for the same artist should then be considered capable for finishing certain parts and clumsy for not finishing others. Another explanation is needed.

In a more general way, it may be observed that quite often various parts of a similar figure are treated differently in Africa. These differences can affect style (J. Laude, 1978, p. 98)—sometimes certain parts are treated in

a naturalist fashion and others in an abstract or schematic way—whether that be in the proportions, or the use or absence of color. Globally, with sculptures in the round, certain parts are treated in relief, like the upper limbs of certain Baoule figures or the lower limbs of certain Luba or Hembra caryatids that are in relief on the base of stools. As for the partial finish, Marie-Louise Bastin, commenting on a Ovimbundu statuette (1969a, p. 34), notes that “the hands and the feet are roughly sketched out. Only the head and the trunk merited the care of the sculptor.” This last remark suggests a hierarchic treatment of parts of the figure. A relationship of agreement or appropriateness is established between the degree to which parts of the sculpture are finished and the corresponding parts of the person represented, ordered according to a hierarchy of values that is socially recognized. The partial, or rather, differential, non-finished aspect, would thus be explained by the representation’s submission to an extra-artistic hierarchy and by an application, a functionalist one, of the principle of appropriateness. We will see this interpretation again with hierarchical proportions (*see* p. 115) and the hierarchy of sizes (*see* p. 120).

And it is also within the framework of a functionalist conception of art that a certain kind of usage, generally qualified as magical, accounts for the partial finish. The best known of these magical statues are of Kongo, Teke, Luba, or Songhay origin. They receive their magic powers from an attachment to the sculpted work of various materials, chosen, prepared, and applied by an expert in magical operations. The sculpted piece by itself has no affect or power. This same object then presents two states and successive aspects, of which only the second one is conducive to use. The difference is sometimes manifested by the fact that users give two different names to the object. It is among the Teke that Robert Hottot (1972) gathered this kind of information for the first time, in 1906. Sculptors know the use of the piece they are cutting; they know that certain parts of it will be hidden by the magical materials that will cover them. They can, then, not only dispense with finishing them but be excused by the users from having to finish them in compliance with the demands of customary, ritual use. Thus one can no longer accuse them of either awkwardness or negligence. However, this difference in the finishing between parts can be attenuated or erased. The second producer, too, can carefully finish the parts that he or she adds. Zdenka Volavkova (1972, pp. 58, 59) in studying the *nkisi* figures of the Lower Congo, observed that sometimes the sculptor takes the future attachments to the statuette into account, while, reciprocally the *nganga* can adapt materials to the sculpted form whose suggestions he or she may seize upon.

The partial finish is readily noticeable on pieces that have been collected as they come out of the hands of the sculptor or at the beginning stage of their use (like the Kongo fetishes in which only a few nails or metal pieces have been implanted), or lastly on pieces stripped of their magical materials.

This explanation according to use is neither specific nor constraining. It is not specific because it is applicable to non-African objects, to uses other than magical ones, and to arts other than sculpture. It is not constraining since, in certain cases, those parts intended to be invisible are as finished as the other parts.

What still remains is to account for pieces that are completely non-finished. Their “sketchy style” is not enough to explain their aesthetic quality. The history of the theories of art offers several ways of justifying our appreciation of the best ones. The theory most frequently turned to calls these works expressionist. But it is one thing to interpret the non-finished or sketchy style in terms of expressionism, it is another to know, based on ethnographic information, whether the users of such pieces

appreciated them in such a way and whether they had terms available to them that would correctly translate into our expressionist vocabulary. For we have a tendency to lend an expressivity we expect to inexpressive objects (see Chapter II, p. 162), as with that skeleton piece that Valéry described as: "This empty skull and this eternal laughter." And so a question of comparative aesthetics has been raised. (see Chapter IV)

THE REPRESENTATION OF MOVEMENT It has been said that, for the most part, African sculptures do not represent the movement of the persons they depict; that, in the rare cases where this is attempted, they do not succeed, or only badly so. What was inferred is that the majority of African sculptors are incapable of representing movement. These reproaches are not specific; they are directed at all so-called "primitive" or "archaic" arts. Here again, the diagnosis that depreciates the pieces and the one that denigrates the sculptor must be differentiated. The first deals with observable objects, the second with intentions and abilities which cannot be sufficiently assessed from an observation of the pieces without ethnographic monitoring.

In the majority of cases, the first negative diagnosis seems legitimate. African statues do not represent movement because the function they exercise calls for the sacred immobility—the conventionalism—of the persons whose representation or presentification it demands. (see Chapter III) In a minority of cases, one recognizes the representation of movement without any difficulty; the best examples are furnished by the weights made to measure gold dust used by the Akan group and the statues coming from the chieftainries of the Cameroon savannas (Bamileke, Bamum, etc.). There are, it seems to us, intermediary cases that lead one to wonder whether a negative diagnosis would not result, once again, from the transformation of a difference into a negation.

There are three cases in which the African sculptor may represent a movement different from those we are able to anticipate and expect: The movement represented may be different from those we are used to encountering in the extra-artistic reality of our own cultural environment. Or it might be different from what we have seen *represented* in the reality, the artistic one this time, that we know. Lastly, its difference may come from the fact that it is depicted differently from the way to which Western observers are accustomed. The first two cases are concerned with movement as the object, subject, or material of the representation; the third one with the form of representation, the figurative conventions of movement.

African dances, ceremonies, and rituals include movements with which most Western observers are not familiar but which the African sculptor is able to represent. African dances are so different from our own that we cannot assimilate them. Also, they are different from the idea of them we are able to conjure up. Thus it is difficult to avoid a negative diagnosis, whereas the researcher, having observed them, will be able to recognize their sculpted representation. Neither can we rely upon the impression of stasis that an isolated sculpture may call forth; for our impressions, too, cause expectations to intervene and their realm of pertinence, just as with our preconceptions, is reduced by that. From the fact that an isolated sculpture seems static to us, we may infer that it represents no movement at all. Thus the frontality and symmetry of certain Mossi statuettes give us a first impression of stasis. But, as Bastin (1984, p. 91) reports, Schweeger-Hefel has presented "photographs of dancing women, their arms slightly apart from their body, and has suggested that this discreet and elegant choreography might have inspired the body structure of women figures" as sculpted. Paudrat (1974) in a chapter entitled "The Forest is Dancing"

has shown how in the “colonial discourse,” African dancing is associated with frenzy of movement, loose mores, and sexual excess. The Mossi example shows that African dancing cannot be reduced to the frenetic gesticulations which one, thus, cannot systematically expect. It also shows that the manner of representing movement is not necessarily imitative; more subtly, the movement of dance can “inspire the structure” of the image.

