

AFRICAN ART STUDIES SINCE 1957: ACHIEVEMENTS AND DIRECTIONS

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Studies on African sculpture serve as point of reference in this paper. Since a full analysis of African sculpture cannot easily be separated from its sociological, technological, and ideational contexts, and since sculpture itself presents only one aspect of wide-ranging but ill-defined artistic activities and aesthetic concepts, however, these other features obviously also need mention.

There is no attempt to review the recent work of individual scholars or to characterize particular models of approach or schools of thought; this would require a badly needed but much longer and circumstantial study. Rather the paper is limited to some general observations about the kinds of works students of African art have produced and some of the needs that seem to emerge from this inventory.

In the last twenty-five years a large quantity of studies on African art, written in English and several other European languages, have been published by ever-increasing numbers of anthropologists, art historians, critics, artists, musicologists, connoisseurs, collectors, and dealers. There are many reasons to be satisfied with the achievements. Students of African art now have specialized associations and exclusive journals besides the many journals that have always been receptive to articles on African art. There is now a book series specifically on African art (Indiana University Press, *Traditional Arts of Africa*) in addition to many other serials and museum publications that regularly include relevant inventories, surveys, and stylistic and cultural analyses. Specialists on African art have achieved tenured positions not only in museums but also in anthropology, art, and history of art departments. There is an endless succession of exhibitions, and major art museums have deigned to organize some of them. In brief, there is an international boom of African art studies. After decades of relative obscurity and neglect, the new importance of the field has now led to a kind of euphoria and complacency among many specialists. This is evidenced, for example, in book reviews, which are either excessively eulogistic or severe and overcritical, and also in the proliferation of generalizations and in the widespread acceptance of assumptions and working hypotheses as proven facts.

The question then arises as to whether or not all is well with the "interdiscipline." Are we producing the types of works expected from us by the broader scholarly community? Are we satisfied with the range, scope, and depth of our studies? Are we accepted in the classic academic fields? Do our works have

an impact on other fields of study?

The positive achievements notwithstanding, several facts attest to severe lacunae and problems, as illustrated in the following observations:

- A great deal of undistinguished works—image books, exhibition and sales catalogs, quasi surveys and syntheses, empty inventories of private and public collections—continue to flood the market.
- At the same time, large geographical areas and numerous art-producing ethnic groups remain inadequately studied.
- Vital themes and problems, including terminology, are still virtually unexplored.
- In both the general and specialized literature, a large amount of significant work is ignored or inaptly used in favor of the redundant and the fashionable.
- The great museums still continue to be vast storehouses of unstudied and unclassified objects accompanied by outdated files.
- The gaps separating international research in different European languages are not bridged.
- Many subdivisions of the visual arts are largely untouched, as are the crafts, material culture, technology, and the relationships among the arts.
- No thorough appraisals of the “interdiscipline” in historical perspective to indicate achievements and lacunae, underlying methods, and theories are available.
- Conventional anthropological and art historical approaches and standard texts continue to ignore much of the new cultural, stylistic, and aesthetic information that has accumulated or else utilize the data in a superficial or marginal manner.
- Linkages and dialogue with students of the other so-called primitive arts are tenuous.
- The respective roles played in the understanding of African art by anthropology and art history are understated or misrepresented.
- Finally, many students of African art find themselves in an uncomfortable and ambiguous position in their academic departments.

In summary, although we have surely made much progress in the study of African art, our overall achievements still lag in range, scope, depth, and comprehensiveness, and in their impact on other academic fields of study.

The overall situation, at least as far as Europe is concerned, is clearly illustrated in the recently published *Etudes africaines en Europe: Bilan et inventaire* (1981). In this hastily done and unsatisfactory work, contributions by Picton, Laburthe-Tobra, Van Geluwe, Cordona, van Binsbergen, and others seem to indicate that in Europe the study of African arts is implicitly judged to be unimportant or ancillary to some other type of thematic study. Only Picton for the United Kingdom and Van Geluwe for Belgium present short articles on art studies; in other chapters, African art is only summarily mentioned if treated at all. Picton attributes the weak interests of the British academic world to the notion that social anthropology belonged to the university and the study of objects to the museum. Beattie (1955: 2) reflects on this attitude:

British social anthropologists do not attempt to study every aspect of the lives of the members of the society they are dealing with. They seek in particular to analyze systems of social relationships. . . . They may, and indeed must, have some regard for other features of the culture, such as language, systems of religious beliefs, and even material culture.

While indicating the pioneering role of several British scholars, Picton points out that only a very few African art courses are taught in anthropology departments and that art historians virtually continue to ignore African art. For Belgium, Van Geluwe includes material culture and art in her essay. Although there are four universities and one institute that offer courses on African art, most Belgian specialists—if they are not working abroad—were and are attached to museums.

