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Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 2, Object and Intellect: Interpretations of Meaning in African Art (Summer, 1988), pp. 75-87
Published by: College Art Association
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Words about Words about Icons: Iconologology and the Study of African Art

By Suzanne Preston Blier

If we understand "iconology" to mean "the study of icons" ("words about icons") then "iconologology" may be said to refer to "the study of iconology" ("words about words about icons").[1] Discourse on iconology, as Jan Bialostocki explains in a historically focused essay on the subject,[2] goes back to the sixteenth century with its manuals of symbols, allegories, and personifications. One of the better known of these works is Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia,* which was first published in Rome in 1593. In the course of time, much has been written both about iconology and about iconography, the two terms' having been used interchangeably during much of the nineteenth century. Scholars concerned with iconological and iconographical issues during earlier centuries focused their attention primarily on motif typologies and subject-matter classifications. Not surprisingly, many directed their studies towards Christian subject matter and the systematic grouping and identification of particular images and motifs.[3] Early iconographical analysis in non-Western art tended to concentrate on Buddhist traditions in various contexts in India, China, and Japan.[4] Thus, studies of iconography and iconology have been concerned with art forms that are characterized not only by relatively standard subjects and forms of representation but often also by consistency over time and across geographical and political boundaries. It is not without significance that both Christianity and Buddhism are also associated with important forms of textual documentation and that both emphasize verisimilitude in representation.

Much of the world's art (including many periods of European art), however, has been left out of systematic iconographic study as it has been historically defined because the associated art does not conform to the above criteria. And, as Svetlana Alpers observed recently,[5] iconological analyses, particularly when patterned on Erwin Panofsky's classic study,[6] have been formulated largely from the perspective of Italian Renaissance art. What Alpers found especially problematic in the Italian iconological models is the emphasis on disguised symbolism, particularly when such models have been used as a basis for examining seventeenth-century Dutch art. It is Alpers's view that "northern images do not disguise meaning or hide it beneath the surface but rather show that meaning by its very nature is lodged in what the eye can take in—however deceptive that might be."[7]

Surface versus hidden meaning in art, however, represents but one facet of the larger question of the applicability for other areas of art-historical analysis of iconographic and iconologic methods developed originally in the context of Italian art. This essay focuses on four related questions raised with respect to this method in African art-historical studies: 1) the problem of "pure form" identification and the question of its primacy in documentation; 2) the role of context in conveying meaning; 3) the nature of art in Africa and the sources of its meaning; and 4) the question-of-meaning hierarchy. Works of African art, it is suggested here, both pose unique problems with respect to subject-matter classification and meaning analysis and raise new and important questions having potential ramifications for the wider field of art history. Although iconological studies have long been with us, the study of iconology as a method and focus of analysis (or what I have called "iconologology") is still very much in its infancy.[8]

The Problem of "Pure Form" Identification and the Question of Its Primacy as Documentation Grounding

The lifting of the hat in greeting, according to Panofsky, is a convention peculiar to the Western world. Its origins lie in the medieval world of chivalry, where "armed men used to remove their helmets to make clear their peaceful intentions and their confidence in the peaceful intentions of others."[9] As understood today, Panofsky continues, this action "is conditioned by [the wearer's] being a man of the twentieth century, by his national, social and educational background, by the previous history of his life and by his present surroundings."[10] Panofsky suggests that the principles that underlie this form of greeting behavior also underlie representations of actions and gestures in a work of art. To understand these principles, he goes on, one must also know both the history of a particular action and its contemporaneous use. These principles ultimately come into play in Panofsky's distinct strata of meaning conceptualization, which he defines as: 1) pre-iconographic; 2) iconographic; and 3) iconologic.

Art historians having various theoretical and methodological orientations today may find fault with Panofsky's reading of his own hat-lifting scene. Some will underscore the fact that Panofsky is describing here a custom of men and that, indeed, customs relating to the wearing of hats by women follow an entirely different set of rules. Others

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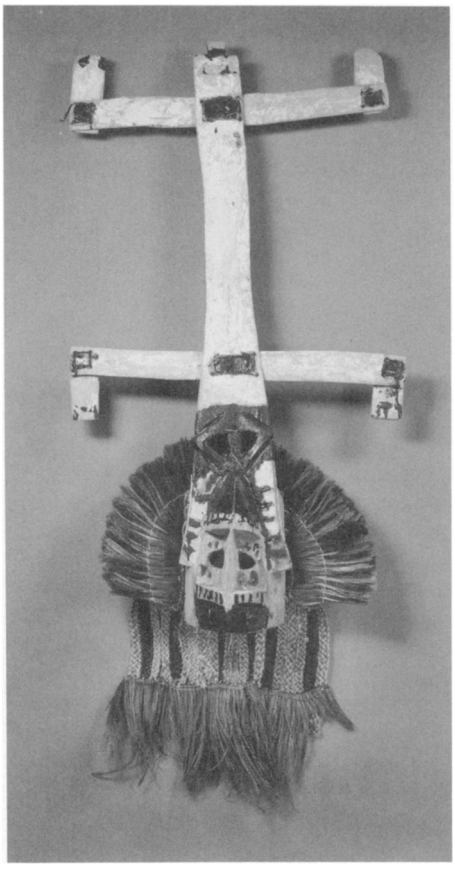


Fig. 1 Dogon *Kanaga* mask, Mali, twentieth century, wood, hide, fiber, pigment, 97.2 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1987.74i), Gift of Lester Wunderman, 1987.

will point out that the very fact of a man's wearing a hat and removing it in greeting, whether in this century or earlier, is preconditioned by the circumstances of class and that Panofsky's reading of this scene takes into account only the background of the wearer. Still others will note that Panofsky's discussion of the fundamental relationship between signifier and signified is undeveloped in his treatment of the role of the hat itself and the gesture of its lifting. One could go on and discuss a number of theoretical perspectives and their distinctive approaches to the subject of hat lifting, but what is important to emphasize here is that every "factual" description is in many respects a relative one. In any description, observers present and in the process reaffirm their particular point of view on the subject. Even in such a comparatively clear-cut description as one man greeting another by lifting his hat, the action taking place will be described differently according to the perspective of the viewer.[11]

In African art, similar questions of the viewer's perspective on subject and meaning also emerge. In some art contexts—the Dogon, for one—a single form may be associated with variant identities and meanings depending on the individuals in the society who are viewing it. The Dogon *kanaga* mask ***(Fig. 1),*** for example, is seen—depending on one's position of eldership within the society[12]—to represent variously a bird and a highly complex symbol of creation and regeneration. Problems in identifying the primary subject are also compounded by the stylization and abstraction that predominate in many African works of art. In addition, African art images do not always have basis in life. Even in the context of a relatively naturalist African art tradition such as that of the Benin kingship, where documentation seems to have been an important artistic concern, it is often impossible to determine the identity of a particular motif or form without the aid of sources outside the work itself. Although Panofsky asserted that "Everybody can recognize the shape and behavior of human beings, animals and plants, and everybody can tell an angry face from a jovial one,"[13] many plants and animals (as well as fish and birds) are, in fact, often difficult to identify in African art. Paula Ben-Amos's identification of the large bronze birds surmounting the ancient palace of Benin ***(Fig. 2)*** as kingfishers[14] was certainly not made on the basis of the formal qualities of the birds themselves. Indeed the tall, curved-beaked, and relatively long-legged features of the Benin palace

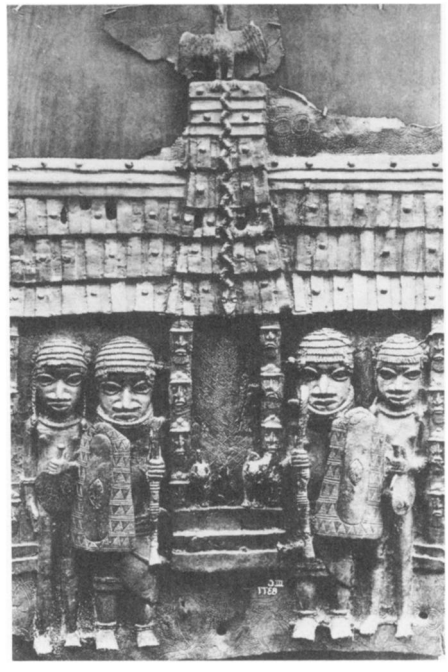


Fig. 2 Benin plaque showing the palace façade, Nigeria, sixteenth–seventeenth century, bronze. Berlin-Dahlem, Museum für Völkerkunde, no. III c8377.



Fig. 3 Kongo seated figure (*ntadi*), Zaire, nineteenth–twentieth century, steatite, h. 41.3 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978.412.573), The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1960.

birds are in sharp contrast to the appearance of kingfishers in life. Clearly, the nondocumentary aspects of these birds were more important to Benin artists than were their particular physical features.[15]

The issue of creative interpretation and cultural difference in expressive form is also important in the portrayal of mood in art; emotions such as anger and joviality are not expressed in the same way in every society. As I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt pointed out, laughter in one society may mean happiness and well-being; in another, it may represent wonder, embarrassment, and even discomfiture.[16] Mourning responses similarly vary from one culture to another. Panofsky's assertion that "such expressional qualities as the mournful character of a pose or gesture, or the homelike and peaceful atmosphere of an interior" can be apprehended even on a pre-iconographic level[17] thus is problematic. The type and degree of expressive mourning in China, for example, traditionally was carefully variated in a code of etiquette that differed according to the closeness of one's relationship to the deceased.[18] In African societies also, mourning is

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displayed in a number of distinct ways. In many African sculptures, facial expressions remain relatively constant (in other words, emotion is rarely shown through facial variations), but gestures and body positions assume great importance.

