1. Introduction

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IN THEIR many studies on morphology and distribution, students of primitive art have, more or less convincingly, established evidence to prove that there exist larger or smaller geographical areas within which, over a certain period of time, characteristic types of art objects, forms, designs, motifs, and style elements occur. They have, with varying results, tried to establish stylistic relationships among several such areas. Various descriptive concepts have been used to identify these areas of relatively uniform styles, such as stylistic area, art-culture area, style province, and tribal style. The specific terms by which these areas are labeled represent a heterogeneous set of geographical terms or tribal labels; sometimes they are borrowed from particular categories of objects, institutional complexes, or style elements. In addition, the literature abounds with dubious and imprecise ascriptions of objects that cannot be conveniently placed within the recognized stylistic areas. The methodology that underlies stylistic classifications is often lacking in consistency and rigidity. Some so-called stylistic areas, indeed, seem to be constructed merely on the readily observable

occurrences of highly distinctive objects rather than on the clear-cut isolation of precisely defined style elements. In many milieus, it has become a standard practice to speak about tribal style and tribal art. Surely the labels are convenient, but the identification of such concepts as "tribal" is uncertain. The reasons for this vagueness are obvious: cross-culturally valid definitions of these concepts are absent from the anthropological literature, and even in the better monographs one is often left in doubt as to the boundaries or the degree of uniformity of the cultures studied. Regardless of these difficulties, however, there is ample evidence to show that specific categories of art objects or specific art styles are often correlated not with whole cultures but with particular institutions, such as initiation systems, cults, voluntary associations, restricted belief systems, and myths. These institutions represent only one dimension of the entire culture; sometimes they have a local rather than a pantribal distribution; sometimes they are transtribal. For example, the literature on Africa occasionally makes reference to Bembe art and attempts to define Bembe style. The Bembe form a fairly closely knit cultural entity in the eastern Congo, but it is generally meaningless to speak about Bembe style. One finds among these people, first, an art (bichrome, wooden, bell masks facing in four directions) of the *alunga* association, which has a limited distribution in the southern part of Bembeland and extends into some adjoining northern Luba groups. One encounters, second, the *butende* art (bi- or trichromatic, wooden, plank-board masks). The boys' initiations, for which they are made, are held throughout Bembeland but are organized autonomously by localized maximal lineages, thus leaving scope for local specialization (which entails, among other things, the total absence of such masks in some parts of Bembeland). Third, there is the *elanda* art (masks made from hide or cloth, and studded with bead designs). *Elanda* is a semi-secret association found only in some of the sixteen partially dispersed Bembe clans. There is the art of the *punga* association (small, wooden figurines) which is of Luba origin and was introduced into

Bembeland within the last fifty years. There is the art of the *bwami* association (small, ivory figurines; rare, wooden face masks; and wooden animal figurines) which is so similar to the well-known art of the Lega that no writing on African art ever distinguishes one from the other. In addition, there are other art objects (wooden figurines) carved in styles reminiscent of the northern Luba, which are made in Bembeland by small, partially submerged groups of other than Bembe origin.

In defining styles, the literature tends to focus on basic similarities and to ignore the significant differences that are easily discovered when one compares the various known pieces of a given class of objects found in a restricted area and within a closely knit cultural entity. Sometimes these differences and variations are just acknowledged; sometimes they are accounted for under such labels as substyles, local or village styles, schools, and much more rarely, at least for large parts of the primitive world, they are ascribed to different style periods. For our purpose, it is necessary to investigate further some of the factors underlying these differences and variations. In many areas of the world, artists of a single culture express themselves in a wide variety of material media (wood, bark, cane, fiber, rawhide, stone, clay, iron, bronze, gold, silver, ivory, bone, and others). Sometimes several of these materials may functionally be substituted for one another; in other instances, art objects made out of different materials are destined to serve the purposes of different segments of the population or of diverse art-using institutions. Sometimes artists are used to working in different materials; in many cases, they are more specialized, restricting themselves to artwork in a single medium. Different style traditions in the same society may or may not be linked with the handling of these diverse media (ivory carving against wood carving, or brass casting against wood carving) (e.g., Fagg and Plass, pp. 18, 21–25). Thus, in descriptions of style the use of different media with correlated techniques and traditions must be taken into consideration as a possible source for style differences. In many regions both two-