STUDIES BETWEEN 1900 AND 1957

In tracing achievements and lacunae over the last twenty-five years it is important to examine what studies were produced between 1900 and 1957. For the early period up to 1945, some types of works do stand out because they provide distinctive methodological viewpoints and important results. The studies published during this time may be grouped in several categories: field-based descriptive and analytical monographs; studies on the regional, local, and ethnic distributions of artworks; descriptive inventories of public and private collections; exhibition catalogs; thematically oriented studies; picture books and sales catalogs. In each of these groups there are significant contributions that opened up new perspectives, broadened the range of descriptive and comparative data, and suggested or expanded new methods for interpreting African art.

Among the field-based descriptive and analytical monographs, some exemplary field reports by scholars, missionaries, and administrative and military personnel have been made in the form of general ethnographies, and in the more narrowly defined studies, such as Germann (1910) on Cameroun; Torday and Joyce (1911) on the Kuba; Tessmann (1913) on the Fang; Rattray (1927) on the Ashanti; Baumann (1935) on the Lunda; Herskovits (1938) on Dahomey; and Van Wing (1921 and 1938) on the Kongo. Griaule's *Masques dogons* (1938b), however, represents the first great monograph on African art. When it first appeared, this influential work drew little attention judging from the few reviews it received. It stood in sharp contrast, however, to the loose and heterogenous ethnographic reporting that had been done for parts of French-speaking West Africa by other Frenchmen, such as Delafosse, Labouret, Tauxier, Desplagnes, le Hérisse, Trilles, and Henry. Following the Dakar-Djibouti Mission (1931–1933), Griaule and some of his collaborators began "the depth study of a case (a society and its parent societies) through protracted or frequently repeated field studies" (Balandier, 1960: 108). Their purpose was to analyze social and cultural phenomena mainly in terms of "native theory," that is, of the intellectual processes and the symbolism underlying the external manifestations of social reality. The method attempted to constitute in the field the "archives" of a particular population. These archives, including special materials such as paintings, altars, figurines, graphics, texts and "native comments," morphology of objects and utensils, ritual gestures and individual and collective arts, were witnesses of a *connaissance* and an *aide-mémoire* for the persons instructed in them. The indigenous interpretation was eventually to be matched with the observed facts (Dieterlen, 1959).

The major aim of Griaule was not to study the art but rather the network of activities and ideas centering on the mask institution. Observing (1938b: 18) that Dogon religion centers mainly on the cult of the ancestors in four different forms, Griaule had noted that the mask institution relates to dead (as contrasted with immortal and resuscitated) ancestors. He had then concentrated on the mask

institution and begun his analysis with the myths which "contiennent en effet l'explication des Masques." In so doing, Griaule examined the interrelationships among rites, masks, costumes, dance movements, music, gestures, texts, and secret language. He described the mask institution as a cosmos, a network of many elements, "each element having its place in an overall system linking events occurring at the time of creation with their repetitions, in symbolic form, in the world of today" (Laude, 1978: 13). Seen from this angle, the analysis of Dogon masks was a success; the work was later to be completed and enhanced by numerous writings by Griaule and others.

Some of the issues that Gerbrands and others have raised about this book have little meaning in the perspective of the long-range teamwork involved. *Masque dogons* cannot be separated from other works, such as Griaule's own *Jeux dogons* (1938a), *Dieu d'eau* (1948) and other studies, Dieterlen's *Les âmes des Dogon* (1941) and her many subsequent analyses up to *Le titre d'honneur* (1982), de Ganay's *Les devises des Dogon* (1941) and *Le Binou Yèbéné* (1942), Paulme's *Organisation sociale des Dogon* (1940), Leiris's *La langue secrète des Dogon de Sanga* (1948), Griaule and Dieterlen's *Signes graphiques soudanais* (1951) and *Le renard pâle* (1965), and Calame-Griaule's *Ethnologie et langage; La parole chez les Dogon* (1965) and *Dictionnaire dogon* (1968). These books and also many complementary analyses by Laude, Zahan, and Imperato constitute a unique example of systematic extended team research.