In Kongo mourning figures, the range of gestures associated with mourning is considerable: the gesture of both arms drawn upwards towards the mouth connotes grief; touching the chin or cupping if with one's hand suggests the state of sadness ***(Fig. 3);*** arms held aloft indicate crying or lamentation; wrapping one's arm about the body portrays loneliness; crossing one's arms in front of the chest communicates coldness and silence.[19] Some of these gestures have parallels with mourning gestures found in European art; others clearly do not. It would be a mistake therefore to read a particular meaning into a gesture in a pre-iconographic description without any confirmation from outside the work itself. In art, as in life, form and meaning, signifier and signified, are not universally correlated. When we are removed in time and place from the work's artist and intended audience—or focus on periods or cultures that are generally concerned less with verisimilitude than with other aesthetic, expressive, or iconic means—there is a real danger of misreading even the most elementary feature of a work. Because numerous problems exist in identifying "pure form" in African art, art historians in this field have often found it necessary to use other means for grounding symbolic analyses. One of the most important of these has been context.

The Role of Context in Conveying Meaning

To return for a moment to Panofsky's hat-lifting scene, his focus in this action is almost wholly on the *narrative* of the lifting of the hat.[20] One needs to ask, however, if this same greeting would occur in another context—in a work environment, say, or in a court of law or hospital, on the field of battle or sport, in a foreign land, in a place of worship, at one's home. Is the greeting the same in both country and city, between strangers and friends, workers and managers? The *context* of hat lifting clearly is essential to grasping the significance of the scene. The anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Erving Goffman have each written about the role that context and setting play in the meaning that is accorded a particular action in life.[21] Both scholars emphasize the need to focus on the context or frame of action. Context in art is also important. Our knowledge of the meaning of Michelangelo's *David,* for example, is much the richer for our awareness of the circumstances of its Florentine setting.[22] Our information on Greek Kouros and Kore figures, is, by contrast, much less deep because the specific circumstances and contexts of their use is, in most cases, unknown. In African art and architecture, context is equally significant for meaning.[23]

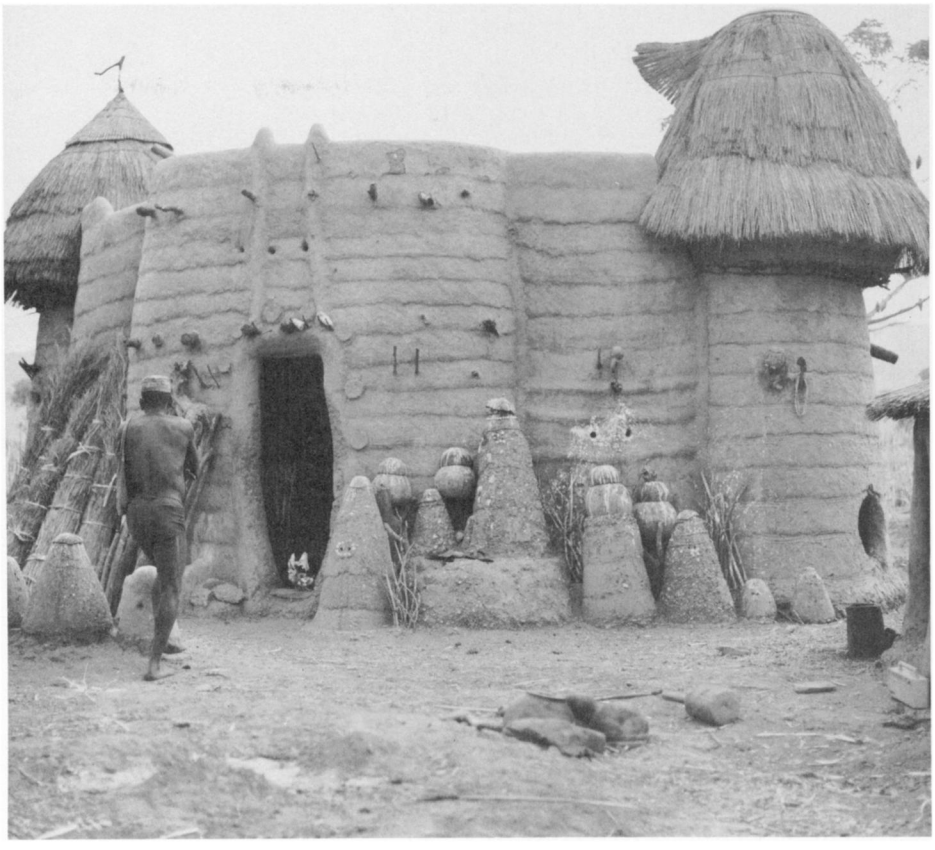


Fig. 4 Batammaliba house, architect: Ibenekwaku Tintinku; House Owner: Ibenekwaku Tintonku, Village of Koufitoukou. Photographed January 15, 1978.

Architectural decoration of the Batammaliba (Tamberma), for example ***(Fig. 4),*** uses a variety of abstract signs, which are incorporated into building façades as a means of identifying these structures as temples to particular deities and spiritual powers.[24] In some instances, the forms that these signs take are peculiar to a particular deity; in others, however, several deities share the same sign. Only be discerning the position or context of the sign—whether it is placed to the left or right of the door or to the left or right of another sign—can its underlying meaning be ascertained. For example, a raised-line sign when positioned on the south joining wall of the façade (on the right as one faces the house) identifies the structure as a temple for Fayenfe, the deity of war and death. If this same sign is positioned above the door between the raised linear elements that lead up to the house "horns" ***(Fig. 5),*** it identifies the house as a temple to Fawafa, the deity of men's initiation. Positioning, rather than form, is also important in differentiating the genders of associated deities. Thus if the raised-line sign identified with the war-and-death god, Fayenfe, is placed horizontally on the south joining wall *(see* ***Fig. 4),*** it identifies the structure with a female Fayenfe god. If, on the other hand, this same line is positioned vertically, it indicates that the associated deity is male. Indexical positioning thus is of central importance in determining a sign's meaning. Indeed, the placement of a particular form or motif often is more important with respect to meaning than is its shape or other features of its appearance.[25]

Similarly, in African sculptural traditions, context is often more important to a work's meaning than either subject matter or related features. Fon *vosa-bocio* figures ***(Fig. 6)*** are a good example. Many of these sculptures, my recent research suggests,[26] are aimed at distancing or distracting harm or difficulty from a particular member of the community. They are set up in and around the house, the community, and the landscape in accordance with particular Fa geomancy (divination) signs. One such geomancy sign will suggest that a sculpture be placed at the house entry, others will specify a crossroads, river bank, forest, and so forth. In addition to deter-

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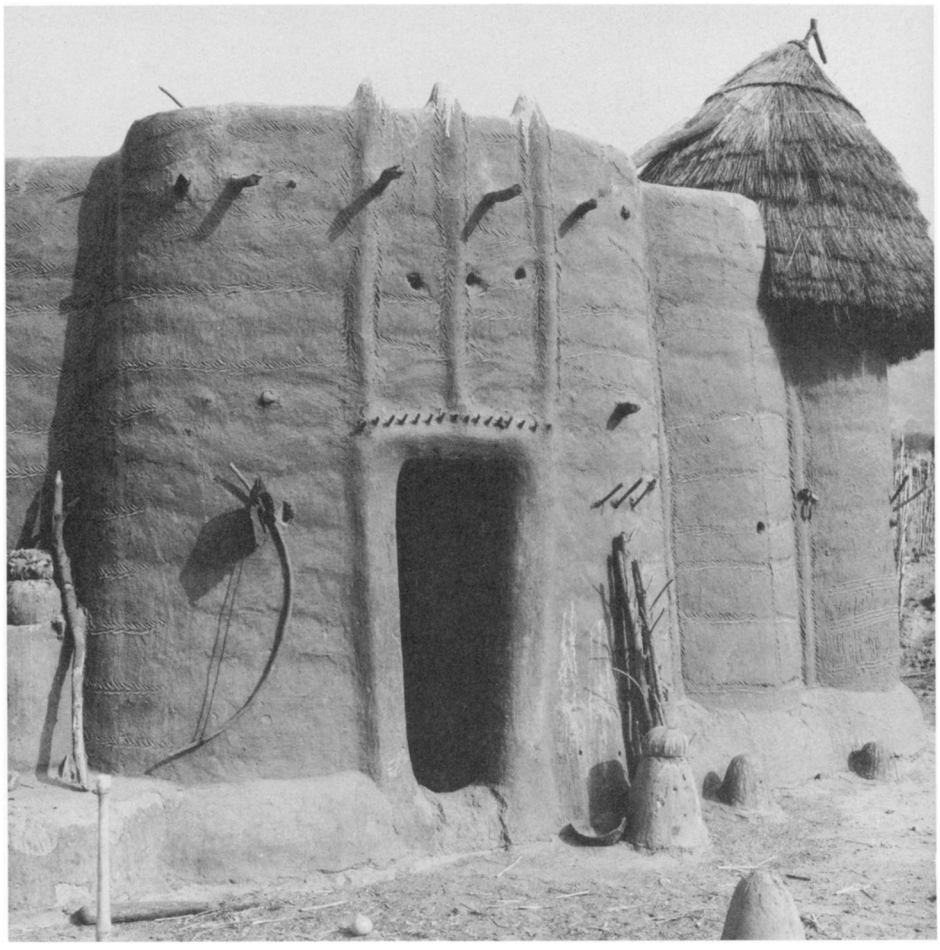


Fig. 5 Batammaliba house, architect: Kufanku Loka. House Owner: Yapita Tapoke, Village of Koufitoukou. Photographed November 19, 1977.

mining placement, the geomancy sign also is associated with an elaborate explanatory account often drawing on the lives and actions of deities, mythological kings, folk heroes, and animals, which gives significance to the sculpture's placement and to the identity of the work with one of the protagonists of the associated geomancy sign. In formal terms, these *vosa-bocio* works show the same basic features; yet their symbolism varies. Their iconographies, in other words, are identical, but their iconologies are distinct.[27] In order to grasp the full meaning and rich religious, social, and psychological groundings of these works within the geomancy system, one has to know exactly where the sculpture was placed, for whom and why it was carved, and with respect to which geomancy sign. A Fon *vosa-bocio* figure out of its original context is devoid of its full symbolic content and meaning.

