

THE ACADEMIC APPROACH TO AFRICAN ART

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How do researchers study African art? The researchers begin with the belief that Africa is a continent of diversities and varieties, that the North is different from the South; East from West, and every ethnic group from another. Within each ethnic group, the researchers find differences between all villages. To pursue this belief to its ultimate consequence, one must also emphasize the differences between all families and all individuals. Thus, we arrive at the uniqueness of all individuals. In fact, two twins are never identical due to their fingerprints.

Due to these differences and diversities, the Western experts caution and decree that one should be "particular" not "general". This scepticism arising from the methodology of science does not refer to or depend on African culture but defeats the power and authority of reason to know reality. In other words, in the face of diversity and differences, reason is powerless. The idea that one must be "particular" not "general" has become an "approved method of science", approved of because the researchers equate facts with knowledge, neglect epistemology and rely on observed facts without the need for reflection.

In pursuit of this "approval method of science", the researchers have divided Africa into different "zones" or "fields". Each expert observes his or her own field, localizes the art object, the place of its origin, the data, the author of the art object, the function, etc. The art object are said to be "sacred", "naturalistic", "abstract", "realistic", "symbolic", "moving", "balance between nature and abstraction", "freedom of expression", etc. Some art objects are classified into "pure art", "religious art", "ceremonial art", etc. These and similar qualities attributed to African art have no meaning within the African cultural premise.

With their rational methods, the researchers into African culture embark on a systematic collection and documentation of data, forbid "general statements" and pay "specific" attention to "particular" areas. This method has led to the accumulation of facts, but the knowledge of African art remains merely popular.

The researchers into African art have not even asked themselves why no African community wrote on paper. They have assumed that culture will illumine the heart of the "Dark Continent". None has suspected that science (the Western science — the concepts and theories derived from the Western culture) cannot improve on or explain the nature of African culture, that the African people did not write their cultural reality — beliefs and ideas, meaning and values of God, man, nature, etc. — on paper because the African cultural reality does not fit into the schemes of space. As a result, all the concepts and theories derived from the Western culture have no validity in the African cultural world.

African art, like all other cultural expressions among the Africans (the Black Africans) stem from a climate beyond the experience of the Western people. In spite of the innumerable facts exhumed daily, the factual data so far accumulated are very minute. Archaeologists, ethnographers, anthropologists, etc. have amassed immense material systematically documented them, but what has come to be known as the knowledge of African art is African cultural fact subordinated to Western concepts and theories. Some experts have tried to formulate laws from the accumulated data. Others still call for detailed observation and study of each village before any attempt to formulate laws could be possible. Besieged by fragmentary and scattered facts which are dubious or incorrect, all researchers into African culture address themselves to the question of the origin of African people or of each ethnic group with the purpose of determining how artistic works have altered during the course of the migration of each ethnic group and how the art of each group has been influenced by

another. Following this line of thought, almost all experts in African culture deny the possibility of any cultural synthesis until the civilization of every village, ethnic group and nation has been systematically studied, observed and documented. Anyone who questions the "approved method of science" will not be given a hearing because it violates the dogmas of the "Church of Reason".

African culture possesses its own assumptions and world-view. The artistic forms of that culture, its political beliefs, its ethical and moral norms, etc. depend on the philosophy of African culture. Religion, aesthetics, politics, art, music, etc. stem from a cultural premise and constitute one body of experience. "A study of African culture reveals almost without question that it is based upon religion — that, in fact, it is within the religious network that the entire culture resides. Furthermore, this entire culture is an organic whole. In traditional Africa, there is no specialization of disciplines, no dissociation of sensibilities. In other words, starting from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and society, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or the core of the culture."¹

The minds of the Western researchers are accustomed to fragment into isolated and independent pieces that which is a whole. Religion, art, politics, economics, music, etc. are seen as different activities or expressions, hence this mode of thought will never grasp the nature, meaning and expressions of African culture. Religion constitutes the basis of all African cultural expressions. What does religion mean in the African culture? "In spite of an enormous literature," Professor Bastide wrote: "we have only a very poor knowledge of African religions.... Religion is seen from the outside as a thing; and not from within as experienced reality.... Books