and three-dimensional art are produced concurrently. As Schmitz (1956, p. 113) has pointed out, these two categories of technique create different problems and possibilities and cannot be intermixed in a general characterization. Basic differences in style are linked with these two categories of activity, and recourse to such concepts as substyle or style period is often unnecessary in this respect. There are many societies where certain types of objects are always made by men, according to what one could call male style traditions, in contrast with other objects that are women's specialities. Among the American Northwest Coast Indians, the arts of weaving and basketry are practiced only by women, whereas painting and sculpture in wood and stone are done exclusively by men. Inverarity (1967, p. 45) finds that discrete style traditions are associated with this type of division of labor. Moreover, the time factor is a significant element in the assessment of stylistic difference. In any culture there is constant change going on, sometimes slow and uneven, often affecting certain spheres of activity more than others. Our documentation of the chronological distribution of artworks produced by separate cultures is, in general, very poor, and many of the collected works of art extend over only a short span of time. Yet, this factor of changing values, taste, aesthetic criteria, and needs, combined with changing influences, is necessarily a potent element in determining the gradual or consistent occurrence of variations.

Other significant factors in variation become apparent if we restrict ourselves to art objects made in a single medium by artists of the same sex, and if we assume that all products under consideration fall within a very limited period of time. Different contexts of purpose and usage may impose different kinds of demand on the artists. Objects such as a Bambara mask made for the *flankuru* society have little in common with the *komo* masks among the same people. This very fact may, in turn, affect the number of artists operating or specializing at any given time in any given society. Functional purposes, volume of demand, number of artists can, in one

way or another, enhance or lessen the possibilities for variation. Thus, the needs for conventional objects may be strictly circumscribed in some cases and flexible in others. Excessive demand for specific objects may lead to mass production, copying, and the acceptance by society of many mediocre artists. Invariably, societies are divided into many kinds of subgroupings, such as local kinship units, distinct political entities, ritual communities, age groups, and voluntary associations. The various subgroupings, although participating in a basic common culture, do not necessarily form common action groups; each may represent a self-contained unit, have its own set of specialized values, preferences, and action patterns, and possess its own interpretation of the common culture. In the literature on art, unfortunately, emphasis on this aspect of variation has often gone not much further than the so-called subtribe, the village, or the loosely defined district. Without indulging in cultural-historical speculation, there is also enough evidence available for many parts of the world that so-called homogeneous societies are composed of various substrata of peoples and of many incorporated groups of diverse ethnic origin. Although participating in an overall common culture, these component entities have steadfastly maintained or developed distinctive patterns and traditions in their technology and art. Finally, the art-producing societies do not exist *in vacuo;* isolation, self-containment, and self-sufficiency are relative concepts. There are many examples of wide-sweeping reciprocal influences that different peoples have exercised on one another's art traditions. Some groups have shown more receptivity and creative originality in the process of borrowing than others that were either resilient or slavish in imitating. Whatever the case may be, in any society some component groups are more exposed to outside influences and eager to incorporate some of the extraneous art elements than others. It accounts in part for the widely observed spread across tribal boundaries of institutional complexes such as associations, initiations, cults, and their correlated art traditions.

Beyond these many factors that contribute to the variations

within culturally well-circumscribed groups, we have to consider the artists, themselves, as individuals, as members of particular "schools," as proponents of local traditions, conventions, and systems of thought. Ultimately, most works of art are created and shaped by individuals, whether or not they are helped in some phases of their work by pupils or by other artists, and even though the patinated finish or thick coating of their work may be the product of several anonymous generations of users. Some authors speculate about the absence of the concept "artist" in most primitive societies. There is no equivalent for "art" either, yet nobody doubts that primitive societies have produced objects that are pleasing and that strike one as beautiful. Obviously, these objects are not sheer replicas of one another, but works made by gifted individuals who in Malraux's (1953, pp. 310, 416) words *create* forms and do not merely *reproduce* them. These artists then, have different personalities, different skills and proficiencies; they differ in age and maturity and are trained and steeped in local traditions. Some are highly specialized in one technique, others are versed in several crafts; some work publicly, others in secrecy; some work with models, others only with mental images and dreams. Some work in ateliers in the company of other artists with whom they can compare their works, under the direction of their patrons by whom they can be guided and of the larger public by whom they can be criticized. Other artists work privately and avoid or ignore criticism. Some work only when commissioned to make carvings; others create more freely when they feel an inclination to do so. Undoubtedly, whatever the stringencies and conventions of style, purpose and expectation, the individual element is a powerful factor in explaining differences. Artists necessarily differ in training, in skill and technical proficiency, in maturity and social position, and in personality. Society can impose upon its artists a certain objective subject matter and style but the artist himself has his own personal conception of the subject matter, a particular feeling for the style, and a certain technique in executing the form.