A similar problem presents itself with respect to mother-and-child figures of the Asante ***(Fig. 7).*** In this culture, mother-and-child images are identified with a variety of different temple contexts. But without knowing the specific shrine from which such a sculpture was taken, it is generally impossible to ascertain the work's underlying religious identity and significance.[28] In Baule sculptures ***(Fig. 8),*** knowledge of the context of a work is also paramount. Figures displaying the same formal features and attributes generally represent one of two very different types of spirit personae: the first, spirit mates (*blolo bla* or *blolo bian*), aid a person particularly in marital matters if correctly worshiped; the second, nature spirits (*asie usu*), who are unattractive and potentially dangerous, are identified with spirits of the forest and geomancy.[29] Although in reality each type of spirit is said to look very different from the other, both are carved with the same basic features. Forest spirits would be offended, it is explained, if one were to portray them as they actually are; thus these spirit sculptures are not visually distinguishable from those portraying spirit mates. Without knowing the specific setting in which a work was placed, it is impossible to know its underlying identity. Here again, context contributes far more to the meaning and significance of a work than do the associated visual features. Here also there is a clear-cut discrepancy between the iconography of a work and its iconology.

A quite different but equally pertinent example of the primacy of context in determining meaning in African Art can be seen in masking traditions of the Dan ***(Fig. 9)*** and related cultures. Here the problem is less one of blurring the visual distinctions between particular sculptural forms than of the changing identity and significance of an artwork over time. In the course of the life of Dan masks, the contexts in which they are worn, the roles that they play, and the significance that they have in the society vary tremendously. Dan masks often begin as entertainment masks, but through the years, as their reputations grow, they may become associated with increasingly more powerful and important roles and identities, juridical among others. Thus the meaning of these works again is not primarily determined by their formal qualities, but by each mask's history and context of use at a particular time.[30] With Senufo *kpelie* masks ***(Fig. 10)*** the problem of context and meaning figures in still another way. Here the role of the mask (and its underlying symbolism) is defined primarily on the basis of the associated costume, instrument accompaniment, and song text.[31] When the costume is discarded (and other aspects of the per-

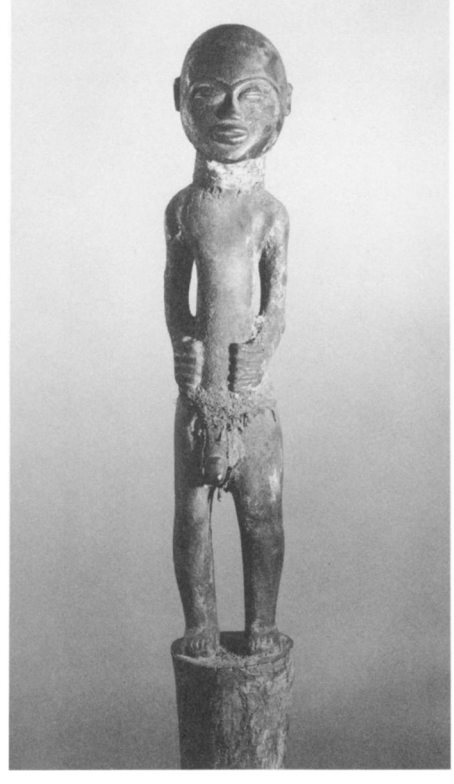


Fig. 6 Fon *vosa-bocio* figure, Republic of Benin, twentieth century, wood, cloth, fiber, encrustrations, h. 101 cm. The Saint Louis Art Museum. (1865:1981), Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Hollander.

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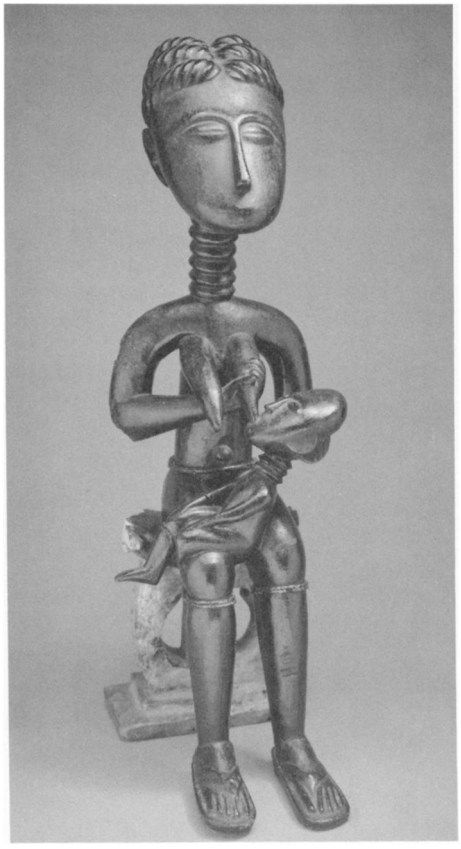


Fig. 7 Asante mother and child figure, Ghana. 1879–1930, wood, beads, paint, h. 20 in. (50.8 cm). Collection Paul Tishman.

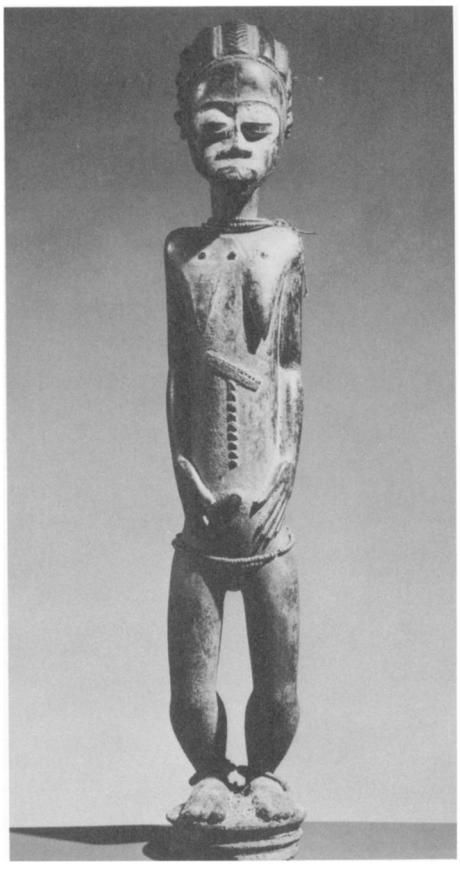


Fig. 8 Baule female figure, Ivory Coast, nineteenth–twentieth century, wood, beads, paint, iron, h. 32.5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978.412.303), The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1969.

formance are lost), as generally happens at the time of collection, the most important elements of documentation with respect to the meaning of the work are lost as well.

The Nature of Art in Africa and the Sources of Its Meaning

Michael Baxandall began his book on fifteenth-century Italian Painting by observing that

> A fifteenth-century painting is the deposit of a social relationship. On one side there was a painter who made the picture, or at least supervised its making. On the other side there was somebody else who asked him to make it, provided funds for him to make it and, after he had made it, reckoned on using it in some way or other.[32]

To examine the applicability of Baxandall's statement for African iconography and the related question of its meaning, it would be well to return once again to Panofsky's hat-lifting scene. If it is assumed for a moment that the hat that is discussed in this passage is itself the work of art and the subject of art-historical inquiry (rather than just the subject of the narrative, as Panofsky intends), then other perspectives on the meaning of the scene also come into play. In this light, it may be important to observe what type of hat it is. And to ask how important its maker (the artist) is with respect to its meaning. And again, to know more about what the shopkeeper (the dealer) and the client (the wearer) have to say about its meaning. The maker-artist certainly would be knowledgeable about the various technical features of hat manufacturing. He or she would also have considerable insight into hat styles and the accepted standards of creativity with respect to particular hat types. The shopkeeper would also know about taste, as well as these other matters. Each of these people obviously is central to the creative process of hat design and manufacture, but how important are these people to the underlying meaning of the work? How much do they know (or for that matter care) about the symbolism of hats?