1. Edward Kamau Brathwaite, "The African Presence in Carribean Literature", Daedalus; Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Spring 1971; page. 71.

concerning the African religion are basically no more than an immense gallery of mirrors which only reflect the image of ourselves, our ideas, our dreams, or our passions. Will we ever be able to break these mirrors which deform?"² African religions are studied, as matters of empirical facts, through interviews, questionnaires, the description of rituals and ceremonies, etc. All these appear "magical", "superstitious" and "undeveloped" because the researchers have completely no knowledge of where and how to start the study of African art and religion. No knowledge of any cultural expression is possible without the knowledge of the cultural premise and of the nature of experience within that culture. Every culture possesses its own science, that is, the standard which the mind must adopt or follow in order to arrive at what that culture believes to be valid knowledge of reality. The method by which any culture arrives at its belief of true and valid knowledge necessarily determines its approach to God, Man, Nature, Social facts, etc. To know what that method is, one must know the nature of experience within that culture. One of the greatest errors committed by the Western researchers was the application of the "approved method of science" to African cultural expressions hence they bring a priori assumptions, hypotheses, concepts, theories suggested by the Western culture to bear on African culture.

The most essential and ultimate goal in the study of African cultural expression is the understanding of the assumptions, concepts and theories through which the African people explain their activities and behaviour. The Western experts think that they will arrive at that understanding by interviewing the Africans in market places as if the common people in any culture know the ideas, principles and assumptions governing their cultural activities and behaviour. African elites, aware solely of the Western ideas, theories and concepts, have no knowledge of their own cultural ideas. As a result, they confuse

the identity of words in the Western and African cultures with the identity of meaning. The western experts do not want to accept the judgement of the few Africans who have insight into both the African and Western cultures and who call for a completely new approach to the study of African culture. Again, the Western experts want to confirm the judgements of those few Africans empirically by interviewing the common people in Africa. Did Hume, Kant, Descartes, Spinoza, Newton, Hegel, etc. distribute questionnaires to the Western populace prior to the formulation of their ideas? Have the Western empirical researchers questioned the common people in the West to confirm or refute the ideas of the Western thinkers? Perhaps the Western people believe that their cultures depend on reason while that of the African people depend on individual opinions. Spencer's sociology, the theories of Comte, Weber, Durkheim, Malinowski, etc. have no hold on African cultural reality. The Western social scientists have developed certain conceptual tools in the light of their own culture and analyze the African culture with such tools.

An appeal to factual knowledge as the basis for the confirmation of African normative theory is absurd. The accumulated facts could as well refer to any culture nor is the normative theory a material thing to be known through the method of natural science. Any study of African cultural expression which fails to grasp or ignores the understanding of the nature of experience in African culture, the concepts and theories of that culture, the standard which the mind must adopt to arrive at the knowledge of African cultural reality, the premise of African culture, has no meaning and no knowledge of culture.

EXPERIENCE IN AFRICAN CULTURE

Culture is a response to human experience. Experience shows or reveals the duality of the Ego and the world. The opposition between the Ego and the World in spite of their mutual dependence constitutes the basis of all contradictions. Without resolving the contradiction between the Ego and the World, there will be a split in human consciousness which militates against the unit of the individual and the selfhood. The duality of the Ego and the World further reveals the duality of the body and mind, individuality and universality, oneness and manifoldness, time and eternity, etc. Cultural activities or responses are attempts to resolve the duality of experience.