Photography, cinema, and television can remedy this ignorance. But photographic documentation is limited, for it too involves figurative conventions. “Human beings have the habit, every time they discover a similarity between two things, of attributing to both one and the other, even in what sets them apart, that which they have recognized as being true for one of them.” (Descartes, *Regulae*, I) Even though a photograph and a sculpture are both immobile representations of movement, this does not mean they render it in the same fashion, by means of identical figurative conventions. Therefore, one cannot assimilate the sculpted representation of movement with its snapshot equivalent. The famous analysis by Rodin (1967, pp. 46–47) of *Marshall Ney* by François Rude is enough to demonstrate this and suggests more refined expectations. According to Rodin, Rude composed two instantaneous but partial observations, homogeneous as figurative conventions but different in their object: two different parts of the body in two different (successive) moments of movement. The analysis of the mode of the representation of movement thus distinguishes two levels, that of the parts and that of the whole. Now, as we have observed, it happens that the African sculptor treats the parts of the same sculpture differently, which would permit us to apply Rodin’s process of analysis. An African sculpture may link the representations of a moving part and an immobile part. Certain Teke statuettes represent a motionless body and legs bent as they are in the men’s dances called *nkibi*, according to Hottot. (1972, p. 20) Such a figurative convention, linking the representation of an immobile part to that of a moving part, may be inspired by the dances themselves. For, in certain African dances, some parts of the body may remain quasimotionless, where the vibration of the legs is linked to the immobility of the torso or, inversely, where the legs, frozen so to speak, are able to support a kind of vibrating of the torso and the breasts.

These brief remarks are designed to suggest the complexity of the question.

Terms, Meanings, Concepts

The critical road followed up to this point must be extended. For it is not enough to detect the expectations that interfere in our approach to African arts—their nature and epistemological state must also be examined. Initial expectations or preconceptions are conceptual outlines, insufficiently elaborated; but are the alternative concepts with which we replace them in pursuing this investigation truly scientific—in the way that the scientific intent of art ethnology demands?

A term, a word, or an expression is, from a linguistic point of view, linked to one or several meanings, and from a logical point of view, to one or several concepts. When the terms are applied to objects, the elements of their conceptual meaning help us apprehend the properties of these objects. One must examine the structure of the conceptual meaning, that is to say, the nature of the connections that are placed thus between properties. It will then be possible to wonder whether the concepts used are truly scientific and if they can be stated in the form of a logically correct definition.

A privileged example will serve as our point of departure. Its interest is multiple. It poses exactly the type of question we have just brought up and supplies it with an exemplary answer. It is the act of experts of recognized competence. It concerns the classificatory usage of terms and concepts. Finally, its character is that it deals with the important question of the authentic and the fake. The corpus of African works of art, the object of our investigation, presupposes a discrimination between authentic and fake pieces.

From the analysis of this example, we shall draw some general observations that will then be applied to several other questions, allowing us to pursue the determination of our realm of inquiry.

The Authentic and the Fake

Two art historians, one an expert in African art, the other in the Italian Renaissance, published in the same year and without referring to each other, two methodological texts that run so rigorously parallel that it is difficult not to assume their tacit common source.

DICHOTOMY AND SERIES According to Willett (1976, p. 8), a text published earlier in the review *African Arts* "seems to imply that a work of African art is either genuine or fake. This dichotomy, I think, is a gross oversimplification. As I see it, we are faced with a continuum rather than a dichotomy. One can attempt to slice up the continuum into separate categories, but always one finds something that does not quite fit into the categories one has established. . . . All classes in a system of classification invariably grade into each other, and different students will have different standards."

The dichotomic classification is too simple because the reality to be classified is not only complex but continuous. Therefore, it does not suffice to multiply the classes—by dividing genres into species, for example—they must be decompartmentalized by ceasing to use concepts that establish clear-cut demarcations that are insuperable between classes. These brief methodological remarks are matched by an application to African art. For the initial authentic-fake dichotomy, Willett substitutes a series of nine classes that he characterizes as follows:

1. The most obviously authentic works which, all would agree, are those made by Africans for use by their own people and so used by them. However, this category can be subdivided, because the piece so made and used may be of superior, average, or inferior aesthetic quality.
2. A work made by Africans for use by their own people but bought by a foreigner before use.
3. A sculpture made by Africans in the traditional style of their own people for sale to a foreigner.
4. A sculpture made by Africans in the traditional style on commission by a foreigner.
5. A sculpture made by Africans in a poor imitation of the traditional style of their own people for sale to a foreigner.
6. A sculpture made by Africans in the style of a different African people (though it may be well done) for sale to a foreigner.
7. A sculpture made in the style of a different African people but badly done for sale to a foreigner.
8. A sculpture made by Africans in a nontraditional style for sale to a foreigner.
9. Finally, we have works made by a foreigner, i.e., a non-African, for sale to other non-Africans but passed off as being African. This, at the other end of the continuum, is the unquestionable fake.

Mark Roskill (pp. 155–56), historian of Renaissance art, asked himself the same question and answered it in the same spirit:

“But what exactly is a fake? Between a painting’s being an original by a major master and its being an absolute fake made with the intent to deceive, there are many intermediate degrees.” The author mentions the following “intermediate degrees”:

- a. A “school piece.”
- b. A piece by “a follower rather than the artist himself.”
- c. A piece “left unfinished and completed by another hand, possibly very much later.”
- d. A piece that may have been “substantially revised or retouched or prettied up at some later point, perhaps because of its poor condition or damage to it, or to make it more superficially attractive.”
- e. Works “by other artists of the same period” that “may get under the wrong name, and may simply be of less exalted authorship.”
- f. Finally there are “copies and imitations which were not originally made with any intent to deceive, but which may be passed off as originals subsequently on the art market, either by unscrupulous persons or simply by mistake.

“So where the label on a picture in a museum turns out to need changing as time goes on, in at least ninety-five cases out of a hundred there will be no question of a forgery.”

In compliance with the intention of these two texts, a few categories may be added to Willett’s series. When an original work is duplicated, one can distinguish between replicas made by the same hand done shortly after the original, which they resemble a great deal; versions clearly made at a later time, which often show the evolution of the manner or style of the artist; and finally, copies made by a hand other than that of the original artist. Various kinds of replicas, then, can be distinguished. There are those that have been commissioned by the same user or traditional patron as commissioned the original, from the same people as the sculptor. Such is the case with a throne of King Njoya, the original of which has remained in Foumban; a replica of it, done as faithfully as possible, was given in homage to a highly placed non-African visitor and is now in Berlin. (C. Geary, 1981, p. 37) This kind of replica could be inserted between categories 2 and 3 of Willett’s series. Ethnographic samples bring to mind a second kind of replica. They are commissions from an ethnologist to a sculptor whose work and oeuvre the former is studying, done in order to keep the original *in situ* and to obtain as authentic a sample of it as possible, intended for a museum. Several ethnographic replicas commissioned by William Bascom (1973), for example, are by the hand of the sculptor Duga from the Yoruba town of Meko. The “ethnographic replica” could be inserted between categories 3 and 4.