Some readers will object that hats cannot be considered in the same light as works of fine art. Yet documents concerning fifteenth-century Italian art cited by Baxandall suggest that the concerns of patrons and artists at this time were often just as prosaic. Ghirlandaio's 1485 contract to paint the frescoes in the choir of S. Maria Novella noted accordingly that he agreed to include "figures, buildings, castles, cities, mountains, hills, plains, rocks, costumes, animals, birds, and beasts of every kind."[33] What about the symbolism? How important was meaning? Baxandall's study suggests that during this period religious spokesmen were in many respects far more concerned with symbolism than were either the artists or the patrons.[34]

My experience in Africa in several very different cultures (Yoruba, Batammaliba, and Fon)—interviewing artists, consultants, priests, and others, and observing art in the contexts of its use—suggests that artists and architects, although extraordinarily knowledgeable in technique, style, aesthetics, and what is appropriate or acceptable for a particular type of object or structure, are far less knowledgeable when it comes to the underlying meaning of a work or its symbolic grounding than are others in the society, such as priests and geomancers. The artists and architects I interviewed generally knew about the multiplicity of factors that affected the making of the work, they knew about their own visual sources, about what was well done, what was beautiful (and difficult to achieve), and what was "correct" in formal features and symbolic attributes. Generally, however, they cared

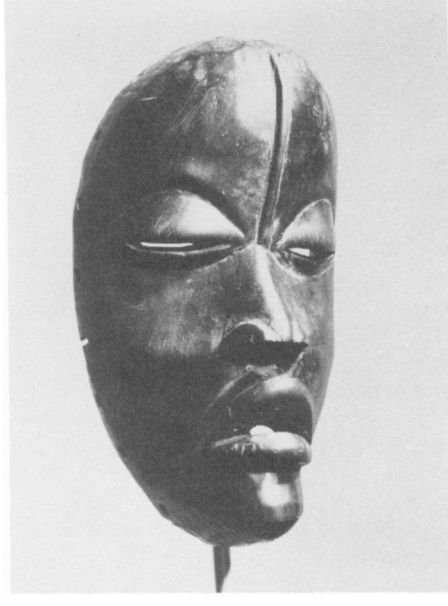


Fig. 9 Dan mask, Liberia or Ivory Coast, nineteenth–twentieth century, wood, h. 21.9 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978.412.303), The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller. 1964.

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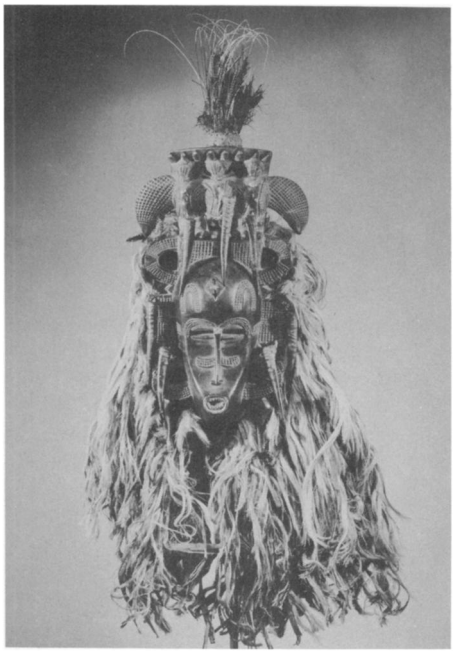


Fig. 10 Senufo *Kpelie* mask, Ivory Coast, nineteenth–twentieth century, wood, horn, fiber, cloth, feathers, aluminum, h. 35.5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978.412.489). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1964.



Fig. 11 Fon warrior figure, Republic of Benin, artist: Akati Akpele Kendo, 1858–68, iron, h. 165 cm. Paris, Musée de l'Homme, Captain Gonssagrives Gift 1894.

little about the larger meanings accorded their creations, and many responded to related questions about symbolism with either discomfort or outright amusement.

The patrons I interviewed—i.e., those responsible for commissioning the art—on the other hand, generally knew when and for what purpose a work was commissioned. They also were informed about the context of the work with regard both to the significance of its setting and the identities and roles of various other objects that were positioned near the work. In general, the patrons also had information on the particular ceremonial contexts of the art. Contextual information of this type, as suggested above, is often critical for the identification of works and the understanding of their underlying significance. The larger questions of the symbolic grounding, however, often were unknown to those who commissioned an object. How is one to determine the symbolism of a work if neither the artist nor the patron is forthcoming on this matter? And conversely, if the work has no larger symbolic meaning to the artist or patron, can it have any larger symbolic meaning in and of itself? The symbolic groundings of many African arts, I have found, are often less the concern of the artist and patron than of other individuals of the society; most important of these, the society's cultural spokespersons and shapers and the art "users" and viewers.

Because so much within a work is both the expression and the result of the *Weltanschauung* of a particular period, place, and culture, the persons most knowledgeable about the society at the time when the work was produced—the philosophers, religious thinkers, seers, consultants, moral guardians, as well as the custodians, explicators, and disseminators of knowledge—also affect its interpretation. These various spokespersons for the culture, in contrast to the patron or artist, whose view of the form, context, and history of an object is often grounded in personal experience, frequently have knowledge about the place and significance of the work within the larger system of ideas that the culture holds. And since they are usually actively involved in the explanation and dissemination of societal values (which may or may not overtly involve art) they also often influence the actual forms that the works of art take.[35]

In Africa, besides these religious functionaries and the guardians of family or court histories, by far the most important group of cultural spokespersons who influence the shaping and the explication of art are the geomancers, who, in their many-sided roles as seers, consultants, therapists, medical practitioners, religious interpreters, and philosophers, act as conduits and intermediaries between the sacred and social realms, revealing the wishes of deities and spirits to members of the society.



Fig. 12 Fon *Gubasa* sword from palace war shrine, Republic of Benin, artist: Akati Akpele Kendo? 1858–68, iron, h. 153.67 cm. National Museum at Abomey, (45-8-170).

Geomancers accordingly are often actively involved in the process of art creation. Frequently, it is they who indicate when a work should be commissioned, what formal qualities it should have, and where it should be placed. Susan Vogel suggests that the features of Baule figures (such details as scarification, age, posture, and coiffure, among others) are often specified by the geomancer.[36] In some cases these geomancers even indicate which tree in the forest should be cut for the carving.

In the case of the Batammaliba, the geomancer plays a critical role in both shrine and architectural decoration. Thus nearly every one of the various signs that are incorporated into the building façades as a means of identifying the structure with a particular deity or spirit *(see* ***Fig. 4****)* is placed there as a result of a geomancy decision. If, for example, a geomancer determines that the problem facing a family is due to the intervention of a certain deity or spirit, the sign of that power will be added to the façade, and its shrine will be housed within. The Batammaliba geomancy system in turn provides an important check on central aspects of artistic creativity with respect to architectural and shrine form and decoration.

Among the Fon, the impact of geomancy on art is equally important. In addition to the critical role geomancy plays in regard to the placement and symbolism of the *vosa-bocio* figures dis-

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cussed above, geomancy also influences the formal features, symbolism, and placement of many other forms of art. These range from deity representations such as the earthen portrayals of the messenger-trickster god, Legba, which are constructed in front of every house door, to various sculptures commissioned by the king. Since each of the Fon kings is identified with a specific Fa geomancy sign, his associated sign often played a critical role in the arts that were commissioned during his reign.

One of the best known of the Fon royal sculptures is the lifesize iron figure of a warrior now in the Musée de l'Homme ***(Fig. 11).*** This work originally formed part of a military shrine constructed inside the palace of King Glele (1858–89). It was encircled by larger-than-life iron *gubasa* swords ***(Fig. 12)*** and machetes set upright in the floor. The knives and the warrior figure were both commissioned by King Glele for the memorial ceremonies of his father King Guezo (1818–58) to commemorate the latter's victories over the Mahi to the north. This sculpture is the work of a talented artist of Mahi origins, Akati Akpele Kendo, who was brought to the capital by King Guezo during the course of the Mahi conquest. In this sculpture, Akati shows Guezo in the guise of Gu, the Fon deity of war, smithing, and iron. The figure strides determinedly forward, its arms (which once held a large *gubasa* sword and a gong) are raised in anticipation of a battle, ready to slice through the air as it moves forward, trampling and destroying all adversity and enemies in its path.

Although it is dedicated to the memory of King Guezo, the work incorporates important references to his son, King Glele, who commissioned the work. The iron-and-war god, Gu, is the patron deity of King Glele's Fa geomancy sign, *Abla-Lete,* and this sculpture refers to one of Glele's names, which was derived from this sign: *Basa gla ji Gu honlon ma don,* "the great *gubasa* sword gave birth to Gu and he will carry out the vengeance."[37] This is generally interpreted to mean that the great King Glele is himself the son of a powerful individual (Guezo) and will continue his father's military vengeance. The *gubasa* sword, which the figure once carried, was one of Glele's most important symbols; the form is specifically referred to in the geomancy sign *Abla Lete.* Other features of the figure are drawn from this geomancy sign as well. Most refer to Gu, the patron deity of this sign. The figure not only is depicted striding off to battle in war dress (in reference to Gu's important role as the deity of war) but is made of iron (the material both sacred to and empowered by Gu). Every work of iron essentially serves as an altar to this god. Black, the color most closely associated with Gu, is also meaningful in this work: the iron from which it is made is of this color. Black pigments were spread on the faces and bodies of Fon warriors before battle both to reaffirm their identity with Gu and to frighten enemies. On the figure's head is a spiky crown of war weapons and tools—knives, hooks, swords, hammers, machetes, pokers, lances, hoes, arrow heads and thunder axes—that are all closely associated with this deity. Hats with miniature tools and weapons of this type are worn by important priestesses of Gu, and miniature implements form an important part of Gu shrines. Essential features of this work thus derive from the Fon geomancy system, in this case from *Abla-Lete,* one of its 256 signs. Fon geomancers, in turn, played a critical part in both the creation and explication of this sculpture.

Native viewers, "users," and experiencers of art, because they actively and personally participate in the experiencing of a work, also contribute to the interpretation of the meaning of an object or structure. Their opinions are frequently crucial to understanding the art and its significance in the context of the broader society. Although many of these people are reluctant to discuss the more personal aspects of a work's religious or psychological meanings for them, I have found that often their reactions to the work of art are as revealing as any utterance.