How did the African culture respond to the duality of experience? The African cultural spirit saw the World as centered on the Self hence it made no distinction between the Ego and the World. This led to the belief, as a personally experienced reality, that Nature is alive not a dead thing. Consequently, the Self animates the World. The Self and the World order become identical. The World which has no reference to the Self has no meaning within this cultural context. Consequently, the World possesses order and unity through the living experience of the Self. The Self and the World are one, and both proclaim the unity and solidarity of Life. Living, therefore, in a world of aesthetic continuum which admits of no duality of thought, a world of aesthetic continuum where the Ego and the World are one; the dualistic and analytical modes of thought in the West have no validity in the African culture. In the world of aesthetic continuum, it is possible to discern anything "specific", "concrete", "clearcut", "objective", "subjective", "religious", "secular", etc. Rather, one is confronted by a world of events where everything is in every other thing and where there is no isolated thing or individual.

In the African cultural world of aesthetic continuum, a world of art, of pure sound and pure sensation, the whole is the real. In this universe of aesthetics, there is no impersonal experience. God, person, man, ancestor, spirit, man, etc. are personally experienced realities... As a result, the African culture is extremely vital, sensitive, musical, dynamic, emotional in nature and rich in human living. Art, therefore, permeates the African life, religion, thought, because it is the art of living. Art and life are inseparable and religion is the "mechanism" for its expression. The Western anthropologists, ignorant of the nature of African cultural experience, term African religion "animism", "superstition", etc. The African artistic solution to the antinomy of experience — the duality between the Ego and the World — unifies the Ego and the World, individuality and universality, time and eternity, oneness and manifoldness. The African ancestral figures proclaim the unity of life; past, present and future.

Since Nature is alive and not dead, the African mind sees in plants, stones, rivers, etc. certain living but invisible forces which must be approached with caution. In other words, "material things" are not merely "material" but co-exist with indivisible forces. Material and spiritual, sacred and profane, etc. express the duality of analytic thought which the African cultural premise forbids. Thus, instead of the material or the spiritual, the African mind sees a vital-force. The universe is a web of vital-forces and all forces are in constant interaction. The masks meant to harbour the spirits of the dead express the attempt of the African mind to restore the unity of vital-forces fragmented by death. The African does not claim to possess a conscious knowledge of the invisible forces residing in "things" or a complete mastery over it though he possesses the method by which he can gain contact with it — the magical power of words. The African realizes that form determines the function of every vital-force. Bows, arrows, domestic implements, etc. are

not merely "material things" but embody living and invisible forces. Through incantation, rituals, adherence to certain strict rules, he approaches the invisible forces. The African idea of Nature and its qualities have led to the adherence to certain permanent, not static, expressions in artistic forms, rituals, ceremonies, etc. The African people, approaching "Objects" as living forces, do not behave illogically. Personal experience has shown them that "empirical objects" embody invisible forces. Contemporary physics has confirmed what the African intuitively knew.

Experience, in African culture, is immediate and personal as well as transcendental. The African grasps reality through personal experience. Science, in the Western culture, cannot explain, observe or improve on African, cultural experience. Of what God, man, person, spirit, ancestors, family, the living-dead, etc. mean in African culture; scientific observation and theory can never explain. There is no separation from experience and the self who experiences hence African art from African life.

THE WESTERN CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

How does the Western culture approach the duality of experience; the duality between the Ego and the world. No culture is as contradictory as the Western culture, not only within its systems of ideas but with reference to observed facts. The West makes the World the object of rational knowledge and believes that the World exists independent of the Ego. The World is seen as Objective and the Ego, Subjective. To know the World objectively has been the aim of the Western culture. In pursuit of this goal, the Western science removes the Ego from the World. The world, as a result, is regarded as the object of knowledge. But the relationship between the mind and the world in the Western culture is rational or intellectual. Experience, in the West, means scientific and impersonal experience.

The West believes that the real is the material process in time, that which can be measured and quantified. This knowledge — scientific knowledge — is said to be "objective". But it is an artificial thing. In other words, "objective truth" belongs to the artificial world of mathematics, to abstract concepts and abstract relations, not the truth of life and the heart. To grasp the truth of the heart, one must not only feel and experience its relations but must be moved by them.