The feasibility of the expression of individual taste, skill, and temperament in artistic productivity is a much debated question in regard to communities that focus heavily on corporate solidarity and collective action, and doubts are raised as to whether or not it is possible to speak about creative originality and conscious innovation. Surprisingly little work has been done in depth on the many aspects of this problem. Yet, the first attempts at unraveling some of its elements date back to the twenties and thirties in studies written by Firth (1925, 1936) on the Maori carver and on New Guinea, Bunzel (1928) on the Pueblo potters, O'Neale (1932) on Yurok-Karok basket weavers, Himmelheber (1935, 1938) on West African and Eskimo artists, Herskovits (1934*b*, 1938) on Dahomey, Griaule (1938) on Dogon, Vandenhoute (1948) on Dan.[1] Some authors, like Firth, discussed the personality, the social position, the method of training of the artist, and the place of his work. An initiation ceremony was performed over the Maori artist which claimed "to render him apt to receive instruction" and "fixed the learning firmly in his mind. . . . Innovations were not permitted; mistakes were *aitua* (evil omens)" (Firth, 1925, p. 283). Others, like Bunzel, were involved with local and individual variation, its character and causes. Bunzel learned to distinguish the work of several potters in San Ildefonso, Acoma, and Hopi; the distinctions were more often a matter of mastery of technique than of style. She found more emphasis on originality and individualism in some Pueblo cultures than in others (Bunzel, 1928, pp. 62–68). Originality was apparent in two spheres: in minor, distinguishing, technical characteristics, such as texture of paste or use of color; in the highly distinctive treatment of form and of decorative elements (Bunzel, 1938, p. 566). In an unsurpassed analysis of typology, ethno-aesthetics, standards for excellence in the choice of materials, design arrangements, pattern placing, size and proportions of baskets, O'Neale (1932, *passim*) stated that within "a compact body of established

[1] For a brief appraisal of some of these works, see Fraser, 1966, p. 244, Fischer, 1962, pp. 161–163.

traditions" choices are possible and alternates sought for certain portions of the basketry work more than for others. The rules for learning the craft, for selecting and using materials, for form, proportion, and design were rigid, but choice-making was permitted, for example, in the tone and rearrangement of color or in the selection of material for a design element. O'Neale concluded (1932, p. 165): "Far from being deadened by a craft in which so much is reduced to conformity, the women of the two tribes have developed an appreciation of quality, design-to-space relationships, and effective color disposition, which are discriminating and genuine."

Aspects of individual style and creativity are, of course, treated in recent works. Some of the more elaborate discussions are to be found in Himmelheber (1960), Smith (1961), Fischer (1963), Fagg (1951, 1958, 1963), Gerbrands (1967), Carroll (1967), Forge (1967), d'Azevedo (1966), Goodale and Koss (1967). Many other studies have index entries for "artist," but often the so-called artist is unnamed and treated in abstract and nonspecific terms.[2] All in all, little attention has been paid to the problem, and the reasons for it are numerous. Most objects that form the subject of art studies were torn away from their social context by untrained foreigners who were barely interested in the products themselves, let alone their makers. Most anthropologists have shown an enduring disregard for detailed field studies on the aesthetic dimensions of primitive societies. Most students of primitive art have been satisfied with classification of products into so-called homogeneous styles and substyles, with the distribution of motifs, and with general stereotypes about their meaning and function. Emphasis has been placed only on select aspects of the total artistic activity or on se-

[2] In one of the most comprehensive accounts yet published on a single primitive art, Bodrogi (1961, pp. 149–150) has only slightly more than one page on the artist. The comments boil down to such elementary statements as "It seems that the artist in northeast New Guinea received adequate moral recognition and material compensation for his work." *A Bibliography of African Art*, compiled by Gaskin in 1965, has only twenty titles listed under "artist," and many of them have reference to the modern African artist.

lect categories of objects, leading to an unfortunate compartmentalization of otherwise closely integrated artistic activities.

In most general handbooks on primitive art the authors are concerned with the principles of individual style variation and creative freedom, accepting, sometimes with several reservations, that they do exist.

Wingert (1965, pp. 15–17) claims that the artist was not so completely restrained by his society and his patrons as to be a mere copyist; he "could endow the traditional forms with his own interpretation and insight" and "In this controlled material he created, following traditional patterns, his own renderings of the requisite forms."

Fraser (1962, p. 22) writes: "Not only does the primitive artist strive to be understood, but also every step of his selection and training forces him in a traditional direction." Buehler, Barrow, and Mountford (1962, p. 42) summarize their point of view as follows: "Each work of art is therefore the expression not merely of individual experiences, sensations, and values, but also of the influences and attitudes of the culture concerned. The message of a work thus expresses cultural as well as personal attributes."