During my first extended stay in Africa, living in the Yoruba royal city of Save, an itinerant art trader came to my house to show me various Yoruba works, which he hoped I would purchase. One of my Yoruba assistants happened to be there at the time and looked on with barely veiled amusement as various traditional masks and religious objects of wood, stone, and ivory were taken out. When, towards the end, the trader took out a pair of brass *Edan Ogboni* similar to the pair illustrated ***(Fig. 13),*** my assistant became quite serious, his body stiffened, and his face turned ashen. He obviously knew these works in a way different from the other arts. When I later asked him about his reaction, it became evident that he was cognizant of the political meaning of the *Edan* and their association with the powerful group of community elders who constituted the local judiciary and whose power extended even to removing kings from office.[38] The formal qualities of the works and the beauty of their features meant little to him; in reality he saw

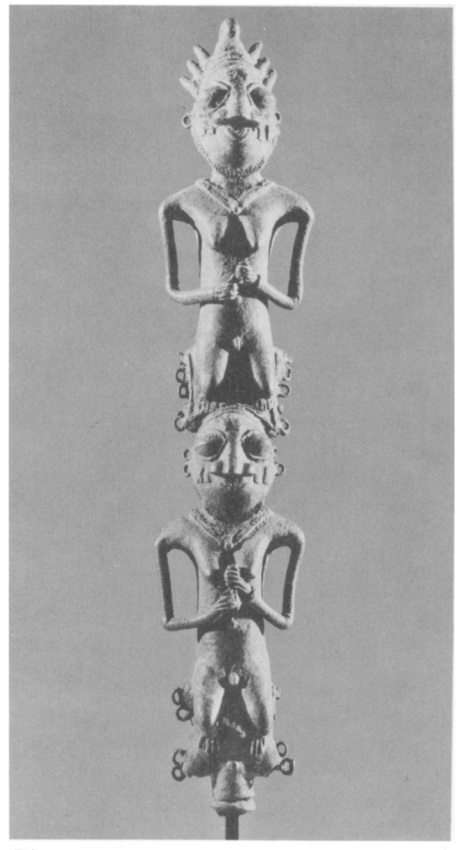


Fig. 13 Yoruba *Ogboni* staff, Nigeria, nineteenth–twentieth century, bronze, h. 37 3/10". New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1978.412.464), The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1962.

neither. Rather, it was what the works represented, what they signified to him as a member of Yoruba society, that constituted their most vital meaning. The experiential is thus in many respects a work's most profound and deeply felt dimension of meaning. Yet this is an aspect of symbolism that can be neither grasped fully nor understood completely by an individual outside the culture. It is also a dimension of symbolism that is generally overlooked in art-historical analyses that give primary emphasis to the formal features of the work.

Fon royal staffs of office (*makpo,* or "recades," as they are usually referred to in the literature) ***(Fig. 14)*** offer another example of the importance that the personal perspective of the viewer-experiencer has for the meaning of a work. Adjaxo Humase, one of the most powerful of the traditional ministers of the Fon court, described the role of these staffs to me:

> If the king wants to see me in a hurry, he will take his *makpo* and give it to the person who serves as his messenger, saying, "Give it to

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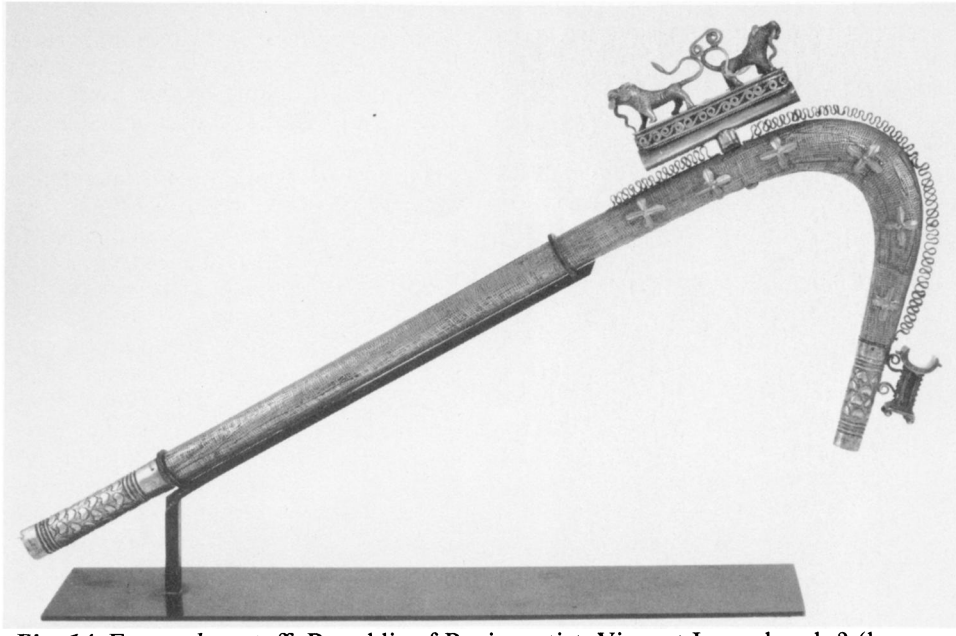


Fig. 14 Fon *makpo* staff, Republic of Benin, artist: Vincent Lamadosedu? (b. 1886), early twentieth century? wood, silver. Collection Frederick and Claire Mebel.

> Adjaxo." When the person arrives, he kneels and I too will kneel. Migan [the prime minister], everyone, when the *makpo* arrives, one must kneel. The one who brought this to me will bless the earth as one does in front of the king. I also will do this. He then gives the *makpo* to me. When I get up, I will not even go to get my hat, I will continue directly with him. It is with this that the king calls one, and one should not even take the time to look behind one before continuing. When you take it, you hold it with both hands and carry it to the king. When someone sees you with the *makpo* in your hands, this person will kneel and let you have the path.[39]

J. A. Skertchly, a nineteenth-century traveler to the Fon capital, provides an equally incisive view of the role and meaning of the *makpo:*

> While discussing breakfast the next morning, a messenger arrived bearing a *kinikinikpo,* or royal lion stick, from His Majesty, who desired me to proceed to Abomey at my earliest convenience. Of course all my people were for setting off on the instant, as the custom [requires] performing all offices for the king with ostentatious haste; but as I much preferred finishing my breakfast to being jolted in a hammock, I sent word to the king that I would start before *panigan* or mid-day. Beecham was horrified as usual but . . . I thought best to let his fears take their own course. . . . The young Prince Ghugalah had been provided with a royal stick . . . which would ensure our speedy passage through all gates, and besides it possessed the all-important power of "passing" us through the bands of [female warriors] who frequent the road between Kana and the capital, and who would be obliged to give way before the bearer of so powerful a token. . . . Just beyond the gate we met a gang of [female warriors] who, with their usual braggadocio air, commenced to tinkle their bells at us. Ghugalah, however, took them "flat aback," [by] advancing with the magic stick raised above his head, and crying out "A-h-go" [attention!] . . . he quickly brought them to a sense of their position. . . . [T]hey stood stock still, and when they had gathered together their wits . . . made way for us by rushing pell-mell into the bushes. . . . I could not but laugh at the chagrin . . . evident upon the faces . . . but it was no use grumbling,—out of the way they had to go, much to the delight of my hammockmen, who were overjoyed to have an opportunity of paying out the soldieresses in their own coin.[40]

These descriptions, of course, tell us nothing at all of the history of the *makpo* form, a tradition that, according to Adjaxo, began with King Guezo and replaced an earlier tradition of using canes (*kpoge,* "thin stick") for this purpose, which had been introduced by King Tegbesu (1728–75).[41] Nor do they explain anything about the importance of the various motifs that are carved into or added onto these works (in the case of King Glele, whom Skertchly visited, a lion). Moreover, these views are clearly limited in that they represent the experiences of but a few of the many different viewers and users of these sculptures.[42] Yet it is obvious that, as with the Yoruba *edan ogboni,* an important aspect of the meaning of art lies outside the work itself and in the personal experiental associations of its viewers and users.

Another example of the importance of the meaning that the users and viewers bring to a work also comes from the Fon. Among the various art forms that I researched there were figures carved to represent deceased twins, ***hoxo (Fig. 15).*** I had seen a number of women carrying figures of this type secured in their wrappers in the same way that they would carry a living child. I had also seen several of these figures in other contexts: in the houses of various individuals, where they were positioned on tables or dressers; as part of the "equipment" of certain geomancers; and as silent "witnesses" during various religious feasts. Although much has been written about twin figures of the nearby Yoruba,[43] I knew little about the meaning of these works for the Fon except that twins, whose original home is thought to be the forest (and who are believed to return there after death), are considered to be very powerful. Indeed, twins are said to be living gods, and it is for this reason that when one twin dies, a commemorative sculpture is carved and then cared for by the family members as if the twin were still alive. In the words of the geomancer Ayido Gnanwissi, "the figure does not represent a *vodun* [mystical power]; it *is* a *vodun.* Although originally one purchased the sculpture, after one brings it to the forest and does all the ceremonies, it becomes a *vodun.*"[44]

Since all Fon twin figures have the same basic features, it soon became clear to me that key aspects of their meanings necessarily derive from the personal experiences and views of their various viewers and users. Ayido Gnanwissi, who has twins within his family, explained the meaning of these figures:

> When a twin dies [lit., "when one escorts him back to the forest"], the mother goes to see the priestess of twins.[45] The mother then marries [purchases] a twin [i.e., twin figure] in the market. All the statues are set out by their sellers there in the market. You stand in front of them and if there is a

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statue that pleases you, you will marry it. However, if your child was a boy and if the statue that you found is a girl, you will not marry that day. Instead, you will return home empty handed, and afterwards you will go back to the market. If you do this enough times, eventually you will find one that you will want to marry. After marrying the twin you will again go to the priestess of twins and then buy the things that she requires of you and prepare the dishes of food that she has requested. When everything is ready, the priestesses arrive to do the ceremonies. In this way your child who was lost will be found. Once it has been found, the twin who is still living will no longer want to go to the forest, or if he or she is always sick or jumpy, this will cease. If one does all the ceremonies, everything will be in order.