Believing that reality can be grasped by reason, the West looks low on emotions as inferior qualities associated with lower animals. As a result, the West under-rates everything "subjective" as an individual opinion. Reality and truth, for the West, must be "objective" and "public". This is expressed in figures and formulae; but figures and formulae are neither things nor realities. The "objective" view of the world led to intellectualism and rationalism. The Western theory of knowledge — the Western philosophy — is marked by the conflict between rationalism and naturalism, between rationalism and voluntarism. The division of reality into "subjective" and "objective" was the basis of rationalism, materialism and analytic thought. Since the method by which any culture arrives at what it considers a true knowledge determines its approach to the Other: God, Man, Society, art, etc., the West believing that that method is rational or mathematical created rational theology, rational psychology, rational politics, rational art, rational aesthetics, rational sociology, etc. Knowledge, in the Western culture, means a systematic and logical knowledge deduced from postulated concepts and their abstract relations. The meanings of such concepts depend on their definitions within the systems of scientific theories. As a result, such terms as God, man, spirit, soul, immortality, love of God, etc. found in the religious treatises of the Western philosophers are not personally experienced and immediate realities but

purely logical constructs. They are defined concepts not given to personal experience. Body, mind, idea, mental substance (man or person), substance, law of nature, etc. as found in the Western culture are postulated concepts, logically defined concepts, unobservable "entities". Being theoretically postulated concepts, their meanings can never be found in personal experience. In African culture, on the other hand, in a world of aesthetic continuum, all African cultural concepts are intuitive and imaginative. As concepts by intuition and imagination, they have personal references. Scientific knowledge is not the knowledge of Personal God, persons, personal meaning, institution, etc. Since the African cultural concepts are not theoretically postulated and defined, no social scientist can find any "specific", "concrete" and "clear-cut" fact in experience to confirm such concepts. Such terms as space, time, individual, knowledge, art, etc. do not have the same meaning in the African and Western culture. To call for "specific", "particular" "concrete" and "clear-cut" cultural expression in Africa is to impose the intellectualism, the rationalism, the cold and impersonal objectivity of the Western culture on the living reality of African culture.

Contemporary physics has shown that "clear-cut", "concrete" and "objective" observations and knowledge are impossible. Contemporary physics has shown that reality cannot be known rationally, that physics cannot give an "exact" picture of the world, that Nature is alive, that no distinction exists between subject and object, that the indivisible coexists with the actual, that analysis into subject and object destroys reality. Contemporary science has discovered the mysterious, the magical, the non-logical, in the realm of Nature. Contemporary science has shown that we live in a world of aesthetic continuum, a religious not a rational world. These discoveries have destroyed the theories of materialism and mechanism, rationalism and naturalism. The Theory of Relativity showed for the first time in the Western scientific culture, the importance of the observer, of consciousness, in the world. The Principle of Indeterminacy emphasizes the non-objectivity

of the world. With the collapse of the concepts of postulation the western scientific attitude comes to an end. Reality is not impersonal but must in some way be related to person and personal experience. Consequently, the Western rational theology, sociology, psychology, politics, art, aesthetics, philosophy, etc. have no meaning, validity and application in the light of the world of aesthetic continuum. It is not the African cultural expression that should be subordinated to the concepts of rationalism — to the 19th Century Westery theories — but the Western concepts that must be re-defined in the context of the African cultural concepts. Anybody who speaks of science today speaks of religion not reason. Consequently, all that the Western people call God, man, mind, person, knowledge, observation, thought, body, society, emperical, etc. must undergo radical changes.

THE AFRICAN APPROACH TO THE OTHER

How does the African know the other: God, man, society, events? This will determine his approach to art. "Let us, therefore, consider attitude of the Negro-African towards the Object to be known, towards the Other: God, Man, animal, tree or pebble, natural fact or social fact. Contrary to the classical European, the Negro-African makes no distinction between himself and the Object; he does not hold it away from himself to be examined or analysed; or rather, after having examined it, if not actually analysed it, he takes it in his hands, alive as it is, careful not to kill it and pin it down like a specimen. He touches it, he feels it, he is conscious of it. The Negro-African...is a field of pure sensation.