Three works among the studies on the regional, local, and ethnic distributions of artworks, all of which the authors intended to be preliminary surveys, stand out: von Sydow (1930 and the later elaboration in 1954), Kjersmeier (1935-1938), and Olbrechts (1946 and 1959; the book manuscript was finished in 1940; the 1959 French translation is inadequate from many points of view because it fails to capture some of the finer nuances of Olbrecht's Dutch text). Von Sydow's and Kjersmeier's works are convenient geographically and ethnically based surveys that do not include a precise indication of criteria for classification. Von Sydow's study, however, was structured on an inventory of available data that was dispersed in museums, archives, and published works, and he intended it to be a preliminary for further field research. Olbrecht's classic work is a more tightly conceived study in comparative morphology. Trained in the Boasian culture area concept, using the Morellian method, and restricting the scope of his work to Zaire, Olbrechts brought a measure of order to the loose classifications of Zairian art that Masui (1899), Coart and de Hauleville (1906), and Maes and Lavachery (1930) had made in terms of purely geographical regions and administrative districts. Olbrechts's method has been criticized by Goldwater (1964) and others because of its excessive reliance on external characteristics, the isolation of individual traits from their contexts, the lack of interest in the work's total impact, and its emphasis on uniformity. One should add to these observations the unsystematic usage of morphological criteria, the limited amount of sculptures compared (masks are largely excluded), and the weakness of the sections on function and symbolism. The work, however, was trend-setting, and various additional details in several works mainly by Maesen (1959a, 1959b, 1960, 1967) and Cornet (1972) have tended to refine but not contradict the classification.

The tradition of descriptive inventories of public and private collections took an early form in the publications from museums in London, Leiden, and Tervuren. In some instances (e.g., Coart and de Hauleville, 1906; Maes, 1935) valuable archival documentation was included but without any clear conceptual

framework; in others (e.g., Marquart et al., 1904–1913) the inventories boiled down to arid descriptive enumerations that made little effort at classification or interpretation of the available data. A few inventories, like Börrison (1925) for the Kongo and the “monumental descriptive work” (Dark, 1973: 15) by von Luschan (1919) for Benin, contained original information for a geographically and ethnically restricted area. Guillaume and Apollinaire’s *Sculptures nègres* (1917), which included short texts and plates of twenty-four sculptures mostly from private collections, set the tone for the many subsequent works of this type. Apollinaire (1917: 3) wrote: “Le but de cet album a été avant tout l’agrément et ensuite de réunir une série d’exemples typiques au point de vue esthétique.” Von Sydow’s survey (1932) of the von der Heydt collection, although mainly descriptive of form, occasionally contained valuable cultural details.

Among the fairly large number of sketchy exhibition catalogs that appeared during this period, some such as Maes and Lavachery (1930), Sweeney (1935), *Togo-Cameroun* (1935), and Olbrechts and Maesen (1937–1938) provide a greater wealth of information. The rarely used catalog prepared by Olbrechts and Maesen for the 1937 Antwerp exhibition (which was later considerably improved by the two authors and by Maesen along for exhibitions in Rome and Denmark) stands out as a model document in which a serious attempt was made at stylistic classification and some cultural interpretation.

Few thematically oriented studies appeared in the early period, but the works of Vatter (1926), Nuoffer (1925), and Himmelheber (1935) serve as examples. Although not based on field research, Vatter’s work had a certain originality in that he critically applied some Durkheimian theories (unfortunately also some from Lévy-Bruhl) to the study of art. Nuoffer represented an early attempt to understand the nature of African art in “its cultural particularities” (Heydrich and Fröhlick, 1954: 3). This contrasted sharply with the exuberant “aesthetic” and quasi-mystic treatises that had previously appeared. Like Himmelheber, Vatter was also interested in the personality and creativity of the artist. Himmelheber’s work on Guro and Atutu/Baule artists was also a clear break with standing traditions, although too much of the data was based only on interviews rather than on actual observation of events and processes.

Some picture books (*Bilderbücher*) and sales catalogs (e.g., Einstein, 1915; 2d ed., 1920; Hôtel Drouot, 1931), focusing mainly on form, style, and quality of objects, were accompanied by more or less informed introductions. Other sales catalogs (e.g., Theatre Arts Monthly for the Blondiau Theatre Arts collection, 1927; Grand Hôtel, Antwerp, for the Pareyn collection, 1928) followed the same patterns, although they included a much wider panorama of artifacts than the usual art catalog.

The above-mentioned trends and types of studies were pursued from 1945 to 1957. Few important field monographs were published during this period, except for works such as Harley (1950), Lebeuf and Masson-Detourbet (1950), Holas (1956), Lecoq (1953), Söderberg (1956), and Cory (1956). At the same time, however, it is true that the number of specialized articles on particular types of objects or artistic features greatly increased. Scholars like Beier, Biebuyck, Carroll, de Sousberghe, Fagg, Griaule, Holas, Lebeuf, Maesen, Mercier, Murray, and Schweeger-Hefel published topical articles in a great variety of journals. These in-depth studies offered fresh information on certain styles and on particular types and aspects of art; carefully delineated themes were explored, and more attention was paid to contexts, interrelationships, and functional attributes. The various

articles contained in *L'Art nègre* (1951) provide some general idea of the type of research predominant in the late forties.