The ceremonies take all day. During the night one goes to the forest to continue the ceremonies and to find the twin; one remains there until day break. . . .[46] At this time the priestess leaves the forest holding the figure secured to her chest wrapped in the cloth which she is wearing. When she and the other priestesses arrive at the house, she calls the mother of the child saying "we have found your child and have brought it back to your house." The mother will kneel in front of her. The priestess extends the figure three times saying "here is your child." Finally the figure is placed in the mother's hands as she wishes the child "good arrival." The figure is then presented to the father, and if there are other children or relatives at the house, the figure will be presented to them as well, saying this is your brother or sister.

When the mother [or the remaining twin when old enough] wants to eat, she will place the twin figure beside the plate and give it a bit; when one drinks one does the same. A seat also is made so that the twin can sit. When one goes to bed one will lay it down to sleep. And, whenever one goes to the tailor with cloth one will tell him to make something from the cloth for the twin as well; the tailor will understand and will do this. One could never sell such a figure. If you sell it, it is your own child, brother, or sister, that you have sold. You have sold your own person.

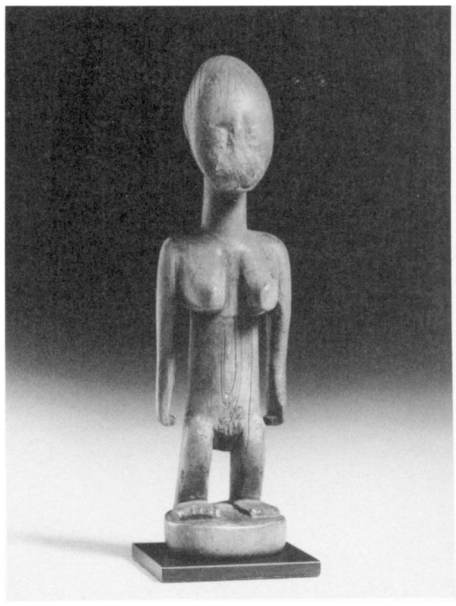


Fig. 15 Fon twin figure, Republic of Benin, twentieth century, wood, h. 17.5 cm. Düsseldorf, Galerie Simonis, Afrikanische Kunst.

Here, too, in many respects the meaning of the work is imposed on it by users and viewers after its manufacture. For the priestesses, whose role is both to transform a simple statue into a deity in the course of day- and night-long ceremonies and to present the "found child" to the mourning parents and siblings, the sculpture helps to reaffirm their function as intercessors between the divine and the human. For the parents and siblings of the deceased twin, the work's meanings become interwoven with the real-life memories of the person it both represents and in a sense *is*. Through the daily act of nourishing, clothing, carrying, and bedding the statue, the ontological grounding of the work's meaning is reinforced in a continuing way.

In time, owing to the care that is given to the figure its features change; the work becomes smoother, softer, and the whole surface assumes a beautiful sheen.[47] This change within the work is particularly striking when a figure that has had extensive use is contrasted with one that has been recently carved; the latter's features are much rougher and harder and its surfaces are dull. The fact that a significant aspect of the beauty of a twin figure is based as much on the softening and smoothing of the features through the user's daily feeding and attention as on the way in which it was carved originally makes it clear how important the user is both in giving meaning to the work and, at least in some cases, in modifying its form. Since Fon artists frequently emphasize smoothness as one of the most important of the aesthetic criteria of the works they make, it is obvious that users play critical roles in the process of defining a work's beauty.

For African art then, Baxandall's description of Italian fifteenth-century painting as a two-sided social interaction between artist and patron would have to be amplified to be relevant. I would suggest that the art of Africa is the product of both a social *and* a cultural interaction. On one side are the creators, those who make or supervise the creation of a work of art and in so doing express their own individuality and, consciously or not, the concerns of the particular age and place in which they are working;[48] on another side are those who commission (and usually recompense) the creators for the works, who often stipulate the essential shape that these should take, and who, to a greater or lesser extent, determine the context of their utilization;[49] on a third side are the culture's spokespersons, who in their multivalent roles offer insight into the place of art within society and often directly influence the form that the arts will take; and on the fourth side are the individuals of the culture and period who directly view, use, and experience the work and endow it with their personal meanings. In the center of this four-part frame is the artwork itself, which both derives shape and meaning from and gives shape and meaning to the ideas, actions, and expessions of the persons who in one way or another have to do with it.

Iconology and the Question of Meaning Hierarchy in African Art[50]

Scholars of Western and non-Western culture and art have long been concerned with symbol multiplicity—the ability of symbols to carry multiple meanings simultaneously. In most art-historical symbolic analyses the predominating frame of reference is hierarchical: one searches to find an image's "deeper" and "deepest" meaning. Erwin Panofsky distinguished three levels of increasing complexity and specialization: 1) pre-iconographic, or primary; 2) iconographic, or conventional subject matter determined through secondary knowledge (in his case, literary sources); and 3) iconological or intrinsic meaning ascertained through synthetic analyses. In approaching this third level of analysis, Panofsky noted that the scholar is responsible for "the discovery and interpretation of . . . 'symbolical' values (which are often unknown to the artist himself and may even emphatically differ from what he consciously intended to express)."[51] Differences or contradic-

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tions in the associated data, Panofsky suggested, must be corrected by the scholar.[52]

In his study of African symbolism, Victor Turner, like Panofsky, assigned hierarchical levels to the multiplicity of meanings carried by a symbol.[53] He, too, would organize symbolic data into three primary strata based on: 1) observable characteristics; 2) responses of local specialists and laymen; and 3) interpretation by a trained scholar with extensive knowledge of the culture.[54] Of his own third level, Turner has noted in the context of Ndembu ritual that the meanings

> are not made explicit by informants, but must be inferred by the investigator from the symbolic patterns and from behavior. He is able to make these inferences only if he has previously examined the symbolic configurations and the meanings attributed to their component symbols by skilled informants, of many other kinds of ritual in the same total system.[55]

In other words, the investigator must analyze symbols in the context not only of each specific kind of ritual but also of the system as a whole. Such an analysis, like that proposed by Panofsky, is characteristically synthetic. Resolving contradictions is a necessary part of the analytic process. As Turner has noted, "It will become clear that considerable discrepancy exists between the interpretation[s] . . . offered by informants and [their ritual] behavior."[56] Insight comes, he explains, from reconciling the inherent differences in indigenous explanation, action, and symbols.

Another African scholar concerned with hierarchical meaning levels in symbolic contexts is Marcel Griaule. Griaule however, has recorded that the Dogon, whom he studied, emphasized two levels rather than three. These strata, too, agree more or less with the idea of explicit (i. e., primary or natural) data and secondary knowledge, which, if not necessarily synthetic, is at least more abstract. As Germaine Dieterlen, Griaule's research colleague among the Dogon, has noted in her introduction to Griaule's *Conversations with Ogotemmeli,* in the early part of the research,

> The Dogon had answered questions and commented on observations made during previous field trips on the basis of the interpretation of facts which they call "*la parole de face*"; this is the "simple knowledge" which they give in the first instance to all enquirers. . . . But the Dogon came to recognize that it was becoming increasingly difficult to answer the multiplicity of questions without moving on to a different level.[57]