....It is his subjectivity, with the tips of his sensory organs, with his insects antennae, that he discovers the Other. We see him excited, moving centrifugally from subject to object on the waves of the Other.Here we see the Negro-African sympathising, leaving

his ego to identify himself with the Other, dying to himself to be born again in the Other. He does not absorb, he is absorbed. He lives a common life with the Other...he has cognition of the Other. ...Subject and Object are here compared dialectically in the very act of cognition.The Negro-African could say: 'I sense the Other; I dance the Other: I am.' Now, to dance is to discover and to recreate, particularly if the dance is a dance of love. It is in any case the best means of knowing. So that cognition is at the same time discovery and creation or rather re-creation, and re-creation is the image of God."⁴ (Leopold Senghor).

A good Western rationalist would laugh at the African mode of knowledge with contempt because it is not "objective", "systematic", "rigorous", etc. Instead of the formally constructed and logically reasoned doctrines of the Western culture, one notices that the African dances his religion, expresses it in intuitive poetry, proverbs, myths, because there is no other way to express the personally experienced reality. The Western people love definition of terms as if everything can be defined. What will the Western man call the reality which admits of no distinction between subject and object or the aesthetic continuum termed mind and matter?

Let us examine the Western approach to music and the African attitude towards it. "Some Western authorities," Fela Sowande wrote, "subscribe to the idea that music is an aspect of human behaviour; that music has many facets, for its aspects include the historical, social-psychological, structural, functional, physical, psychological, cultural, aesthetic, symbolic, and others; and that therefore music can and must be studied from many standpoints, for clearly no single

4. Fenner Brockway, African Socialism, The Bodley Head; London, 1963; pp. 33-34.

kind of study can be successfully substituted for the whole. But were we to attempt to sell this idea to traditional man in Nigeria, he would either tell us to get lost, or his reply would be couched in such language that his vocabulary would be of considerable interest to Dictionaries that have space for hitherto unprintable, quadriliteral Anglo-Saxon words.

"Our Nigerian traditional man would tell us that Sound was evocative; not that it 'could' be, but that by its very nature it was evocative; he could point to his 'words of power' or his 'mantrams', which he has used time and again to produce tangible results; if he happens to be a Yoruba, he would refer to these vocal forms handed to him by his forefathers, such as the Assan, the Ogede, or the Ofo, patterns of Pure Sound, the like of which Elisha used in the Bible to call down fire on the soldiers sent to arrest him, or Jesus used to command the storm to be still. Nigerian traditional man knew — at least in Yruba land ...that through the medium of Sound, he can evoke and handle Psychic Forces of tremendous potencies, which his will could then direct as it suited his purpose. He knew this, not as a theory, but as experienced fact.

"We shall never penetrate beneath the surface of Nigerian music, until and unless we adopt this view of traditional man, who is likely to reject, out of hand, our present day of 'studying' traditional music through the meticulous cataloguing of styles, etc.; and is more likely than not to support Spengler's views that 'more would be revealed to us, if we were to write history of musical instruments, not — as it always is — from the technical standpoint of tone production, but as a study of the deep spiritual bases of the tone — colours and tone-effects aimed at"⁵.

The Western researchers would not only be reluctant to start from where they ought to — religion as experienced reality — in the study of African cultural expressions, they do not believe that one approach is adequate. But the multiplicity of view-points so much admired by the West in the study of events has no validity in African culture. Like music, African art stems from a world of