One category, mentioned by Joseph Cornet (1975a) is more difficult to insert. An example would be the *kifwebe* mask of the Songhay. “On the advice of a European merchant of enlightened tastes, twenty or thirty years ago a local workshop was established that began to accentuate even more strongly the characteristic volumes of the masks, thus giving birth to an entirely new category. The close resemblance of the sculptural techniques, the almost infallible beauty of the proportions, the uniformly aged ornamentation, the careful boring of the holes for the fiber necklace (or at times the absence of such holes), everything indicates a single commercial center the commercial intent of which is beyond any doubt” (p. 55); this type would be inserted between categories 4 and 5. But, the author continues, “this new type of mask has left its mark on the authentic masks of the *kifwebe* society.” (*ibid.*) It is more difficult to situate this authentic type, influenced by the commercial type, in the series. Now, this

difficulty raises two questions: what are the classifying criteria, that is to say, the properties that enter into the determination of categories, and how are these properties distributed in each category and each series?

CREATIVITY AND ETHNICITY The series proposed by Willett and Roskill present differences and similarities. They differ in the criteria or properties they use and they resemble each other formally in the way they distribute them.

Their difference raises the question of the relationship between art history and art ethnology. The question of what is authentic and what is fake, posed by both disciplines, is closely linked to the matter of attribution. In fact, one may provisionally define the authentic work as the object of a true attribution and the fake as that of a false one, of a mistake in attribution. This purely gnoseological definition accounts for Roskill's last observation: the same work, a fake under an imprecise attribution (or label), becomes authentic when its attribution is rectified—for example, "school of Giotto" instead of "Giotto." But this definition is insufficient: it is not applicable to all the categories in the two series. The works in the last category, the "absolute" fakes, do not become authentic once they have been uncovered; a forged Vermeer does not simply become an authentic Van Meegeren; it remains a forged Vermeer by the forger Van Meegeren, different from the paintings by that artist when he was not counterfeiting anyone. Moreover, the African pieces qualified as airport or tourist art, classifiable in category 8, once they have been clearly recognized as such, are no longer seen as authentically African; they are furthermore ignored by the collectors. Despite these limitations, our provisory definition is sufficient for tackling certain questions.

The attribution, in the art-historical sense, is a judgment of attribution, in the sense of Aristotelian logic, the canonic form of which is S and P. The logical subject, S, always designates a single given work and the predicate, P, a class associated with a classifying label, brought into being by the label. Now, in their respective series, Willett and Roskill use different predicates or attributive labels. In art history, attributive labels would be the names of individual creators, and in art ethnology, the "peoples" to which the artists belong, who therefore themselves remain anonymous. Thus, this question blends those of anonymity (*see* p. 35) and tribal art (*see* p. 48). Therefore, another way of distinguishing between the two disciplines must be found.

The difference between these two kinds of attributive labels results from two ways of conceiving of artistic production and the social organization around it. Roskill conceives of art as the creation by an individual artist, a master, endowed with exceptional creative powers, often called a genius, who realizes himself best when working alone. Decreasing degrees of authenticity correspond to decreasing degrees of this creativity. It is as if the master's creativity were losing its force as it diffuses. This diffusion presents two aspects: a multiplication of the number of individual producers working in collaboration, and dispersion in space (another studio) or across time (students, disciples, a school). The diffusion is made within the framework of this particular organization of production which is the studio centered around the great master (who, with Romanticism, disappeared, reduced to the master).

Willett, at least in this text, refers back to a functionalist conception of art. The emphasis is placed no longer on the creative individual, nor even on the studio, but on the social group to which belong patrons, producers, and users. Thus, the social organization of the production is the functional group: patron, producer, product, use, and user—within the context of the same "people." The quality that would correspond to individual

creativity, then, is ethnicity: that all these elements of the functional ensemble belong to one single social group, "people," or ethnicity (or tribe). The loss of authenticity again has its origin in a dispersion by multiplication, no longer of individuals, but of social groups to which partners of the functional group of artist, patron, and user (or buyer), belong. This loss of authenticity is stronger when the new partners are no longer even African.

But the idea of conjoining the first concept, the creativist one, with art history, and functionalism with ethnology, is untenable. Art history does not exclude taking the functional context of works into account. And art ethnology, as it has developed, has discovered individual creation and abandoned the ideology of anonymity. Furthermore, the intervention in Willett's series of criteria of aesthetic quality suggests the recognition of a differential creativity. The difference between the two disciplines comes rather from a difference in their development. (R. Goldwater, 1973)

As to the methodology of attribution, it has as a result that the two series of attributive labels are not exclusive. They could be linked, though not without appropriate rearrangements. Then, in full accord with Willett's programmatic intent, a series would be available that is at one and the same time more complex and more refined, allowing one to better respect the wealth and continuity of the field studied. Now, the possibility of such a linkage is furnished by the existence of a formal structure common to both series, very probably ascribable to a common source, which we must now clarify.

Family Resemblance Predicates (FRP)

Edmund R. Leach (1961) proposed the idea of "rethinking anthropology"; ten years later, a group of anthropologists around Rodney Needham (1971) began "rethinking kinship and marriage." "To rethink" means to change mental procedures while still studying the same thing and, to that end, Needham proposed an explicit recourse to philosophy and, more specifically, to a theme in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, the Family Resemblance Predicates, FRP, according to the tradition of Wittgensteinian exegesis. The same technique is directly applied to the study of African art by John Ladd (1977). It is as if our two texts were applying this program to the letter. The explanation of the FRP theme will be reduced here to the indispensable minimum permitting a generalization of the solution brought jointly by Willett and Roskill to the particular question of authenticity, in order to then apply this generalized solution to other specific questions raised by the study of African art.

The meaning (or connotation) of a term is the ensemble of the characteristics something must possess in order for that term to be applied correctly. Following Wittgenstein's *Logical Investigations* § 65 ff.), we can distinguish two types of terms according to the type of relationship they have with the things to which they are correctly applied. In accordance with a tradition that goes back to Socratic definitions, codified by Aristotle, the characteristics that constitute the meaning of a term (to be defined) must be possessed by all things to which it is correctly applied. These characteristics are, therefore, common ones and constitute a common concept associated with the term. Now, things either possess all of these characteristics and are linked to the concept or do not possess them all and are not linked with the concept. Thus a clear-cut demarcation is recognized between them.

But Wittgenstein notes that many terms, when correctly used, are not associated with a common concept. Things are not arbitrarily regrouped for all that; they may well share common characteristics but, on the one

hand, these may be common only to some of them and not to all and, on the other hand, they may not always be the same ones. Thus one can discover between these things a network of variable similarities that bring them closer and closer together, in the absence of one characteristic common to all of them. They form a family, and these characteristics are the predicates of family resemblance. Wittgenstein offers a paradigm—a rope made of braided fibers: “The strength of the rope does not reside in the fact that any one fiber runs through its full length”—by analogy with a predicate common to all the things—“but in the overlapping of numerous fibers.” The term, thus associated with variable characteristics, does not permit a clear-cut demarcation to be drawn, as a common concept does. On the other hand, given two things of the same name but with no common characteristic, one can link them closer and closer through a series of intermediaries. Thus one can speak of terms or concepts that have an “open” structure or texture.