Paulme's work (1956) contained more substantial ethnographical data than had generally been included in introductory surveys, and Gerbrands (1956) critically evaluated some classic writings on African art. Underwood's aesthetic studies (1947-1949) added new insights in the appreciation of sculptural techniques. Bascom and Gebauer's brief regional survey (1953) on West Africa also presented new and more precise cultural information, particularly in the judicious classification of the arts of the then British Cameroons. Wingert's *Sculpture of Negro Africa* (1950) and Vandenhoute's (1947) grouping of Dan, Ngere, and Wobe masks gave new distinction to stylistic and morphological studies.

Two works by Herskovits (1945) and Griaule (1947) deserve special mention. Although part of Herskovits's book was devoted to a rehash of the African culture areas and to a summary of Dahomey, his chapter "Patterns of African Art" contained important suggestions for further study. He noted (1945: 58-62) that "the approach to be applied must cut across specialties no less than across cultures," that "aesthetic valuations must be fully related to cultural background," that African art must be studied in its setting, and that studies must be devoted to the artist in society, the nature of his craftsmanship, the standards by which he is evaluated, and the range of the creative process. He also pointed out (1945: 54) the conventions that had cropped up in the field: "when conventions through repetition equate with fact, the analysis loses its quality." Griaule (1947: 8-13, 50) was highly critical of some existing studies and stressed the need for assembling "l'appareil critique dont on ne sera pas en possession avant longtemps," for in-depth detailed documentation, for the study of the social and religious conditions underlying the artistic process, and for an emic approach ("il ne s'agit pas de dire ce que nous pensons des arts noirs mais ce qu'en pensent les Noirs eux-mêmes") that would also force us to discuss a series of representations and manifestations that to Europeans may not relate directly to the objects.

THE PERIOD 1957-1983

Many of the old formats, approaches, and trends have persisted in the last twenty-five years. It is true that there has been a tremendous increase in the number and range of objects and ethnic groups included in more recent works. The increment in depth of interpretation, exhaustiveness, and comprehensiveness of coverage, however, has not always been significant. The innumerable picture books, although often delightful, have been frustrating because they are repetitive, sketchy, and provide few real explanations. General introductory handbooks and regional surveys, which at one time were a welcome contribution to the field, suffer from uneven coverage and were never conceived as comprehensive surveys; many show an imbalance in source selection and are badly outdated. Inventories of public and private collections in various formats have become very popular. Apart from the visual aids they provide, these books are often useless because they fail to place the inventoried objects in any classificatory order or omit primary archival and bibliographical data.

Exhibition and museum or private collection catalogs, which are also extremely popular, mark a strong development. They range from elementary and arid

descriptions marked by a great deal of uninformed guesswork, to refreshingly new presentations in which the exhibition is conceived as a broad survey of African art, as an introduction to the art of one people or one area, or as a thematic whole.

There has been a peak in the number of descriptive and analytical monographs based on field studies and complemented eventually with museum, archival, and bibliographical research. Among the many works falling in this category, the following may be cited as examples of the variety of ethnic groups covered: de Sousberghe (1958) on Pende; Zahan (1960, 1980) on Bamana; Bastin (1961, 1982) on Cokwe; Holas (1964) and Glaze (1981) on Senufo; Horton (1965) on Kalabari; Brain and Pollock (1971) on Bangwa; Thompson (1971), Fagg and Pemberton (1982), and Drewal (1983) on Yoruba; Schweeger-Hefel (1972) on Kurumba; Biebuyck (1973, 1981) on Lega and pre-Bembe; Ottenberg (1975) on Afikpo; Fischer and Himmelheber (1976) on Dan; Boston (1977) on Igbo and Igala; Neyt (1977) on Hemba; Imperato (1978) on Dogon; Le Moal (1980) on Bobo; Meyer (1981) on Lobi; Cole (1982) on Owerri Igbo; and Cornet (1982) on Kuba. These works are as varied as their authors and as the societies on which they are based: some focus on one type of art, while others concentrate on diverse arts from one people; some take a broad cultural setting as their basis, and others select a particular institution; still others weave the cultural information around the art as the primary subject of study. Few are diachronic, many are synchronic; some focus primarily on form, style, and aesthetic evaluations, and others on ideas, symbolism, institutions, and contexts; some deal with arts and cultures that are already well documented, but others center on largely unknown groups. In general, only a few envisage the totality of the arts and their interrelationships.

The considerable progress made in this area of descriptive and analytical field monographs is the hallmark of African art studies. These are badly needed not only because of the disappearance or impoverishment of the at one time rich art-producing contexts, but also because of the woeful neglect of the arts shown in most anthropological ethnographies. This situation contrasts greatly with the earlier, perhaps less professional but certainly more inclusive, ethnographical studies. Obviously these monographs are the *sine qua non* for more synthetic surveys or comparative studies. The weakness of these comparative works is attributable not only to the lack of such studies but also the failure of many general works to use adequately the available sources.