Himmelheber (1960, p. 23) also takes a moderate stand: "Der Künstler hält sich ziemlich streng an die ihm von diesem Stammesstil vorgeschriebenen Formen." He stresses, however, the marked differences with which four Guro artists render an elephant head, and demonstrates how various Senufo artists represent in different degrees of stylization the traditional women's coiffure in the form of a bird's head and beak (Himmelheber, 1960, p. 64, figs. 52, 53).

At this stage of very limited knowledge on individual style and freedom many of our questions must await an answer because so few specific data are available. But the questions relating to the general nature of the limitations imposed upon artists by different societies can be fruitfully pursued.

It is true, as Read (1961, p. 124) points out, that a work of art is essentially individualistic in origin, and that from artist to artist

there are differences in personality and temperament. It is equally true that the artist is deeply steeped in his milieu, versed in its values, eager to be in conformity with them and to be acceptable by his group. The artist is usually not a solitary person, cut off from his milieu by his own will, engaged in a full-time pursuit of the aesthetic, involved merely in a world of forms which he creates for himself. Firth's statement that "the artist-craftsman is only a part-time or leisure-time worker in this activity" generally holds true (Firth, 1951, p. 172). Moreover, the artist is himself frequently an active participant in the rites and ceremonies in which his products are used. All this implies that, as Firth remarks (*ibid.*, p. 173), the artist is not divorced from his public and that "the primitive artist and his public share essentially the same set of values." Yet, in societies where some of the art is used in the highly esoteric contexts of initiations into closed associations, the artist may not be familiar with the ultimate meaning and destination of his products. The artist has a message to convey, a concept or belief to sustain with his work of art; he must, therefore, be "readable" and understandable to his public. But again this public, of which he is himself a part, is highly skilled in reading symbolic messages; it may cultivate, as Leach notes (1954, p. 29), "a faculty for making and understanding ambiguous statements." It is my experience among the Lega of the Congo that this public is also flexible and creative in the interpretation of symbolic messages conveyed through the art forms. We may conclude that there is a close, reciprocal bond between the artist and his community, which both compels him to do certain things and allows him to do other things in his own way.

In what terms, then, can the problems of individual choice-making, creativity, and innovation be understood? Definitely the binding forces of conformity differ in nature and intensity from society to society, from activity to activity. The creative process is channeled through a great many variables, some of which are examined here.

It should be realized that, whatever rules, standards, and conventions a society may set up for its members, there is, as Kroeber

(1952, p. 138) suggests, "always a gap between values and behavior, between ideals and performance." Values, he goes on to say, "always influence the behavior . . . of men, they never control it exclusively." In the study of primitive art we have been working mostly with the finished products, with the concrete results of the performance. From these forms, scholars have constructed rules and standards. But few of us have any knowledge about the rules and criteria as they are actually formulated by the art-producing societies, and of which the finished products are incomplete projections. The conventions we construct for ourselves from the study of the finished products cannot help us in ascertaining precisely to what extent a gap exists between the norms and the performances, to what extent there is mere mechanical deviation from them or conscious creativity, to what extent are tolerated anomaly, error, reinterpretation, and conscious deviation. Art forms must not be taken at their face value. Society presents the artist with its complex ideals, values, and behavior patterns. Only certain of these demand expression in art forms; only certain symbols can find direct expression in wood or other media. Many facets of the symbolic system find their expression in oral literature, song, dance, gesture, or dramatic performance rather than in art forms. Thus, most art objects acquire their full meaning only in an appropriate context of song and drama and in their wider association with other art objects, simple artifacts, or natural objects. The artist makes these symbols into motifs. Once these motifs have come into being they belong to the realm of art; that means they can be technically modified, amplified, or reduced, regardless of their meanings or without changing their meanings.[3] The art forms belong to the artist, the meanings belong to the broader community that makes the demands, sets the patterns, and then uses what the artists are able to produce. It has been widely observed that forms almost never speak for themselves (e.g., Guiart, 1963, pp. 91–136). Those who try to explain the meanings behind these forms, without the appropriate knowledge of the cultural context

[3] For a further elaboration on this point, see Schmitz, 1956, p. 112.