If one moves from the terms to their classificatory use, Aristotelian concepts engender dichotomic classifications whose theory goes back to Plato's *Sophist* and to the first book of Aristotle's treatise *Parts of Animals*. Such coordinated and subordinated dichotomies form a tree. The FRPs, for their part, can engender networks.

All this is so exactly suited to Willett's and Roskill's series that a fortuitous coincidence seems highly improbable.

The methodology of history leads to the same result. Thus, according to Paul Veyne (1971, p. 163), who takes “revolution” and “city” as his examples: “the concept does not have precise limits”; the revolution or the city “is made from all revolutions and all cities already known and awaits an enrichment from our future experiences, to which it remains definitively open.”

Applications

One can recognize in many a term used in art ethnology not so much terms associated with neatly demarcated common concepts but with concepts of open texture or with FRPs. Our samplings will be limited to terms whose importance depends on the fact that they serve to demarcate our realm of inquiry. African art is described as being *primitive* or *tribal*; but one speaks first of all of art, and we are studying African sculpture. Now, not one of these terms is associated with a clearly demarcated common concept. If a scientific concept must fulfill this condition, not one of these terms is scientific. It is, nevertheless, difficult not to use them.

PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES AND ARTS African arts have been classified under the term “primitive.” The notion of primitive art includes two elements. First, there is a conception of the relationships between various societies that permits one to call some primitive and others evolved or civilized; this is the evolutionist theory of societies. Then, there is a conception of the relationship between the art and the society in which it is produced that in turn permits one to transfer the property or the predicate “primitive” from a society to its art. These two conceptions having been abandoned today, the notion of primitive art has also been abandoned, at least in this evolutionist form.

The connection between art and society was conceived as a strict or causal determination. In producing its art, a society would transmit its properties to it. Such determinism is no longer accepted. Art certainly is not entirely independent from the society in which it is produced, otherwise the sociology of art would hardly have a clear object. But the properties of a society are not the necessary and sufficient conditions of

the properties of its art. The same criticism will be raised against the transfer of tribal characteristics from the tribe to its art.

The evolutionist theory of societies has also been criticized. We will borrow this criticism from Lévi-Strauss (1952) by reformulating it in terms of expectations. If one compares different societies to each other, while referring them to ours, one notes that they possess different properties, and one will observe that they do not possess the same properties as our society, to which we attach the idea of civilization. The notion of evolution allows us to determine the relationship between noncivilized societies and civilized society or societies. It is in the course of an evolution that these latter would have acquired and developed properties then that they did not have before. If one accords a positive value to these properties, this evolution is progress.

The process of evolution or progress requires time: these are forms of history. Societies deprived of these properties would be anterior to evolution or progress; they would, therefore, chronologically come first, which places them in a distant past. However, they are presently our contemporaries, which distinguishes them from prehistoric societies and justifies their being called "primitive." Their status is paradoxical: even though they can be observed in the present, theory sends them back to a distant past. A supplementary hypothesis resolves this paradox: they have not evolved but have preserved their first state throughout time. Thus the concept of evolution can only account for primitive societies on the condition that it not be applied to them. The negation has been redoubled: they are not civilized and have not evolved. We once again find the absence of history. Thus evolutionism engenders seminegative dichotomies that reveal its ethnocentrism, for it is always our society that serves as the mold for the affirmative and positive member of these dichotomies. What we expect and do not encounter are the properties of our society.

The concept of the primitive has likewise been applied to the arts. W. Deonna (1936) undoubtedly furnishes the most systematic application. He proposes a dichotomy between classical and primitive art; but the properties characterizing the latter are nothing but negations of the properties of the former, itself described according to the model of Greco-Roman art; again the dichotomy is seminegative and ethnocentric.

Must the notion of primitive art be abandoned, together with the theory of evolution that gave it its meaning? The notion of "first arts" has been proposed. (*Arts Premiers* catalogue, Brussels, 1977) But these arts have their own history, at the endpoint of which we are observing them. Furthermore, we are noting their disappearance under the influence of Western society, and this disappearance is so rapid that it makes their study quite urgent. (G. Balandier, 1961) The label "last arts" would suit them better.

But one can follow another path and attempt to isolate characteristics common to the primitive societies that have been directly observed by ethnography. Hsu (1964, cited by R. F. Thompson 1973b) enumerates the following fourteen properties:

- 1) absence of writing;
- 2) small-sized settlements;
- 3) isolation;
- 4) lack of historical documents;
- 5) low-level technological constructions;
- 6) social relations based primarily on family relationships;
- 7) nonindustrialization;
- 8) absence of literature;
- 9) relative homogeneity;
- 10) nonurban settlement;
- 11) general lack of time-telling techniques;
- 12) economy without money;
- 13) lack of economic specialization; and
- 14) possession of a super-powerful sense of reality, according to which daily facts have a religious and ritual significance.

One will notice that the majority of these criteria are overtly negative.

the properties of its art. The same criticism will be raised against the transfer of tribal characteristics from the tribe to its art.

The evolutionist theory of societies has also been criticized. We will borrow this criticism from Lévi-Strauss (1952) by reformulating it in terms of expectations. If one compares different societies to each other, while referring them to ours, one notes that they possess different properties, and one will observe that they do not possess the same properties as our society, to which we attach the idea of civilization. The notion of evolution allows us to determine the relationship between noncivilized societies and civilized society or societies. It is in the course of an evolution that these latter would have acquired and developed properties then that they did not have before. If one accords a positive value to these properties, this evolution is progress.

The process of evolution or progress requires time: these are forms of history. Societies deprived of these properties would be anterior to evolution or progress; they would, therefore, chronologically come first, which places them in a distant past. However, they are presently our contemporaries, which distinguishes them from prehistoric societies and justifies their being called "primitive." Their status is paradoxical: even though they can be observed in the present, theory sends them back to a distant past. A supplementary hypothesis resolves this paradox: they have not evolved but have preserved their first state throughout time. Thus the concept of evolution can only account for primitive societies on the condition that it not be applied to them. The negation has been redoubled: they are not civilized and have not evolved. We once again find the absence of history. Thus evolutionism engenders seminegative dichotomies that reveal its ethnocentrism, for it is always our society that serves as the mold for the affirmative and positive member of these dichotomies. What we expect and do not encounter are the properties of our society.

The concept of the primitive has likewise been applied to the arts. W. Deonna (1936) undoubtedly furnishes the most systematic application. He proposes a dichotomy between classical and primitive art; but the properties characterizing the latter are nothing but negations of the properties of the former, itself described according to the model of Greco-Roman art; again the dichotomy is seminegative and ethnocentric.

Must the notion of primitive art be abandoned, together with the theory of evolution that gave it its meaning? The notion of "first arts" has been proposed. (*Arts Premiers* catalogue, Brussels, 1977) But these arts have their own history, at the endpoint of which we are observing them. Furthermore, we are noting their disappearance under the influence of Western society, and this disappearance is so rapid that it makes their study quite urgent. (G. Balandier, 1961) The label "last arts" would suit them better.