In addition to the monographs there are greater and greater numbers of valuable shorter studies, mostly in article form, that deal with particular aspects of art, drawn either from one people or comparatively studied. Their proliferation has been enhanced by the availability of specialized journals. Whereas such studies can fill serious gaps in the record and elucidate specific points, they cannot replace the more broadly conceived monographs. All too often they offer a piecemeal aperçu of some feature, and unless they support or are supported by fuller analysis, these fragmentary studies often lack effectiveness.

New types of studies have been added in the last twenty-five years. Some works (e.g., d'Azvedo, 1973; Warren and Andrews, 1977; Vogel, 1980) deal with individual artists and native aesthetic codes, responses, and judgments, but these studies await much further elaboration. In the aesthetically oriented ones, linguistics, textual analysis, musical values, and the significance of dance and gestural communication will have to play a much greater role. In those relating to artists, more ethnohistory, autobiography, and studies of socialization processes

and economic aspects may be needed. Few studies (e.g., Bravmann, 1974, on Islam and art in West Africa; Neyt, 1977, on Hemba chiefdoms; Adams, 1980, on men's and women's societies in Liberia and Sierra Leone; Biebuyck, 1981 on pre-Bembe hunters) have followed the small-scale comparative approach initiated by Fraser and Cole's *African Art and Leadership* (1972). Exhibitions have frequently been occasions for producing short comparative studies on a theme (e.g., Rubin, 1974, on accumulative sculpture; Siroto, 1976, on spirit images; Thompson and Cornet, 1981, on Kongo funerary sculpture; Blier, 1982, on gestures). Of special significance are the "internal" comparative studies, based on the scrutiny of collections and eventually complemented by field research, bearing on ethnic substyles (e.g., Goldwater, 1964) or historical periods (e.g., Dark, 1973, 1982).

Some works increasingly concentrate on other much neglected artistic aspects. Some deal with dress and body adornment in its different permanent and transient dimensions (e.g., Faris, 1972; Huet, 1978), textiles (e.g., Boser-Sarivaxevanis, 1972; Menzel, 1972-1973; Sieber, 1972; Eicher, 1976; Picton and Mack, 1979; Idiens, 1980), and decorative design (e.g., Trowell, 1960; Jefferson, 1973). Others cover topics such as architecture (e.g., Haselberger, 1964; Prussin, 1969; Denyer, 1978), furniture (e.g., Sieber, 1980), pottery (e.g., Fagg and Picton, 1970; Leith-Ross, 1970), and ironwork (e.g., Widstrand, 1958; Westerdijk, 1975; Fischer and Zirngibl, 1970). Some also pay attention to the interrelationships among these activities or among the visual and verbal arts, dance, music, and gesture. Unfortunately, the specialized studies are sparse and the results meager. These new fields, however, hold great promise, even though in many cases it is no longer possible to study them exhaustively.

In the last three decades, several authors have reviewed and evaluated various approaches and methods of study, identified needs and areas of research, and suggested new lines of inquiry. Prominent among the recurring themes is the need for field studies and the resulting descriptive and analytical monographs. The urgency of such research was noted by Fagg (1955-1956) and by numerous authors before and after him. Willett (1971: 41-42) came to the same conclusion that progress in the field was "handicapped by the relatively small number of such studies" and that "the really valuable writings on African art consist of detailed studies of limited areas." Fagg (1955-1956: 464) considered field studies centering on the artists to be "the ultimate purpose of research in African art" and boldly stated that "if we could learn all there is to know about African artists then there would be little need for other methods." If artists are not available for direct study, then the works of art should be documented in the field through photographic records. Artists and artworks had to be examined in relation to environment, economics, society, religion and philosophy. Broadened concepts of the notion of art, scepticism about the distinctions between arts and crafts, and deeper awareness of the integration of the arts in a social framework led to an emphasis on fuller studies to deal with the complete range of arts, crafts, technology, and material culture. Studies were needed not only of the artist and craftsman but also of the patron, the entrepreneur, and the itinerant specialist (Sieber, 1966); these studies would not only be on style and mode but on function and context as well (Bascom, 1962; Sieber, 1962).