5. Fela Sowande; Composer 19, Sept. 1966; pp.28, 29.

aesthetic continuum where "Sound is evocative or creative in its own right, and as itself". Music, as well as art, is "the organization of the raw material of Sound into formal structural patterns that are meaningful and generally acceptable to that Society in which the organization has taken place, patterns that relate in a most intimate manner to life-experiences of that Society, viewed as a homogeneous whole, and are accepted as such by that Society".⁶ Music like art must be regarded as "functional" in at root, because it enabled its creators and practitioners to bridge the gulf between the visible and invisible worlds, thus aligning Man with God and Nature, in one and the same hierarchy, in which Nature is part of Society, and Society itself consists of (1) the Ancestors and heroes, (2) the present generation, and (3) the next generation, all three regarded as forming one unit. The claims of the next generation explains in part, why in traditional society, property was defined in terms of family community or village, not in terms of individual ownership."⁷ Thus, the African notion of art does not refer solely to empirically observed facts in space but to the invisible forces which intuition and imagination alone can contemplate.

Having examined the African approach to the Object to be known and to music, let us examine his attitude towards a physical event. "Think of a house falling on someone who is passing by," Dr. Oruwariye wrote. "From the European point of view, the explanation is simple, the house is old; maybe there is an earthquake, or a breeze blows, and the house falls; the African does not leave it at that. He wants to know why that man, why that day, why that particular hour, and why that particular house out of so many houses, is involved. For practical purposes, for engineering, the European would reduce all the unknowns to a few, which would help him to make a prediction. All he has done is to simplify things.

6. Idem, p. 29.

7. Idem, p.29

The African views the whole as a compact system; hence you will not be able to understand his activities, unless you take his way of thinking into account."⁸ The African is not interested solely in the "how" an event behaves but why it behaves so. As a result, he is aware of the event as well as the psychic state of the observer.

The African, living in a universe of forces, does not create "things" but "living-forces". Nature as understood by the West (as a dead thing to be known rationally and mathematically) was not the theme of African art. The Renaissance art in the West made landscape a theme of monumental art. In the 19th Century impressionism, the Renaissance art reached its lowest level. The African uses mythology, stories, etc. to create art. Words are forces, creative, significant, meaningful, powerful and magical because they can transform and arouse other forced to action. But imitating or copying a "dead" Nature, the Western artists laid emphasis on technique so that those who copied Nature mechanically and effectively were called good artists. The Renaissance art was essentially mathematical and rational as the works of Leonardo de Vince, Puero della Francesa, etc. would show. With the destruction of form by Occam, followed the devaluation and impoverishment of vision and perception. Mere seeing, even till today, took the place of vision, imagination, perception, intuition. If form does not exist, then painted objects are realities. That was the logic of the artist. Thus, colour took the place of form. Thus, technique became the basis of art, science and even of life. As a result, art in the West was merely intellectual and mechanical because reality was believed to be mechanical and rational.

THE ARTISTIC SYNTHESIS

No writer on African art has delved into the most important goal and nature of African art: the synthesis of human experience and the understanding of the world and to resolve the duality of experience. But science fails to achieve its purpose because Nature, its object of knowledge, does not embrace the whole world. The knowledge it offers consists in the unification of empirical data with the general laws of the mind. It brings Nature — material things — under general laws, but Nature is not the whole world. As a result, the world constructed by science is partial and fragmented. The men of science subordinate particular facts to general laws and, as laws of Nature, do not offer universal knowledge. By subordinating the particular to general laws, science ignores the question of individuality and universality. In other words, the subordination of the multiplicity of empirical data to general laws termed "the laws of Nature:" fails to explain the problem of One and Many. Since in the world of Nature, everything obeys mechanical laws, freedom does not exist. Consequently, science fails to solve the duality of the Self and the World. It merely strives to subordinate the Self to Nature, to a thing said to be dead and mathematical. It may even strive to eliminate the Self from the world or even objectivize the self as "a mental substance". By eliminating or objectivizing the Self, science becomes impersonal. Nature marks the limit of science. In the realm of the Self and its reality, science is mute and powerless. In trying to explain the actual world, science goes beyond the actual and returns to verify its postulated concepts in the actual world of experience. It does not mean that the results and concepts conform with the actual world.