But one can follow another path and attempt to isolate characteristics common to the primitive societies that have been directly observed by ethnography. Hsu (1964, cited by R. F. Thompson 1973b) enumerates the following fourteen properties:

- 1) absence of writing;
- 2) small-sized settlements;
- 3) isolation;
- 4) lack of historical documents;
- 5) low-level technological constructions;
- 6) social relations based primarily on family relationships;
- 7) nonindustrialization;
- 8) absence of literature;
- 9) relative homogeneity;
- 10) nonurban settlement;
- 11) general lack of time-telling techniques;
- 12) economy without money;
- 13) lack of economic specialization; and
- 14) possession of a super-powerful sense of reality, according to which daily facts have a religious and ritual significance.

One will notice that the majority of these criteria are overtly negative.

Moreover, Robert Farris Thompson shows that only four of them are applicable to Yoruba society (numbers 1, 6, 7, and 14). Other African societies would give rise to the same observation but the applicable criteria would change from one case to the next. All of this suggests that the ensemble of these properties does not constitute a clearly demarcated concept whose definition, thus constituted, would be applicable to all societies described as primitive; therefore they do not form a genus, in the manner of natural genera, but rather a family, in Wittgenstein's sense.

SOCIETIES AND TRIBAL ARTS The concept of tribal art has been suggested (W. Fagg, 1965) as a replacement for that of primitive art. Primitive societies are no longer being compared to those that are not, but rather, we find arts and their styles being distinguished one from the other through distinctions made among the tribes that produce these arts.

The obvious intention is to classify. As a matter of fact, most of the attributions use the names of "tribes" as labels or predicates.

According to Fagg, each tribe "forms a universe in itself from an artistic point of view": "These worlds are really closed off from one another and . . . their horizon ends at their own borders. . . . The tribe is a closed, exclusive group for whom art is one means, among others, through which to express its internal solidarity and its self-sufficiency and, inversely, to differentiate itself from the other groups" (pp. 10–11). Consequently, two traits oppose the tribe and our own society. First of all, since art is functional within a tribe, there is no separation whatsoever between the art and its public. Moreover, since the art is nonfunctional outside the tribe, the members of one tribe "are indifferent to the arts of other tribes," whereas our society is capable of accepting all arts (p. 12). To be fair, it must be said that Fagg blends nuances and restrictions into this thesis, which certain critiques, however, have turned against themselves. But the thesis presents a solid core, summarized in a canonical formula, "one tribe, one style," which has served as a target for number of critics (D. Biebuyck, 1966; F. Willett, 1971; S. Ottenberg, 1971; R. Bravmann, 1973; L. Siroto, 1976; J. Vansina, 1984; C. D. Roy, 1985, among others). The persistence of criticism is less a response to the use of tribal attributions than to their adequacy: they should be considered solely as approximate and provisional.

The solid core of the thesis contains three elements: a relationship and its two terms. The relationship is a bi-univocal correspondence, one = one: *one* tribe, *one* style. The terms are the various tribes classified under the general concept of tribe and their various arts under the general concept of style. The critics take aim at these three elements.

The correspondence between tribe and style—Generally speaking, the hypothesis of a bi-univocal correspondence may be invalidated in two complementary ways. We have mentioned observed cases in which one of the terms of one series corresponds not to a single but to two or more terms of the other series. In the present case, we shall mention instances of correspondence: 1) between a single tribe and two or more styles (thus, challenging the stylistic, intratribal homogeneity); 2) between a single style and two or more tribes (thus, challenging the stylistic, intertribal heterogeneity and the closing of borders). Indeed, examples of these two configurations abound in ethnographic literature to the extent that this thesis, which does not take them into account, shows itself to be an unjustifiable simplification of the examined reality.

First configuration: one tribe, two or more styles. Here, the tribal designation is provisionally accepted; on the other hand, we are not talking about substyles that would correspond to subgroups of the tribe, the bi-univocal correspondence being maintained between subtribes and

substyles. Thus one can contrast Yoruba art (S. Ottenberg, 1982, p. 51) where "regional stylistic variation clearly exists within a general aesthetic framework," while there is "no single art form typifying all of the Igbo." For example, the styles of Udi, Bende, Achi, and Afikpo masks are as different one from the other as each one is different from those of the Bini or the Yoruba. (W. Bascom, 1973, p. 102) There is no correspondence between the diversity of Igbo substyles and the cultural homogeneity of the ethnic group as a whole.

It is not only within the same tribe, but the same institution that very different styles may be observed. Among the Baoule, masks are used in the *goli* dance "so different in aspect that we would attribute them to different peoples . . . if we did not know otherwise." (G. N. Preston, 1985, p. 14) [figs. 388, 389, 390, 392] The styles of these masks differ according to three parameters: bi- or tridimensionality, simplicity or complexity, abstraction or naturalism. A style difference may be noted within a single, identical type of object and be justified by iconographic considerations. On the subject of the Dogon stool, known as *imago mundi*, Jean Laude (1973, p. 84, and 1978, p. 96) writes that all of the figures do not emerge from the same style—depending on whether they represent a priest (*hogon*) or certain mythical characters (*nommo*). [figs. 275, 276] In various groups of Benin bronzes, the divine king (*oba*) and a slave are not represented in the same style: their proportions, in particular, are very different [fig. 466]. The Yoruba mask of the *epa* type [fig. 439] is composed of a helmet-mask in a non-naturalistic style with a superstructure whose figures are related to the criterion of "relative mimesis." (R. F. Thompson, *see* p. 4) When stylistic differences emerge thus from iconography, it should be remembered that the "subject" represented may belong to the style. (N. Goodman, 1978, II, 2)

One must not draw the conclusion from this that the formula "one tribe, one style" is never applicable, but only that it is not in every case, and that it cannot therefore characterize African art in general. (*see* p. 31)

Second configuration: one style, two or more tribes. This amounts to stating that the area across which the style is distributed does not coincide with tribal territories, or rather, that the tribal borders overlap or cross and are not delineated or closed. The cases mentioned here can thus serve to challenge one of the properties that help to define the tribe.

In certain cases, the style under consideration is correlated with an institution common to various tribes that uses objects in that style. Thus, the helmet-masks produced by men but—a rare if not unique occurrence in Africa—worn by women are used by a female initiation society called the *sande* or *bundu*, which exists among the Mende of Sierra Leone [fig. 347] and among the Bassa, the Vai, the Gola, the Kpelle, and the Dei in Liberia. (M. Adams, 1982, pp. 62–69) Undoubtedly, "tribal" substyles may be distinguished, but they are subordinate to a common style correlated with the institution they hold in common, not with the tribes.

In other cases, it is a technique that is common to several tribes. In order to weigh gold dust, brass weights were used, in particular, figurative weights whose style is common to various tribes of the Akan group, such as the Baoule and the Asante. (In other respects, this style differs from that of the statuettes or masks of these tribes, which provides another example of the first configuration.)

One must then look for the reasons that cause these objects and their styles to straddle or cross borders, which is exactly what René A. Bravmann did in an essay entitled *Open Frontiers*. What must be remembered, in particular, is that there was a commercial circulation of objects previous to colonization and an existence of marketplaces whose clientele and tradespeople came from different tribes. With these kinds of

inquiries, we move from ethnology to the history of traditional African art.