As a general comment, Bascom (1962: 583) noted: "Anthropologists who should be studying the cultural contexts of African art have almost forfeited this important subject to critics and art historians, who either ignore the cultural

context or search desperately through the ethnographic literature for bits and scraps of relevant information." Sieber (1965: 445), referring to weaving, architecture, pottery, painting, and costume, observed that shockingly little has been published on any area except sculpture. We have also learned that we are dealing with an "ensemble d'événements esthétiques," not merely with the finished object but with music, dance, and sung or spoken words as part of a total performance (Fry, 1978: 27). Studies of African art must not be restricted to the product (the art object in its technical aspects of form, style, symbolism; the date, place, artist) and the process (the skill and training of the artist; his position and role; the creative act and the sources of inspiration). They must also examine the impact on the audience, including the affective character, the responses and the associations, which are not merely aesthetic and individual but often also utilitarian and plural (Sieber, 1962: 653). In addition, we must look at the arts as behavior and focus attention on the "concept leading to behavior, resulting in the product, which in turn feeds back upon the concept" (Merriam, 1964: 228). The arts are not as rigidly traditional and conservative, and the materials not as uniform, as is often assumed; therefore, the research should not be restricted to synchronic analyses that "regard these traditions as fixed and unchanging" but should be carried out concurrently with historical research (Laude, 1978: 14-15; see also Fagg, 1955-1956; Sieber, 1965: 444). These and other useful precepts stress the need for a field methodology that is essentially interdisciplinary in character.

From the ethnographical monographs we know that there are many possible approaches, results, and foci in field research. Some ethnographers have attempted to make holistic studies of a particular society, and others have concentrated on specific features viewed in as broad as possible perspective. Both of these types have led to significant results, for in the last instance it is, as Gluckman (1959) pointed out, the depth, complexity, and comprehensiveness of the descriptive data that matter. The same holds true for field studies on art. Whether they are holistic in conception or address themselves to a particular feature, their ultimate value resides in the quality of the data and analyses. Need we be reminded of Richards's (1953) dictum that "the best of the monographs are only preliminary outlines of the societies concerned?"

Apart from the general requirements for sound field research—conceived in the great tradition initiated by Malinowski as direct observation, personal participation, and use of the African language—I think that multiple types of approaches are valid and necessary. It doesn't really matter whether the researcher focuses on the art product or the artist, or on the broader institutional framework within which the art operates; whether his ultimate intentions are stylistic, aesthetic, iconographic, structural, or functional; whether he aims at a contextual and performance oriented analysis or at local and regional surveys; and whether his approach is historical or synchronic. The value really lies in the multiple levels of analyses and in the interrelationships perceived in the ensemble. The relationships between behavior and ideology—between what people actually do (normal customs as individually interpreted) and what people say they do (normative rules)—should always be weighed carefully (Leach, 1982). In some milieus, research techniques based on interviews with informants in and outside the performance context have become popular means of extracting aesthetic responses or cultural information. Apart from the sampling problems and the need to clearly identify the relationships between "test subject and object"

(Sieber, 1973: 430), the results obtained illustrate only one level of reality. In situations where the contexts have disappeared, such methods may, if judiciously used, be the only recourse left for gaining some insights.

Presently there is a lack of holistically conceived field-based monographs that study the total artistic-aesthetic experience in a particular society in its context (Crowley, 1958, p. 191, already called for consideration of the full range of the phenomenon of art in all its forms). The need is all the greater because many societies have not been described or are inadequately documented, and because so many aspects of the interrelationships between the arts are unknown. We are frequently faced with studies that concentrate on a specific aspect, which in the absence of a broader outline of the culture and the artistic complex, preclude valid generalizations. Such holistic studies are time-consuming and demand much interdisciplinary knowledge, and so perhaps it is impossible for one scholar alone to undertake the task. The protracted and repeated field research of a team, as followed by the many collaborators and pupils of Griaule, is certainly an asset. Somewhat less ambitious efforts should be encouraged to counterbalance the piecemeal and segmented approaches.

Our studies probably also suffer from a random selection of groups and topics. Richards (1953) and Firth (1951) noted a similar tendency in ethnographic research. Firth deplored the fact that societies selected for research were chosen haphazardly and rarely in view of any specific criteria for comparative work, and Richards noted for East Africa that tribes were picked at random or on a whim rather than as part of an organic scheme. In a similar vein, the Visual Arts Group (Sieber, 1966) mentioned among the critical areas of research, the absence (or relative paucity) of studies on the French-, Portuguese-, and Spanish-speaking areas of Africa. Although the latter observation is no longer true, particularly for French-speaking Africa, numerous ethnic areas have not even been touched by art-oriented fieldwork. The sad result of the situation is that for some groups nothing is known, whereas for others we have to rely on bits and pieces of information, mostly in nonprofessional literature. It would certainly be an important step if such critical areas could be identified and their study encouraged, if it is still feasible to undertake it.

We are still in great need of studies on individual artists, whether they are conceived as biographies, autobiographies, or technical studies. In spite of all the discussions about artists, we are as yet too much confined to generalizations or satisfied with the mere identification of an artist's work.

Few field studies deal thoroughly with the socio-economic and legal aspects of art: the system, modes, and conditions of acquisition through purchase, inheritance, and initiation; their obligatory nature; the system of ownership or temporary control and guardianship; the labor and the acquisition of the primary materials; the payments for the services; the exchanges.