in which the forms occur, generally come up with the most fantastic, simplistic, or merely poetic interpretations. Thus, some have interpreted the well-known Lega carvings of the figure with one arm and hand raised as an imploration of celestial powers, whereas the Lega themselves are not involved with sky-gods and consider the gesture not as a form of imploration but of prohibition. Lega carvings representing pregnant women with excessively distended bellies were thought to be associated with fertility cults, whereas they merely represent the Ugly Woman (symbolized in this case by the destructive effects caused by adultery during pregnancy). So, for those not instructed in reading meanings into forms, there is always a certain vagueness, nebulosity, and ambiguity involved in these artworks. Indeed, it may well be deliberately so intended, for many of these works are destined for use in the esoteric contexts of cults, initiations, and so on. The objects must be mysterious for the noninitiates, and they must retain something of their transcendent mystery even for the initiates. The interpretation of the symbols conveyed through the works of art, then, can accommodate to the unusual motif and form. When I studied the Lega, the *bami* initiates were altogether serious about the substitution of Western-made madonnas, dolls, electric light bulbs, or tree roots in suggestively distorted shapes, for some of their ivory figurines; they had no difficulty whatever in finding symbols and explanations for the substituted objects in their patrimony of traditional interpretive proverbs. Faced with an unusual carving or with one that did not correspond very well with the original demand, the Lega initiates did not reject it on the grounds that it was bad, but went through a painstaking process of justifying the interpretations that they associated with it.

Societies differ with respect to the nature of their codes of behavior and in the relative rigidity or flexibility with which rules and conventions are enhanced and sanctioned. Not all societies stimulate and validate individual effort and free initiative to the same extent. Some are highly individualistic and oriented toward self-

assertion, prestige-seeking, originality. Others are creative and apt at introducing and synthesizing new elements of culture. Linton, Wingert, and d'Harnoncourt (1946, p. 105) found that as the result of constant trading in the Sepik River area some groups, like the Iatmul, practiced an easy eclecticism; others, like the Arapesh, developed a parasitic art (characterized by the large-scale import of alien elements and the systematic copying of them). Still others, like the Abelam and Kwoma, adhered to their own, very distinctive styles. Vandenhoute (1948, p. 4) observed that the Dan-Ngere-Wobe of West Africa explicitly recognized the value of an *original* mask form and were willing to attach superior social efficiency to it. Even in such societies with rigid, totemic codes as are found in Arnhemland, Elkin, Berndt, and Berndt (1950, pp. 14–15) found the conscious search for form, line, balance, rhythm, and color arrangement to be so strong that even "the expression of a myth does not override these factors." Limitations are, of course, set by the local style tradition itself. Boas (1955, pp. 156–158) attached great importance to this factor: "the style has the power of limiting the inventiveness of the productive artist. . . . The controlling power of a strong, traditional style is surprising," and "Although the artisan works without copying, his imagination never rises beyond the level of the copyist, for he merely uses familiar motives composed in customary ways." Without taking this extreme viewpoint of Boas, we can undoubtedly agree with Malraux (1953, p. 281) that "One of the reasons why the artist's way of seeing differs so greatly from that of the ordinary man is that it has been conditioned, from the start, by the paintings and statues he has seen; by the world of art." It is against this style that every great artist has to struggle (*ibid.*, p. 359). In all societies there are only a few great artists. Many of the works that we have collected and studied were probably made by mediocre artists. Fagg (1951, p. 119) has remarked that, owing to various circumstances, mediocre African works have been preserved in large quantities. Some were made by individuals whose social system or social position re-

quired them to make conventional types of objects regardless of their skill and training. No wonder, then, that many works reveal this trend toward conformity and uniformity of style which is attributable not to the stringency of the restrictions on creativity but to the carver's incapacity to produce original work.

In different societies, artists and users both focus their attention on different aspects or qualities of works of art to judge and to interpret them. Among the Lega of the Congo focus is first on the size, material, and gloss of a piece, and only then on its general form and design. Bunzel (1938, p. 570) noted that the Hopi potters always spoke of line, the Zuni potters of the number and the distribution of designs, San Ildefonso potters of the surface texture and the luster. In Polynesia the value of a drum is determined by its shape and the quality of the wood (Guiart, 1963, p. 112). It is very likely that for those features of the artwork on which the main aesthetic and functional focus rests, the rules are more stringent than for the other, secondary qualities.

There are the social position of the artist himself, the status attached to his person and to his works, the motivations behind his activity. Is the carver recruited within a limited descent group? Is he a member of an abject caste? Is he, regardless of lineage or caste, recruited because of mystic values associated with him because of the special circumstances of his birth?[4] Or, is the position of the artist, as among the Dan-Ngere-Wobe, the result of vocation, talent, and apprenticeship? (Vandenhoute, 1948, p. 4). Not only are differences in skill and workmanship, but also relative freedom from local "schools" and traditions, intimately connected with this aspect of recruitment. But even where the craft is inherited within a rigid line of descent (e.g., from father to son) it would seem that the pupil can still specialize in the sculptural form and designs that he realizes best, in which he is most successful, and for which he