The concept of tribe—We will leave aside those critiques (by Maurice Godelier, for example) bearing directly on the concept of tribe and we will deal only with those whose application focuses on art. Let there be, on the one hand, diverse social groups to whom the term tribe is applied and, on the other, the properties of these social groups coming under the definition of this concept. In order that this concept be a common one with clearly demarcated boundaries, it is necessary that all properties it comprises be true for each and, therefore, for all these social groups. At the very least, it is enough to show that one of these properties does not fulfill this condition.

According to the thesis, the tribe's borders are closed and because of that must be clearly demarcated. Now, not every group that is called a tribe has clear-cut borders. To expect clear-cut borders is, therefore, to project a modern European fact on traditional Africa. The borders of present-day states are results of colonization and frequently cut across the previous ethnic territories. Certain groups called tribes are the products of a regrouping of populations by colonial administrations.

The borders of a tribe would be the geographic limits of a territory occupied in a homogeneous fashion by all the members of one tribe and by them only. Thus, this homogeneous population is concentrated. (Concentration is distinct from density: a population of very weak density can be homogeneous and concentrated.) Now, in traditional Africa, the territorial distribution of populations does not occur in this form alone. A population may be dispersed; it may be divided into two or more homogeneous parts, separated by one or several other populations; it may be intermingled with different populations; one part of it may be homogeneous and concentrated and another part may be intermingled. For example, in certain regions of Zaire, dispersion and mixing are the most frequent form of distribution. (D. Biebuyck, 1985) The ethnologist who imposes clear-cut, closed borders upon such "tribes" reminds one of those who, in Jacques Prévert's words, "in their dreams plant bottle shards on top of the Great Wall of China" (*plantent en rêve des tessons de bouteille sur la Grande Muraille de Chine*). Bravmann, too, speaks of open frontiers. The property of having clear-cut and closed borders does not belong to every group called "tribe." Of course, one should not confuse the borders of tribes for the border of the concept tribe, that is, the literal and the metaphoric uses of the word. The property of having a clear-cut frontier (in the literal sense) not being common to all groups called tribe, it could not serve to define tribe by means of a clearly demarcated concept (in the metaphoric sense). This argument is applicable to other properties, such as language. (J. Vansina, 1984, pp. 31–32)

The concept of tribal style—Like that of the tribe, the concept of style may be examined in itself (M. Schapiro, 1982) or in its application to tribal art. Tribal style is determined by a morphological type that consists, in principle, of the characteristics common to all the works produced by the tribe. This type is either described verbally by means of common properties, or represented by a schematic drawing. It can be examined from two points of view. What is, first of all, the procedure used to determine the type? It is obtained through comparison and abstraction: one observes the largest possible number of concrete works and, through comparison, one abstracts common characteristics from among them. But one cannot have available all works produced by the tribe; the available material is therefore the result of a selection. This selection should contain pieces documented with great precision, otherwise one might confuse, for example, the production of a prolific studio with a tribal style represented by a few pieces. (J. Vansina, 1984, p. 29) Moreover, the selection must also

satisfy the conditions of statistical sampling; this condition is rarely fulfilled.

One may also call into question the intention of putting together morphological types conceived in this way. Since these types serve as predicates in the attributions, one can go back to a remark by Max J. Friedländer (1942). He analyzes, not the attributive proposal, but the intellectual and perceptive procedure that poses and verifies the attribution. One starts with the "assumption that the artist—whatever he experiences, whatever impulses he receives, however he may change his abode—at bottom remains the same, and that something which cannot be lost reveals itself in his every expression" (p. 200). The attentive and repeated observation of works of indisputable authenticity allows the "connoisseur" to form a generic image with which he or she confronts works about to be attributed, and which is, for an adherent of intuition like Friedländer, what type is for adherents of the method passed down by Morelli. But, he continues, this conviction is "often shaken by practical experience. . . . In spite of many disappointments, we persevere in our endeavour to discover something that is unchangeably solid, and in so doing often get into the position of a man who peels an onion and in the end realizes that an onion consists of peelings" (p. 200). This disappointment of the onion peeler is analogous to that of a person who, undoing Wittgenstein's rope, would be looking for a fiber running the full length of the rope. There is no type common to every work, no fiber running through the entire cord, no pit underneath the onion peels. "If," Friedländer goes on, "all pictures by Rembrandt had been lost, except one from 1627 and the one of 1660, it would be impossible to connect them with one another solely on the basis of style criticism. Only when we are familiar with the chain of many links which makes up the *oeuvre*—and that is the case with Rembrandt—can we join beginning to end" (p. 205). Between extremes lacking common properties, we find the continuous series of intermediaries described by Wittgenstein, Willett, and Roskill. This approach may be transposed from the individual artistic personality to the collective morphological type. Jan Vansina (1984, pp. 90–91) gives a beautiful example of the insertion of an intermediary between two stylistic entities with no common characteristics: "Consider the typical central style of Shaba (Luba) all built up in rounded volumes and then the typical style of northeastern Kasai (Songhay) with their angular blocked out geometrical volumes, almost cubistic. A transitional style is hard to imagine here. And yet it did exist and yielded some very striking masterpieces." (Musée Ethnographique, Antwerp, no. A E 744) [fig. 202] In the usual typologies, instead of introducing intermediaries or transitions, one speaks in terms of mixed types and classifies certain works as atypical, that is to say, unclassifiable.

From all this discussion of the notion of tribal art, two conclusions, not equally harsh, may be drawn. The most severe is that one must abandon, pure and simple, research into tribal types; tribal attributions would only be maintained if matched with an acknowledgment of ignorance: a classificatory order, even if bad due to ethnocentrism, being better than no order at all. "It is time to abandon this artificial nomenclature. . . objects should be labeled by their village and workshop of origin, if known, otherwise by reference to the institution to which they are associated." (J. Vansina, 1984, p. 33) Daniel Biebuyck (1985, p. 97) is less severe: he gives tribal nomenclature a heuristic value. This, in our terminology, amounts to seeing tribal art not as a scientific concept but only as a provisional outline allowing the inquiry to begin—in short, as an expectation.

SPECIFICITY AND PURITY It has been asserted that African objects do not stem from art but from religion. This negative diagnosis resulted from what one meant and expected by the term art. This involved either objects faithfully imitating a natural model (*see* Chapter II), or “art for art’s sake.”