African art analyses could be enhanced by methods derived from ethnolinguistics, such as taxonomies of artworks and other material objects; taxonomies of the botanical, zoological, and geological materials used; the semantic fields clustering around key concepts or items; gestural systems accompanying activities and language and also those reflected in the objects themselves. The recent work *Language et cultures africaines: Essais d'ethnolinguistique* edited by Calame-Griaule (1977) generates new lines of approach, and these are of importance also for the codification of African aesthetics. The frequently repeated statement that there are no terms in African

languages for artist or art may also have to be reconsidered in this light.

As archaeological documents become available, the historical aspects of the arts of a particular population or region may be fruitfully analyzed. There are serious problems, however, because of interruptions in the record and also the many dangers inherent in applying twentieth century ethnographic and artistic data to the interpretation of the products of a vanished culture (see Leach, 1982). For well-documented areas the internal evidence that the objects themselves offer can help to establish stylistic developments, successions, external influences, internal innovations, and growth of symbolic forms. Much more attention in this respect should be devoted not only to oral traditions relating to the artworks per se but also to the actual ethnohistory of the social groups that compose the ethnic unit.

Granted that each can be considered as an entity in itself, the interrelationships among the arts and among the widest range of manifestations of so-called material culture deserve very special notice, and here again, field research is the primary need. How can we fully understand the significance of even one type of artwork, say the Dogon lidded bowl belonging to the *hogon*, without a grasp of the total insignia (made by blacksmiths, the griot, and totemic priests) transferred to him as part of enthronement rites that also involve the recitation of an epic text and the refurbishing of graphic signs (see Dieterlen, 1982)? Many aspects of the visual and verbal arts form an inseparable whole, but it is not enough to study myths and other texts that may contain concepts and justifications about art forms, usages, and functions. The very acts of producing or consecrating a painting, a sculpture, or a costume may be accompanied by sung or spoken words that not only clarify the *modus operandi* but also add power and meaning to the object. The ritual performances, celebrations, and enactments in which objects are transferred, acquired, and used involved appropriate texts that contribute to the understanding of the total event. How can we persist in attempting to explain Kongo *nkisi* figurines if we ignore the texts proffered by their expert *nganga* and assistants while the objects are in actual use? The relevant texts are not just myths but cover a wide spectrum of genres including formulas, riddles, aphorisms, imprecations, eulogies, prayers, and tales. The dynamic interplay between text and visual object must be studied as part of the performance. To simply relate a set of texts, independently collected, with a set of artworks is a hazardous undertaking. By the same token, the absence of texts and even complete silence in certain contexts also provide significant information.

The same holds true for the combinations of music, dance, text, and visual object. General and specific notions about what dance is, what behavior it entails, what types of performances it leads to, and what functions it plays (see Hanna, 1980) add to the understanding of the visual object in its context. Works by Muyaga Gangambi (1974), Ndambi Munamuhega (1975), and Ngolo Kibango (1976) on the Pende draw attention to dance steps, type of music, and vocal behavior combined with masks, costumes, paraphernalia, and gestures. They shed more light on the nature of Pende masks than classic studies, which did not include these contexts. Important here, of course, is the study of distinctive costumes, paraphernalia, and other body adornments, whether permanent or ephemeral, which add special nuances of meaning. Whereas the ultimate goal is to comprehend the totality of the ensemble, each of its elements must also be studied by itself. Each item has its separate distinctive forms and references and can be used in permutations.

In the iconography of African art, body symbolism reflected in relative proportions and emphases on particular parts of the body, in gestures and poses, and in ornamentation remains a key issue for study. There is much guesswork about the meaning of these various elements in single cultures and the importance of their recurrence in other cultures. This topic is intrinsically linked with the broader analysis of the significance of different parts of the body, and it is expressed not only in dance, gestures, and decoration of the human body but also in numerous related tales and other texts.

We possess, of course, a large number of important general introductions (e.g., Laude, 1966; Willett, 1971; Brain, 1980) and geographically and ethnically based surveys, either for Africa as a whole (e.g., Himmelheber, 1960; Leuzinger, 1960; Delange, 1967) or for specific regions (e.g., Fagg and List, 1963, and Ekpo Eyo, 1977, for Nigeria; Redinha, 1965, and Lima, 1967, for Angola; Holas, 1966, for the Ivory Coast; Cornet, 1972, for Zaïre; Cole and Ross, 1977, for Ghana; Gebauer, 1979, for Cameroun). Many loosely conceived works are anything but genuine surveys since they focus on a restricted number of artworks, are limited to certain groups, and are not derived from comprehensive bibliographies. Some are valuable as surveys of forms and styles but are largely irrelevant or sketchy regarding the cultural data they present. There thus remains a considerable need for small-scale, intensive surveys of a country, a region, or an area, and these would constitute at the same time a critical *status quaestionis*. There is still some usefulness in careful distributional studies that survey the spread of clusters of features across cultures. Panoramic inventories of the total creative output of a particular group, sustained by adequate typologies derived from native categories, are also desirable.