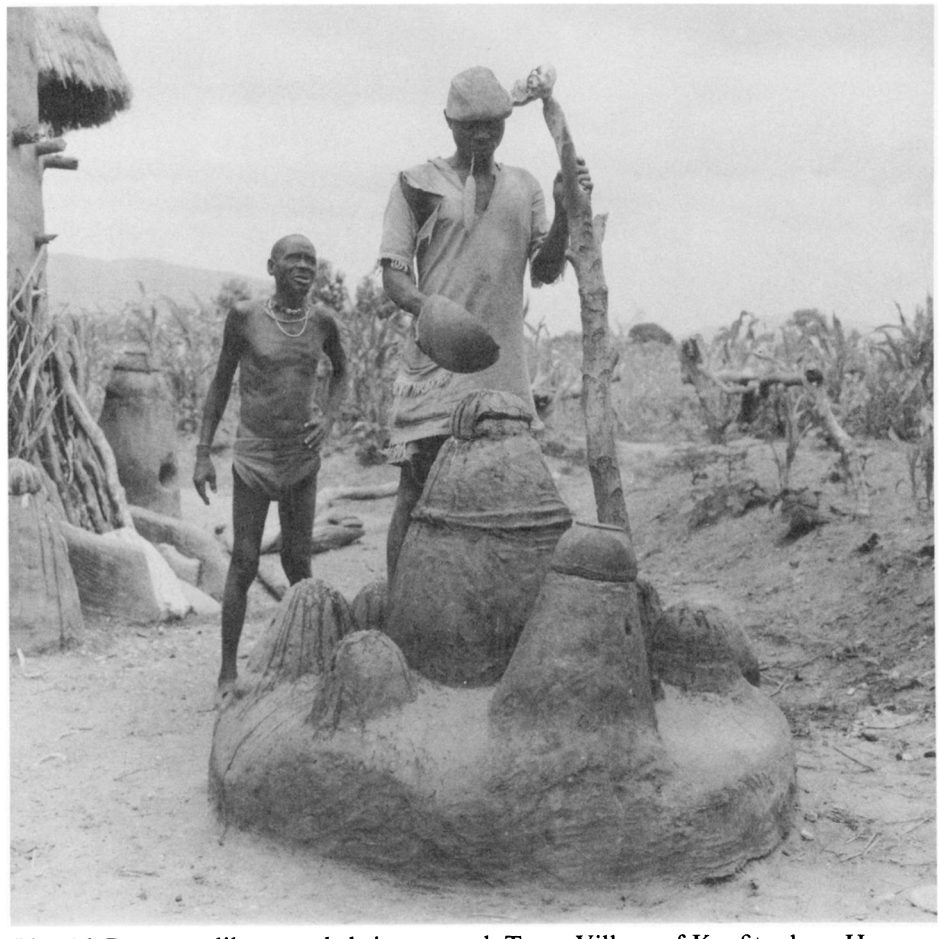


Fig. 16 Batammaliba portal shrine mound, Togo, Village of Koufitoukou. House of Yapita Tapoke. Photographed January 31, 1977.

Important here is the idea that the Dogon maintained, in their dealings with outsiders, a *double entendre,* in which central aspects of meaning were identified with clearly distinct explanations. By means of a carefully orchestrated revelation of surface knowledge, deep knowledge was kept hidden by a tight-knit group of elders and priests. In order to learn these deeper meanings, Griaule (or presumably any researcher) had to undergo a lengthy trial period (in Griaule's case eight years) after which he was trusted enough to be told the "real" (i.e., "deeper") significance of a given form or idea. Thus, in Griaule's view, the primary need for the scholar is to become well enough accepted by the community and sensitive enough in one's questioning so that the deeper meaning is divulged.

A fourth scholar who has concerned himself with the question of multiple meaning contexts is Clifford Geertz.[58] But, rather than discussing multiplicity from the perspective of hierarchical meaning levels, Geertz views these diverse meanings as differential yet essentially equal "facts." The diversity of such facts within a given context (most important in his case, the Balinese cock fight) reinforces key features of the culture:

> The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. . . . Societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them.[59]

Despite the essential equivalence of these diverse facts, each is seen by Geertz to add in its own way to the "deepness" of the context as a whole. Each of these meanings is known to and expressed by the Balinese: "The Balinese peasants are quite aware of all this and can and, at least to the ethnographer, do state most of it in approximately the same terms as I have."[60]

Panofsky, Turner, and Griaule emphasize the importance of distinct meaning levels in symbolic analysis. Geertz stresses the equivalency of multi-

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tudinous meanings. With respect to their view of the relative role of the investigator in determining the basis of these different meanings, these scholars also differ. To Panofsky and Turner, interpretation rests squarely with the investigator. Both cite inherent contradictions in the data (and its sources) and the need for the investigator to serve as final arbiter. In contrast, Griaule and Geertz, although they differ in approach, see the culture itself as providing the meaning base.

How are these issues of multiplexity and level meanings understood in the context of Batammaliba architecture, and what is the relative role of the researcher and indigenous cultural spokespersons in determining the deeper significance of these forms? To some extent, the Batammaliba, like the Dogon, conceptualize meaning in terms of levels. The comparison that the Batammaliba most frequently use is to a river: some knowledge is identified with great depth; other knowledge is more shallow. As one person explained, "When you are talking, you may be asked to go down and find the bottom of your words. When you begin speaking, you may leave out a part and put it to the side, and one will tell you to go down and get that part."[61] This concept of meaning depth is also used in the context of comprehension. "I could not find the bottom of the words" (i.e., I could not determine the source of these problems), it was explained in a prayer.[62] "Stop the talking; that which remains is deep," a priest admonished men's initiation participants in the course of the society's sacred Night Walk.[63] Among the Batammaliba, depth is seen to complement knowledge profundity.

Yet, the Batammaliba do not see their meaning levels as hard and fast. Indeed the very premise of a hierarchy of meanings as proposed by Panofsky, Griaule, and Turner would be untrue in this case. For the Batammaliba, meanings are much closer in concept to the differential but essentially *equivalent* "facts" identified by Geertz with the Balinese cock fight. This is evident with most of the more important metaphors and symbols associated with the house. The large, central earthen *lisenpo* mound in front of the house door is a good example ***(Fig. 16).*** It serves as an altar for the solar deity, Kuiye, and his Earthly complement, Butan. At the same time this mound symbolizes the soul or life force of the house and its inhabitants. It is recognized, in turn, as a reference to past family members and to lineage unity and division. Furthermore, the *lisenpo* mound is an essential symbol of house political autonomy and power. In this way, it carries, like a telegraph wire, a diversity of messages simultaneously. Rather than contradicting one another, the meanings that are associated with it reflect the multivalent character of Batammaliba symbolic and metaphoric forms.

The earthen horns above the house entry ***(see Fig. 4)*** offer a similar example of the multiplex, nonhierarchical nature of meaning.[64] In cosmological contexts, the horns are associated with the ordered movement of the sun back and forth across the sky each day. On other occasions, the horns are identified as altars to Kuiye, the solar deity whose daily and yearly passage they mark. From the perspective of human anatomy, they are said to represent testicles, the source of the fertilizing sperm that, like Kuiye, is necessary for new life. In the context of the family, the horns serve as metaphors for the husband and wife and for the succession of generations. As a major designator of gender differences in game animals, the horns reinforce the division between house men and women. In the context of house security, the horns recall the protection and power associated with the hunted game. They are accordingly an important referent to house autonomy. In funerary contexts, the horns serve as important metaphors of death and the associated transition of the deceased elder's soul. Thus the meanings identified with the horns are diverse.

Like the Fon war-god sculpture discussed above and many other works of African art, the symbolic grounding of these entry horns is multiplex. Can one place the variant and divergent meanings within a hierarchical frame of deeper and deepest symbolic dimensions? I think not. Each of the meanings found in the work is equally important.

What I have suggested here contrasts in many respects with what has often been emphasized in iconological and iconographic studies in art history with their concern with subject-matter identification, artist and patron perspectives on meaning, and hierarchical structuring of the various symbolic dimensions of the work. In many African art traditions, context rather than subject matter, cultural spokespersons and viewers-users rather than artists and patrons, and multiplexity rather than hierarchy are far more significant for the way that meaning is perceived and expressed within an artwork. Is African art unique in this respect, or do these differences point up distinctions in the orientation of African art historians? This is a question of considerable methodological and theoretical interest.

Art history in recent years has seen a growing division between positivists, committed to affirming art history as an exacting discipline, and a growing body of interpretationists, questioning whether art history is every completely objective and knowable and advocating a more hermeneutic approach. Out of these discussions undoubtedly will emerge new and vital theoretical and methodological orientations that will benefit the discipline as a whole. In the same way, a closer look at the contexts of art in living cultures outside Europe will help in the formulation, grounding, and testing of new theoretical and methodological perspectives in art. In many African art-producing societies, the artists, patrons, cultural spokespersons, and users can still be interviewed and questioned about the nature of art and its meaning. And, by studying cultures in which art is still a vital part of both the religious belief system and the processes of political expression, additional issues will be raised and questions addressed, which through their exploration in other, non-African art contexts may provide insight into the role of art in these other periods and cultures as well.

Notes

1 Both Kenneth Burke's discussion of logology in his *Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology,* Berkeley, 1970, and Murray Krieger's recent essay, "Words about Words about Words: Theory, Criticism, and the Literary Text," *Academe* (March-April 1984), pp. 17ff., offer interesting insight into related issues of literary criticism.

2 Jan Bialostocki "Iconography and Iconology," *Encyclopedia of World Art,* New York, 1963, VII, pp. 769–85.

3 When the field of iconographic study was broadened to include popular imagery, these works often were viewed from the perspective of how close a fit they had with more "standard" representations. Often, Bialostocki (cited n.2), p. 771, suggests, such forms were seen to be "characterized by an exaggeration and simplification of the traits and attributes of more traditional imagery."

4 See especially: A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography,* Cambridge, MA., 1935. The iconographical method has also been used by some anthropologists; see: Bernadette Bucher, *Icon and Conquest: A Structuralist Analysis of the Illustrations of de Bry's Great Voyages,* Chicago, 1981.

5 Svetlana Alpers. *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century,* Chicago, 1983, p. xlx.

6 Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," *Meaning in the Visual Arts,* Garden City, NY, 1955. This is a somewhat revised

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version of Panofsky's earlier *Studies in Iconology,* 1939, and "Zum Problem der Berschreibung und Inhaltsdeutung von Werken der bildenden Kunst," *Logos,* 21 (1932), pp. 102–19. Important issues with respect to Panofsky's view of iconography and iconology have been discussed by Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History,* Ithaca, NY, 1984. See also: E. H. Gombrich, "The Aims and Limits of Iconology," *Symbolic Images,* London, 1972, pp. 1–22; Keith Moxey, "Panofsky's Concept of 'Iconology' and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art," *New Literary History,* 17 (1985–86), pp. 265–74; and Larry Silver, "The State of Research in Northern European Art of the Renaissance Era," *Art Bulletin,* 68:4 (1986), pp. 518–35.