The notion of “art for art’s sake” is a vulgarization of the Kantian notion of finality without end. Strictly speaking, not only African works but all religious works would not be art. But these works emerge out of an art conceived in a different fashion from “art for art’s sake.” Either one recognizes the difference between two realms of art or, by transforming this difference into a negation, everything that does not come out of art for art’s sake would be excluded from the realm of art. This exclusion presupposes a Kantianism that is popularized and misunderstood. In fact, Kant, who seems to be the *bête noire* of ethnologists, is not the problem. He does not assert that a work whose purpose is utilitarian is not a work of art, but only that it is not *purely* artistic. In the field of conceptual analysis, he purifies the notion of the work of art but does not claim that actual works must be perfectly adequate to that pure notion. In other words, he distinguishes between specificity and purity. By specificity we mean the ensemble of properties that define a work of art. But a definition is one thing, the concrete works thus defined another. These latter may be presented under two different conditions. Either they possess only the properties defining art and they are works of pure art, or again they possess these properties and are specifically artistic, but they possess in addition utilitarian or functional properties: they are not purely artistic. Purity implies specificity. Of these impure or functional works, one has the right to claim only specificity. The negative misreading here confuses specificity and purity and, expecting purity while encountering works that are impure, it throws the baby out with the bathwater. That works are utilitarian or functional is not sufficient reason to reject them from the realm of art, it only allows them to be excluded from the realm of pure art.

The distinction between these two states of purity and impurity is not purely conceptual, is not a simple view of the mind. The same work of art may present itself to us in both states. African objects observed in their place of origin and use are utilitarian or functional there; but these same objects, removed from this context and frequently stripped of what are considered to be secondary accessories, are regarded in the museum as purely artistic works, in total ignorance or in disregard of their functional properties. Certainly, not every functional work qualifies for this second status: artistic specificity is required, which is not necessarily linked to functional value. (*see* Chapter III)

We are immediately interested in two aspects of the concept of purity. The first one concerns the relationship between art and what is *other* than art—religion, politics, justice, magic, or technology. These other cultural forms constitute, for the work of art, so many factors or elements of impurity; but when we retain them rather than exclude them, we consider them as elements that assign the work its functions or uses. One understands how a functionalist approach to art accommodates itself badly to the notions of art for art’s sake or of pure art.

The second application of the concept of purity concerns the relationship between one art and the other arts, for example, between architecture and sculpture or painting, or, in Africa, between sculpture and dance or music. Conjointly with the intention of creating pure art, an intention appeared in the West of creating pure poetry, pure painting, pure sculpture. In fact, the history of Western theories of art shows that the question of the relationship between different arts is a double one. On

the one hand, by dividing the genus art into its species, the different arts, one intends to give them all a classification and each one a definition. This classification separates the arts in the manner of natural species, and defines a state of purity for each one by eliminating hybrids. On the other hand, the arts are reunited by subordinating them one to the other and, finally, to one dominant, hegemonic, or architectonic art. According to R. G. Collingwood (p. 17 *ff.*), this second perspective is characteristic of functionalism (which he calls the technical theory of art). The product of each of the arts is utilized by another art to which it is, by this fact, subordinate. Thus, the architect uses sculpture as a decorative or iconographic element. In this way, one can see how an architectonics of the arts suits the functionalist approach.

So, in opposition to the search for a purity of the arts coexists the idea of a total art, such as the Wagnerian opera or the dance according to Serge Lifar, which is nothing other than a metamorphosis of the idea of an architectonic art. It is permissible then to wonder whether the two possible ways of regarding an African sculpture—out of context in a museum or in situ in use—would not match respectively, the notions of pure sculpture or of sculpture that is integrated in a functional whole consisting of rituals, ceremonies, or celebrations which would offer an African parallel to Western opera. As for this last point, two conditions are required. First, once again following Vansina (1984, pp. 126–29), there is the recognition of and emphasis on the existence of “performed” arts, such as dance and music, side by side with the plastic arts or in association with them, and then, the recognition of the artistic status of these performed activities, such as rituals, ceremonies, or celebrations—if not of all of them, at least of certain ones. The second perspective, the functionalist and/or architectonic one, will be explored in Chapter III and the first one, purist or formalist, in Chapter IV. But the notion of purity presupposes that of essence or nature. A thing is pure, when it contains exclusively elements constituting its nature or essence. Pure water contains nothing but water molecules, to the exclusion of any other dissolved bodies. Classically—since Plato—nature or essence is examined by the question: what is? The formal definition is the pertinent answer to this question. Thus, speaking of pure art, we implicitly presuppose that an essence of art exists and that we have a rigorous definition of art available to us—speaking of pure sculpture, that there is a rigorous definition of sculpture. This double presupposition does not seem well-founded. If we had such definitions, accepted by the community of experts, available to us, this, as Sartre says, would become known. A typically skeptical argument: there are as many different definitions as there are theories of art. We shall pose as a hypothesis that the reason for this is the nonexistence of an essence or nature of art or sculpture.

But to abandon these essentialist presuppositions does not necessarily render the distinction between specificity and purity null and void; it only demands that it be conceived of in another manner. A pure art and another, distinct, cultural form, such as religion, may be seen as the opposite poles of a series of intermediaries which allows them to be more and more closely linked. After all, if profane, nonreligious arts exist, is there a religion without art? Similarly, between sculpture independent from architecture and architecture without sculpture (which the international style produced and toward which Cistercian austerity tended), there exist intermediaries that may subordinate architecture to sculpture as well as sculpture to architecture. Furthermore, let us consider the genre of the equestrian monument, as illustrated by Donatello and Verrocchio. In what pigeonhole of purist classification do we place it? Neither of the two fits, or both fit with the same ease. One can force the

sculpture into it, but by exploding the unity of the work into two parts, the architectural pedestal and the equestrian statue. Similarly, if one allowed clearly defined Luba and Songhay types, one would have to dissociate the statue in the Antwerp Museum that Vansina (*see* p. 50) uses as an example of transition.

The preference accorded to purism in the study of the relationships either between art and other cultural forms, or between sculpture and the other arts, is ethnocentric or anachronistic. In modern Western society, the various cultural forms have a tendency to be truly separate, to be set up in distinct institutions, and to exist independently. A case in point is the autonomy of art, often considered as an achievement of the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe. Likewise, judicial and educational institutions separate themselves from religion, and, with more difficulty, from the State. Jacques Ellul (1954) has shown in a masterly fashion how technology became established as an autonomous cultural form. Inversely, in the traditional societies of yesterday and today in all parts of the world, the various institutions or cultural forms are intimately linked together. "The more we understand the old African culture, the more it becomes clear that everything is interwoven on many levels." (W. Fagg, 1971, p. 7) The status of specific arts, such as sculpture, calls forth the same observation. In both cases, the series of family resemblance predicates seem to us to better suit the African data than do clearly demarcated common concepts that claim to define natures or essences.

Fetish and Acheiropoietic Image

In our inventory of expectations that present a high risk of ethnocentrism, we have not yet reviewed specifically religious expectations. Their intervention is, however, foreseeable, because of the character, most often religious, of African art. And the objects called fetishes furnish a good example of this. They put us in the presence of the religion of the Other, of a religion that is Other, imposing upon us a very strong impression of strangeness, if not savagery. We propose to show that this notion of the fetish involves a way of conceiving of artistic production that intimately associates the very human ability we call art or technique with religious factors—other than human.