There are very few intensive, small-scale comparative art studies, either on a cluster of related or neighboring tribal units (e.g., Lehuard, 1974; Biebuyck, 1981; Cornet, 1982) or on a certain topic, theme, or form (e.g., Beier, 1963, on mud sculpture; Allison, 1968, and Stevens, 1978, on stone sculpture; Fischer and Himmelheber, 1975, on sculptures in gold; Ottenberg, 1975, on Afikpo masquerades; Adams, 1980, on men's and women's societies; Drewal, 1983, on *gelede* masks). Books presented under a central theme with contributions by various authors frequently do not fulfill the requirements of truly comparative studies. Too often they consist of more or less interrelated juxtapositions of self-contained studies representing diverse viewpoints that only loosely focus on a common problem. Too many old style comparative studies boil down to typologies and classifications, or else they examine a certain theme, which instead of being exhaustively studied is simply illustrated by a random selection of examples. Intensive comparative analyses must obviously center on thoroughly and evenly analyzed groups, so that as many aspects as possible of the product, the process, and the context may be compared. Small-scale comparative studies of the arts used within a single institutional complex that spread to other adjoining or related societies should be of historical interest but can also shed light on problems relating to the role of art in different societies.

The field-based study of variations within a society and culture is a form of comparative study. It is of major significance because numerous exaggerated claims are made about uniformity, typicality, and societal boundaries. A piecemeal attitude in the field is particularly dangerous in reference to inadequately studied areas. A seasoned observer like Holas (1969: 6), who was not afraid of generalizations, concluded that there are some twenty groups or subgroups among

the Senufo, that the forms of sculptures varied from fraction to fraction while others were typographically limited, that there were also conceptual contradictions, and that therefore the present state of knowledge discouraged the establishment of a complete list of existing forms of wood sculpture. Even extensive methods of research that provide a perspective on variation within a society or a group of neighboring societies, if used cautiously, can significantly contribute to settling this question (see Griaule, 1933: 7).

The study of museum collections, not only as an ancillary to field research, is an important undertaking. Apart from the need for systematic cataloging combined with the ethnographic validation of museum pieces, descriptive and comparative analyses of such collections deserve more effort. The great museums contain collections made at various times by particular individuals, many of whom obtained the specimens directly in the field but under highly varied circumstances. Large numbers of collections are accompanied by firsthand written and visual documentation; others are complemented by published writings that may not actually discuss the collected pieces but do analyze some of the contexts in which similar objects occurred. There is great benefit for the study of style, type and variation in the thorough description of objects, even though eventually dispersed, that were made by a single field collector. For the Kongo complex, for example, an attentive examination of all objects collected by prolific authors like Bittremieux or Van Wing, matched with their writings, might produce more insightful results than the lighthearted comments now made about a single isolated piece. The analysis of objects gathered in a single group or region at different periods of time by one or more collectors may also result in significant information about local and regional variations, continuities, and stylistic development.

Finally, there remain many terminological and definitional problems. In the report of the Visual Arts Group, Sieber (1966: 2) called for the establishment of "a check list of definitions not only of terms . . . but in general to deal with descriptive and analytical terminology." All too often there is uncertainty and confusion about the scope and content of even the most basic terms, such as art, craft, artist, material culture, aesthetics (see Sieber, 1973). Definitions of these concepts cannot easily be formulated and await more cross-cultural analyses. When terms such as society, tribe, subtribe, clan, lineage, age-set, age-grade, secret society, ritual, magic, witchcraft, ancestor, shade, nature spirit, or concepts such as function (and functionalism), levels of meaning, and context (which reflect major themes in social and cultural anthropology) are indiscriminately applied to different realities, the possible contradictions seem even greater. There is an acute need for circumstantial definitions of these terms, even if numerous listings of this kind already exist outside the domain of African art studies.

I have indicated some badly needed forms of analysis. In our effort to understand the total artistic phenomena in African societies and also to ascertain the place of the African arts among the world arts, no methods of approach or viewpoints should be excluded. All too frequently we tend to dismiss a certain study because it is not in accord with our own line of thinking or that of the school with which we are associated. Social science as well as humanistic perspectives are inseparably linked in our search for knowledge; in many instances we must even rely on data provided by the sciences (e.g., botanical and zoological descriptions and classifications; xylological research; X-ray examination; pharmacology; dating methods). Because of the nature of our subject, however,

informed intuitive and interpretive discussions (e.g., Blossfeldt, 1961; Armstrong, 1971) cannot be dismissed altogether.

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