[4] Schmitz (1962, p. xv), for example, points out that in the Sepik River area when a child is born with the umbilical cord wrapped around its neck, women believe that it will become a great carver.

has more taste. Moreover, as Forge (1967, p. 78) has brought out, the importance of visiting and traveling as a result of various kinship connections, with subsequent exposure of artists to diverse local traditions, must not be underestimated in assessing the degree to which an artist can free himself from locally imposed traditions and inherited conventions. In many societies, also, the artist, regardless of the patterns of recruitment, is not treated just like any other craftsman or like a laborer whose services are bought by patrons with strong demand rights in him. It should be realized that the artist often works for the members of closely knit kinship groups or of ritual communities, or for congeners who do not *pay* him for his work but reward him with food, tobacco, drink, and other presents. There are artists with wide fame, reputation, and prestige whose works are in high demand, as there are famed singers or musicians or storytellers.[5] There are many indications, too, that some artists are nonconformists, although not rebels; some are "originals" whose motivations differ from those of the rest of the population.[6]

Artists in different societies adopt different working methods. How specialized is the artist in making only one set of objects, and how familiar is he with other categories of artworks? Does he work on several items at a time? Has he models or are his images purely mental and personal? Or does he express the dreams dictated to him by shamans? How careful is his planning of designs? Does he work in an inspired spontaneous way without much preparation? How much time is he willing to devote to any one of his creations? The last differs considerably from culture to culture. Himmelheber (1935, p. 85) reported that the Kuskokwim Eskimo always finish their work in one day. Elsewhere, as in parts of New Guinea or

[5] In the more exhaustive studies on primitive art, explicit or implicit reference is constantly made to the existence of these outstanding and widely recognized artists.

[6] Herskovits and Herskovits (1934*b*, p. 128), for example, note that in Dahomey artists were admired for being gifted and respected for their art but, at the same time, were looked upon with scorn because they lacked interest in the prestige and wealth that are primary goals for the majority of Dahomeans.

Africa, the work progresses slowly over weeks and months. Willett and Picton (1967, p. 66) have shown that the north Ekiti sculptors conceive their work in four stages and that apprentices and assistants play a great role in helping to finish the product, progressing as their training develops from the final stage (cutting the details) to the earliest stage (blocking out the main form of the piece). Variability of output among Ekiti sculptors is undoubtedly linked in some way with the amount of work left to apprentices, the point in the progression of the work at which apprentices are allowed to intervene, the maturity of the apprentices, the diligence and firmness of the master himself. There are societies where the number of artists is very limited, and where the artists work in widely scattered places and have little or no contact with one another. There are others where the artists, as members of certain descent groups or castes, live together in villages of their own, thus facilitating consultation, criticism, joint work, and conformity.

Criticism is obviously known in primitive society.[7] But how it is expressed, how far it goes, and what impact it has on the artist's work are unclear. Artists who work in isolation, like the Northwest Coast totem pole carvers or the Abelam, cannot be influenced very much by such criticism. Others, like the Kuskokwim Eskimo, who work publicly in the presence of many spectators are theoretically more exposed to it. Yet Himmelheber (1935, p. 82) for example, has observed that when the Kuskokwim artist's wife would draw his attention to specific details the artist would, frequently and deliberately, retouch an entirely different feature of the work.

The ways in which art products are evaluated by their users are relevant to ascertaining the role of art criticism. When we outsiders review, for example, art objects collected from the Lega, we tend to classify them as good, mediocre, and bad carvings. But for

[7] Bohannan (1961, p. 94) has strongly emphasized the significance of criticism. He writes, "Problems of creation in primitive societies are interesting; but they may be overshadowed, from the standpoint of their significance in the societies concerned, by the problems of criticism."

the Lega themselves, *all* pieces commissioned by the members of the *bwami* association—who have the exclusive control over the artwork—are *good*. That means they fulfill their purposes and functions. Criticism of the physical appearance of such objects is not tolerated; or, rather, such criticism is inconceivable from their point of view. By purpose, all these objects are *isengo*, that is, sacred and dangerous. Through use and anointment with oil and perfume, all objects acquire a patina and a gloss that make them part of the "gathering of mushrooms," as the Lega call it. This stereotyped attitude of the users and the public toward art products is all the more significant since it was widely held that carvings were meaningless unless they had been consecrated, charged with forceful ingredients, and impregnated with emotion through usage. On the other hand, not all art is destined to express mythological or religious concepts, or to symbolize the power structure or the social cohesion of the society. Some art is made for enjoyment, for fun; some art is humorous and burlesque.[8] Among the Pende of the Congo, certain masks representing such characters as Tundu, the clown, Mbangu, the epileptic, or Mazumbudi, the Pygmy, are almost never carved in the classic *katundu*-mask style of the Pende.[9]