7 Alpers (cited n. 5), p. xxiv. See also: Creighton Gilbert, "On Subject and Not-Subject in Italian Renaissance Pictures, *Art Bulletin,* 34:3 (1952), pp. 202–16. For a discussion of surface versus hidden dimensions of meaning in Batammaliba architecture, see: Suzanne Preston Blier, *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression,* New York, 1987, pp. 226ff.

8 The history of the term "iconology" in this century is of some interest in this regard; see: Bialostocki (cited n. 2), p. 774.

9 Panofsky, 1955 (cited n. 6), p. 27.

10 Ibid.

11 Anthropologists and others writing about anthropology in recent years also have come to realize the problems in iconography's sister discipline, ethnography, with respect to the question of the relativity of a given point of view and description. See especially: *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley, 1986; and Allen Johnson, "The Death of Ethnography," *The Sciences* (March–April 1987), pp. 25–30.

12 Marcel Griaule, *Masques Dogon: Travaux et Memoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie,* 33 (1938), pp. 470ff; Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, *Le Renard Pale,* Paris, 1965, pp. 170–73.

13 Panofsky, 1955 (cited n. 6), p. 33.

14 Paula Ben-Amos "Men and Animals in Benin Art," *Man,* 11:2 (June 1976), p. 252, n. 20.

15 Panofsky's point (cited n. 6), p. 33, that problems with identifying subject matter are due either to the artist's incompetence or to malice is problematic in many respects. In a number of cases, generic animals (raptorial bird, carnivorous animal, fish) rather than specific ones are portrayed; in other cases, specific animals are portrayed, but their features are distorted through various forms of abstraction. From my periodic consultations with scientists at natural history musems about the identity of a particular bird, fish, or tree, I have come to realize the difficulties inherent in precisely identifying subjects without additional documentation extraneous to the works of art themselves.

16 I. Eibl-Eibesfeldt, "Similarities and Differences between Cultures in Expressive Movements," *Non-Verbal Communication,* ed. Robert A. Hinde, London. 1972, p. 311.

17 Panofsky, 1955 (cited n. 6), p. 28.

18 Marcel Granet, *La Pensée Chinoise,* Paris, 1934, p. 338

19 Karl Laman, *The Kongo. Studia Ethnographica Upsaliensia.* Stockholm. Vol I, 1953, pp. 43–44; Robert F. Thompson, *African Art in Motion: Icon and Art,* Los Angeles, 1974, p. 73; idem, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds,* 1981, pp. 87–89, 121. For further discussion of the gestural components of African Art, see: Suzanne Preston Blier, *Gestures in African Art,* New York, 1982.

20 Interestingly, it is this issue of narrative in Italian art for which Svetlana Alpers (cited n. 5) takes Panofsky to task in her study of Dutch painting.

21 Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage,* Chicago, 1960; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* Garden City, NY, 1959.

22 See: Howard Hibbard, *Michelangelo.* New York, 1974, p. 58

23 Daniel Biebuyck has been one of the most important proponents of contextual analysis in African Art. See: *Symbolism of the Lega Stool,* Working Papers in the Traditional Arts, 2, Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia. 1977.

24 See: Blier (cited n. 7), esp. Ch. 3.

25 See also: Meyer Schapiro, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text.* The Hague. 1973. Also of interest: Cecilia F. Klein, *The Face of the Earth: Frontality in Two-Dimensional Mesoamerican Art,* Garland Publishing Co., New York, 1976.

26 I am grateful to a Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship and a grant from the Social Science Research Council for making this research possible.

27 See: Gilbert (cited n. 7), for additional discussion of the discrepancy between iconography and iconology in Italian painting.

28 Herbert M. Cole and Doran H. Ross, *The Arts of Ghana,* Los Angeles. 1977, pp. 111–13. For additional examples in Yoruba art, see: Henry J. Drewal, "Art, History, and the Individual: A New Perspective for the Study of African Visual Traditions," *Iowa Studies in African Art,* 1 (1984), pp. 87–114.

29 According to Susan Vogel, "People of Wood: Baule Figure Sculpture," *Art Journal,* 32:1 (1973), p. 23.

30 Eberhard Fischer and Hans Himmelheber, *The Arts of the Dan in West Africa,* Zurich, 1984, p. 9.

31 Anita Glaze, *Art and Death in a Senufo Village,* Bloomington, 1981, pp. 79, 130ff.

32 Michael Baxandall *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy,* Oxford, 1972, p. 1

33 Ibid., pp. 17–18

34 Ibid., p. 57.

35 For a discussion of artist and patron relationships in Yoruba art, see: Henry John Drewal and Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Gelede: Art and Female Power among the Yoruba,* Bloomington, 1983, pp. 258ff.

36 Susan Vogel "[Baule] Female Figure," *For Spirits and Kings: African Art from the Tishman Collection,* New York, 1981, p. 73. Henry and Margaret Drewal (cited n. 35) p. 253, also note the importance of geomancy in the context of Yoruba art.

37 Bernard Maupoil, *La Geomancie à l'Ancienne Côte des Esclaves, Trauvaux et Memoires de l'Institut d'Ethnologie,* 42 (1981), p. 421. This was also reaffirmed by Fon geomancers with whom I spoke in 1985–86.

38 See: Robert Farris Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings,* Bloomington, 1976; Henry John Drewal, *African Artistry: Technique and Aesthetics in Yoruba Sculpture,* Atlanta, 1980; Th. A. H. M. Dobbelmann, *Der Ogboni-Geheimbund,* Berg en Dal, 1976. See also: Henry J. Drewal "Art and the Perception of Women in Yoruba Culture," *Cahiers d'Études Africaines,* 1968, 17:4, pp. 545-67. Drewal explains that Yoruba *Iyanla* masks evoke fear and awe primarily as a result of the hidden and secret preparations associated with them.

39 Interview with Adjaxo Humase of Abomey (Republic of Benin) on August 6, 1986. For additional information on Fon *makpo* staffs, see: Alexandre Adande, *Les Recades des Rois du Dahomey,* Institut Français d'Afrique Noire, Dakar, 1962.

40 J. A. Skertchly, *Dahomey as It Is: Being a Narrative of Eight Months Residence in That Country . . .* , London. 1874, pp. 147–48.

41 Interview with Adjaxo Humase (cited n. 39).

42 The perspective of the king who commissioned the *makpo* and whose person and office it represents also would be important to know. In many respects, however, the *makpo,* as an emblem of power may be equally significant and meaning-rich to people who do not actually hold the office associated with it.

43 See: Thompson (cited n. 38); and Drewal (cited n. 38).

44 Interviews with Ayido Gnanwassi of Sodohome (Republic of Benin), July 20, and 27, 1986.

45 Priestesses of twins are called *Hoxonon,* "the mother of twins," in part because they come to their positions after having themselves given birth to twins.

46 Ayido Gnanwassi (cited n. 44), discussed these ceremonies in detail.

47 Often the area of the mouth is particularly "worn" as a result of the daily nourishing of the figure.

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48 In the context of many works of African art, the definition of artist needs to be expanded to include a wide variety of people who contribute to the work's creation. In the context of certain figural traditions, such as some Fon *bocio* sculptures, the artist should include both the person who originally carved the work and the *bokonon* (geomancer) or *botonon* (power consultant) who applied to its surface the diverse objects of power that give to the work both its real meaning and its distinct visual appeal. Together these individuals provide the sculpture both with its form and with its underlying meaning. In the context of masking in Africa, the definition of creator likewise needs to be expanded to include not only the maker of the mask but also the creators of its costume and its choreography. Here too the form and the meaning of the work are contingent on an interweave of persons. This broadening out of the definition of artist and creator appears to be important for other art contexts as well. As Howard Becker has shown in his book, *Art Worlds* (1982), art in the West is often a far more collaborative effort than many have given it credit for.

49 As with artists-creators, the concept of patron also is broadened in the context of African art. See: Paula Ben-Amos, "Patron-Artist Interactions in Africa," *African Arts,* 13:3 (1980), pp. 56–57; Philip M. Peek, "Isoko Artists and Their Audiences," *African Arts,* ibid., pp. 58–60; Lisa Aronson, "Patronage and Akwete Weaving," ibid., pp. 62–66; Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, "Patronage and Maconde Carvers," ibid., pp. 67–70; Judith Perani, "Patronage and Nupe Craft Industries," ibid., pp. 71–75.

50 Parts of this section are taken from my *Anatomy of Architecture* (cited n. 7).

51 Panofsky 1955 (cited n. 6), p. 31.

52 Ibid., p. 39.

53 Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual,* Ithaca, NY, 1967, p. 44.

54 Ibid., pp. 50–51.

55 Ibid., p. 43.

56 Ibid., p. 25.

57 Germaine Dieterlen, in Marcel Griaule, *Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas,* London, 1965, pp. xv–xvi.

58 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays,* New York, 1971.

59 Ibid., p. 452.

60 Ibid., p. 21.

61 Interview with N'tcha Banfoata of Lissani, Togo, December 24, 1977.

62 Quoted from a ceremony in Koufitoukou, June 12, 1977.

63 Quoted from a men's initiation ceremony, May 21, 1977.

64 How can one know which of an object's (or motif's) diverse meanings is operative or when? If the symbols are not hierarchical but rather multiplex, how does one ascertain which message is being sent? The answer lies in the context. In Batammaliba architecture and Fon sculpture often the breadth and appropriateness of a given meaning is determined by the ceremony, circumstance, or larger context in which it is being defined.

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