Two uses of the word fetish should be distinguished. It is, first of all, a neologism, based on the Portuguese *feitiçao*, a translation of the Latin *facticius*, "made" (that is, implicitly, by human hands), which in turn translates the Greek *cheiropoiētos*. [Trans. note: in English, "handmade"] Why this neologism and why did it gain currency? The original meaning having been abandoned, "fetish" is used today in the sense of "magical object." The first usage characterized the object by its producer, the hand, and, through metonymy, humans; the second, by its function, its use in operations of magic. Only the first usage will engage us, for it exemplifies our two themes perfectly: to detect an initial anticipation and its ethnocentrism, then, as an alternative solution, to replace a dichotomy by a series of the same type as those of Willett and Roskill.

For, despite its form, "fetish" is used in a negative sense, in a polemical context. The fetish is opposed to the acheiropoietic image, that is, *not* made by hand (by humans). The last word has been transcribed from the Greek. (Mark, 14.58; Paul, II Corinthians, 5.1) In Christian iconography, images not produced by a person but by miraculous intervention are termed thus; the best known one is the veil of Veronica, but there is a "considerable" (C. Von Schönborn, p. 206) number of them. The Christian who travels in Africa and encounters images held to be acheiropoietic, but which are different from those he or she was expecting, transforms this

difference into a negation and declares them not *acheiropoietic*, not “not-made” by human hands. While, in logic, a double negative and an affirmative are equivalent, this is no longer so from a polemic point of view. This is what causes the difference between “*cheiropoiètos*,” that is to say, “made by hand,” and “fetish.”

In the polemics against “pagan” images, “fetish” is constantly associated with “idol” and “idolatry” (for example in the *Description of the Kingdom of the Congo* by Filippo Pigafetto and Duarte Lopez, cited by C. Fournet, 1972, p. 29). When it concerns the Other, the pagan, the *acheiropoietic* image is a fetish; it is not an image or an icon, but an idol, and the worship devoted to it is idolatry, a false worship. In a functionalist conception of art, these three oppositions, hardened into negations, form a system. The sacred object is successively considered in relation to its producer, human or not, to its model, and to its user. While, in its essence, the image is different from its model (since Plato’s *Cratylus*), the idol is erroneously identified with its (sacred) model, in such a way that the worship, the idolatry, is an adoration erroneously directed toward images, instead of being reserved exclusively to the one God. A triple error, by mistake, regarding the producer, the nature, and the use of the image. Similarly, for Karl Marx (*Das Kapital*, book I), in the fetishism of merchandise, human relationships, between people, are mistakenly taken for nonhuman relationships, between things.

Despite its coherence, this piece of Christian iconography is, in its application to African objects, demonstrably ethnocentric. It is the Christian, *acheiropoietic* images that serve as the standard of truth, just as it is my religion that is true and the others are false—they are not religions but superstitions. The remedy for this ethnocentrism is methodological: putting the question of truth between parentheses and replacing it with research into signification and an investigation into function. The methodological distinction between truth and signification was established by Spinoza, in the beginning of modern historiography, in a passage of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, whose importance Tzvetan Todorov (1982) has stressed. In social anthropology, the distinction between truth and function has been formulated by E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1965, p. 60), who takes it back to Montesquieu. These methodological rules are not applicable only to images, but to ritual words, myths, legends, and proverbs gathered on-site and indispensable to the iconographic interpretation of African sculptures.

The ethnocentrism inherent in the polemical use of the concept of the fetish presents another aspect, the spotlighting of which allows the investigation to be given a new impetus. Christian iconography does not treat its own images and the pagan ones evenhandedly; the false does not merit as much consideration as the true. With pagans, simple dichotomies suffice; but when it is a question of Christian images, distinctions and subdivisions are elaborated. For example, in Byzantium, for the iconoclasts, if the sign of the Cross is given directly by God to humans, the Eucharist is at one and the same time given by Christ and consecrated by the clergy, and the Church is consecrated by the bishop (P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*); a rite of consecration raises the bread of the Eucharist from the rank of an object of *cheiropoiètos* to that of an object of *acheiropoiètos*. (Nicephorus, cited by P. Brown, 1982) Thus, a tripartition is substituted for the dichotomy human-produced or not: produced solely by God, produced by humans and consecrated, produced by humans. Joined to the idea of artistic production is the idea of consecration. The ritually effective object is attributable to one or two producers, who may be a sacred nonhuman being, a being solely human, the image-maker, or an intermediary, an expert in the sacred. It is fitting to remember here the

two aspects of the Platonic philosophy of art: artistic production is interpreted either as *technè*, art, or as an intervention of the god in humankind (*Ion*), or of this *daimôn*, the intermediary between the gods and people, such as Amor, Eros (*Banquet*), who engenders a creative delirium (*mania*). As so often, Aristotle secularizes Platonism, but the two traditions, Platonic and Aristotelian, have lasted throughout the Western philosophy of art.

Analogous subdivisions are applied to the use of sacred images; for example, between worship and worship of the saints, hyperdulia, worship of Mary, is inserted. (F. Pacheco, 1956) One may then attempt what the Christian commentators were careful not to do—to look for analogous subdivisions in the ethnographic information that relate to the manner in which Africans themselves represent the origins of their sacred images to themselves. Here we have to make do with suggestions; but the theme would merit being studied in its own right.

The point is not artistic creation, but the manner—once again, true or false, it matters little—in which Africans conceive of it. In a functional operation, the object is not attributable to the artist alone. Between the actual production and its use, there very often occurs a ritual act of consecration, necessary for the magical or religious ritual effectiveness of the object. This is particularly true for “fetishes,” magical objects. Africans make a very clear distinction between objects that are human-made and those that are not, but they phrase it differently: for example, that which comes from the bush and that which comes from the village; the opposition bush/village has several values: nature/culture, non- or suprahuman/human. Furthermore, the attribution to a nonhuman agent takes very different forms. An African mask may be seen by the people of the village as having been given to them by a mythical being, a divinity, a primordial ancestor, or a civilizing hero; but it may also be seen as the prototype of which present masks are replicas or replicas of replicas. The collaboration of the sculptor and a suprahuman being may take other forms; the mask may have been revealed to the sculptor in a dream: then the dream image is the prototype, not-made by human hand, of the objects the hand of the sculptor will later carve.

These few examples oblige us to take into account not only the intervention of the sculptor and the agent of ritual consecration, in isolation or jointly, but also other forms of collaboration between human and nonhuman agents, a collaboration that itself is accomplished in various ways. Consequently, in classifying sacred objects, one can no longer content oneself with two dichotomic predicates, human-made or not; one must retain a series of other predicates, not one of which is applicable to all the products under consideration. In short, in order to interpret the way in which Africans represent the origin of their sacred objects to themselves, one must make do with the FRP and pose as a hypothesis that these various African conceptions form one family.

The concept of the fetish has engendered that of fetishism, which in the framework of an evolutionist conception, such as that of Auguste Comte, would characterize one stage in the evolution of humanity. One will understand that this concept has suffered the same lot as that of the “primitive” and that, with the first meaning of the word fetish having been abandoned, one speaks today of “fetishes without fetishism.” (J. Pouillon, 1975)