The next vital question relates to the function and meaning of the primitive work of art. Some authors continue to make largely arbitrary distinctions among religious, magical, secular or utilitarian, and ceremonial art, the implication being that greater or lesser freedom of expression may be correlated with these broad functional categories. The problem, however, should be explored further in terms of more restrictive questions that follow. Is the art object understood to be the iconic transcription of a myth? Is it a mnemotechnical device or a didactic element used in a system of teachings and initiations? Is it understood to represent some es-

[8] In general, this aspect of the artwork has been neglected in the literature. Bohannan (1964, p. 150) has correctly stressed the fact "that some 'art' may be no more than playful decoration added to the basic ideas for producing something that is 'needed.'"

[9] De Sousberghe (1958, pp. 22–23) brings this point out very clearly.

sential aspects of a dead person or of an ancestor, or is it meant to be a stereotyped rendering of a supernatural being? Is it intended to express several meanings in one or to illustrate the opposite of what the value code stands for? Is it intended for masquerades and choreographed dances, or is it to be used, rather, as an emblem, a crest, a token, or as an initiation object? Is it made for private purposes or for public display? Is it meant to be a mark of difference and autonomy? Does it symbolize the integral unity of a large group of people or express the power structure of that group? These and many other purposes obviously exercise different pressures on the artist. Some purposes require conformity with fixed patterns and rigidity in the handling of the subject matters; others invite ingenuity, specificity, and conscious originality. Since art objects are generally used for several purposes and mean many things to their users, it is normal for certain parts or features of the object to be subject to a more rigid conventionalism than others. The basic forms of the *tapa* masks of Oceania did not exhibit wide-ranging differences for the simple reason that they represented a limited number of mythical beings whose names they bore. But the colored motifs around the faces of the masks showed great variation because they were peculiar to specific lineages. Smaller masks representing totems were less esoteric in meaning than the *tapa* masks and showed more originality (Guiart, 1963, p. 132). We may therefore assume that some artistic activities are restrictive and strongly governed by prescriptions and proscriptions, and that other elements of the art product permit or require greater personal inventiveness and choice-making.

In this connection we should also examine the general nature of the demands made on the artists. This question—about which little or no evidence is found in the literature—relates to the problem of what exactly the patrons of the art ask from the artists, how and with what degree of precision they formulate their demands, and what they expect to receive in return for their requests. This point is all the more vital since we know that in most primitive

societies artists create works of art only when commissioned to do so. Sieber explains elsewhere in this book that in one of the African societies he had studied, the demand was merely for a human figurine. The people were satisfied when a human figurine was carved, thus leaving all other choices and decisions to the artist. I have found among the Lega that these demands are expressed in different ways and with varying degrees of precision. The Lega artists have produced, among other things, large quantities of animal figurines which fall into two functional groups. By far the largest number of such pieces is individually owned and classified under the generic term *mugugundu*. This is neither the common name nor the drum name for a specific species of animal, but a taxonomic concept that seems to be the equivalent of *the* animal par excellence, as indicated by the contexts of usage and symbolic associations. For the high initiates of the *bwami* association, who have the exclusive right to use these pieces, *the* animal par excellence is either a pangolin, an aardvark, a bongo antelope, or a terrestrial turtle. Here the demand is only for a carving of *the* animal. Consequently, although *mugugundu* objects are always rendered in a stylized, simple, and unsophisticated form, with little or no decorative design, individual artists have been able to demonstrate their skill and ingenuity in many ways: size—height and length of the pieces; proportions—details of the head, eyes, legs, and tail; patination and quality of material. The artists were bound only by an unspecified, but large, demand for a general form category. The users focused their interpretations on general form, not on details, and particularly on the ceremonial associations and the context of song, proverb, and dramatic performance in which these forms occurred. The second group of Lega animal figurines is much rarer and is not classified under a generic term. The animal figurines of this group are larger, more realistic renderings of particular animals, such as pangolins or hunting dogs—a realism that is sometimes enhanced by the adornment of the wooden figurine with real pangolin scales or with wooden dog-bells. These objects are owned

by only a few preceptors or initiation experts; in some cases they are part of baskets, the content of which includes other carvings and natural objects. The baskets themselves are symbols of ritual cohesion in large lineage groups. The forms and details of these carvings are much more conventionalized and standardized for they stand for the dog prototype *kafyondo* or for the pangolin prototype *kilinkumbi*. In general, the pieces are rudimentary in appearance. The demand is specific and limited. These various aspects of stylistic diversity, then, are not linked with distinct regions or subgroups in Legaland, but with different functions and types of demand.

As outside observers of primitive works of art that were torn away from their associations with music, drama, literature, and other manufactured or natural objects, we anthropologists and art historians have tended to overstate the importance of form and design. In this process we have been inclined to overrate the rigidity and conventionalism of form and to underrate the multivalence and flexibility of usages and meanings attached to them. It may be said that forms are, to some extent, incidental, transient, illusive, and epiphenomenal. Newton (1961, p. 33) finds that in the Gulf of Papua area some objects are more sacred or powerful than others; yet these differences cannot be related to the art motifs. The awe-inspiring quality of some objects here is related to their relative ages and to the addition to them of paint or other objects (skulls). Elkin, Berndt, and Berndt (1950, pp. 8–9) further substantiate this point of view by pointing out that in Arnhemland the *waninja* ritual objects of the very same design are used in more than one totemic ceremony. The authors contend that this sameness is purely external. In other words, when a single *waninja* object is used in different contexts it is no longer the same thing because of its association with different songs, myths, and types of participation. This is very much my experience with Lega art, where single objects of specific form and design are used constantly in totally different contexts of initiation, and possess different associations of

meaning as expressed in proverbs, dance movements, and gestures. If our knowledge about the thought systems hidden behind these art objects was deeper, we would probably find that, very frequently, single forms or categories of form occur in a multiplicity of social and ritual contexts with different complementary meanings attached to them, meanings that are not directly illustrated by the forms but which adhere to them because of traditional associations. The phenomenon implies, among other things, that a gap exists between what the artists create and what the users need, that the demands are for basically functional types, and that artists automatically have much leeway in creating forms that, in a general way, fit these types.

The study of local stylistic variations, as aspects of time, place, culture, and of individual skill and conscious self-expression, must take into account a large number of variables. The configurations formed by these interrelated variables differ not only from society to society, but also within a single society from subgroup to subgroup, from time period to time period, from category of objects to category of objects, and even from one motif and style element to another. These variations are to be sought not only in the overall forms and structures of the products and in their various details, but also in the associated meanings and functions. Judgment of minute variations is particularly difficult and requires profound familiarity with basic forms. Schmitz (1962, p. xiv) has gone as far as to affirm that, within the limitations set by the basic forms, the range of possible variations is almost limitless but that the superficial observer can scarcely recognize them because his knowledge of the basic forms from which variations derive is insufficient. He observes that for Melanesia these basic forms are rarely rendered in full, and that they are either abstractively simplified or baroquely enriched. Stringent conventions often apply, not to the product as a whole, but to its component elements, and they frequently bear, not on the form as such, but on such particular aspects of the product as material (and method of obtaining it), color,

height, size, place of the decorative element, and so on. In judging the significance of self-expression and of creativity one cannot apply the term "artist" indiscriminately to the makers of all the objects produced. For many art products are made not by individuals with special training or vocation or social recognition, but by persons whose social positions and social and religious aspirations compel them to make the art object. Moreover, among the latter there are beginning artists and mature ones, there is "a genius, a clever and industrious mediocrity, or a mere copyist" (Linton, 1958, pp. 9–10). Obviously, the creative capacities of these various individuals differ radically. In addition, in function of the fame and reputation of the artist, unusual and original stylistic features become more or less acceptable and socially compelling. How diverse societies really feel about this matter would have to be investigated in the concrete context of more permanent taxonomic concepts than mere statements. Among the Nyanga of the Congo, for example, the master storyteller, the master zither player, the master carver—persons who command wide recognition regardless of their village or lineage and whose products or performances are in big demand because of their outstanding quality—are all referred to by a compound noun that includes the element *shé-* that is also used in all teknonyms for males. These masters are never referred to as *miné-*, a frequently used morpheme that establishes a relationship of property, possession, and usufruct. In my opinion, the use of *shé-* (derivative of *ishé-*, his father) in reference to the highly talented person, indicates an emphasis on a Man's creative ability, rather than on the sheer mastery of conventional technique and style. Moreover, the study of individuality in primitive art must not be reduced to the identification of individual hands or to the developmental aspects of the individual style. It must be placed in the wider perspective of the social motivations and values that underlie the making of art objects. Some of the vital questions begging answers are: Why is art needed? How and for what purposes is it used in a particular society? What is needed and what is made?

How is a reconciliation made between what is needed and what is produced? How far is the pursuit of prestige, originality, fame, and excellence institutionalized? Finally, creative force must not be measured just against innovation and inventiveness per se; as Wingert (1965, p. 18) has pointed out, it is also to be determined in terms of the artist's "success in fusing tradition with invention and innovation."