Science reduces facts to general laws, but general laws are not facts in the world nor has nature any compulsion to obey them. Where do laws of Nature exist? If in the world, then they are natural facts hence subject to temporal order. But they belong to

a postulated world hence the truth of the actual world which science wants to know cannot be eternally valid. That which cannot be subordinated to general laws do not fail within the domain of science. The whole man, the Self, the whole individual, etc. cannot be known scientifically but culturally. The particular is merely a fragmented aspect of the whole hence should not be confused with the individual who is a whole world. The end of scientific attitude came from the encounter with the whole individual beyond subordination to general laws -- laws of the mind.

The African mind wanted to understand the world through art. It sees the universe as one field of force, of aesthetic continuum, dynamic and rhythmical. Art transforms the forces. In the world of art, all polarities are synthesized. Science strives to offer abstract and logical knowledge; but does not delve into meaning, individuality, universality, eternity, etc. African culture has its own logic of aesthetics: the whole is the real. It offers a delightful knowledge and unifies the individual and the universal, time and eternity, one and many, freedom and necessity. The world of art is not fragmented like that of science. It offers a whole image of the world which science cannot achieve. As a result, the scepticism of science does not govern the optimism of art. **By unifying all opposites, art expresses unity in multiplicity.** Thus, one is forbidden to call one aspect of art "naturalistic" and another "abstract"; one "sacred", another "profane"; one "religious", another "secular"; one "traditional" and another "modern", etc. These dualistic concepts ignore the unitary process of vital-force. The African art embodies a whole experience -- sensuous, logical, personal, spiritual, divine, etc. All these are intrinsically one and vital. The African culture follows the logic of the co-ordination of the individual with the universal; not the subordination of the particular to the general. Intuition and imagination transform the sensuous and the intellectual into one vital continuum. Any analysis of these elements into separate and

independent categories destroys the unity of African cultural reality. African art appeals to the senses, mind, imagination, spirit, all at the same time. As a result, it gives greater satisfaction than scientific knowledge which appeals solely to the intellect not to the whole man. Because it offers living realities, not figures and formulae or heaps of dead ideas, African art creates meaning and significance. The individual, seen in the light of the whole, belongs to the whole and the whole to the individual. Every art work is complete in itself as a whole world. The so-called scientific progress is the accumulation of facts upon facts, but science can never possess complete or sufficient facts to offer a complete image of the world. Its truth is, therefore, partial and rational. African art reconciles body and mind, self and the world, human and the divine, hence its world of art is not one of dull uniformity but rich in the possibilities of human living. Art and history do not speak particular or general but universal language. The African art, therefore, is the art of living not of conquest. In the West, with its art of conquest, rational knowledge shows the relationship between natural force and power. As a result, all the reasoned knowledge in the West is the organization of force for conquest not for coexistence — conquest of Nature and alien peoples as the products of Nature.

THE ROOT OF AFRICAN ART

The study of African art must go to the root — to the myth, religion, world-view — which inspired the artistic expressions. There can never be any separation of African art from African religion, philosophy, world-view, state of mind, faculties and life. To speak of African culture means the recognition of African religion,

the religion of inspiration not institution, the religion of life not of conquest. The beauty of African art is essentially the African religion, thought and life. The West is good at detachment; but the African cultural world forbids this mode of knowledge. Having seen that "objects" are "living forces", attention must be paid to the laws governing the interaction of forces, the power of words which transform forces, gestures which are associated with words, spontaneous expressions which are even beyond language and logic. African art has meaning, value and significance only within the vital and dynamic universe of aesthetic continuum. As a result, art objects cannot be separated from the mental process of the African people. Vital force is active throughout the whole universe. This force can increase or decrease but never annihilated. The norm of good conduct is the strengthening of vital force, of relationships and of the whole life. The vital force at the direction of man (vital force with conscience, feelings, emotions, thought, will, etc.) forms the basis of artistic creativity.

Thus, one must know the theory of vital force both in its universal and individual nature, the theory of man, person, soul and the unity of the soul with ancestors, the living-dead; the individual and the collective soul or community, the position of individual soul within the collective soul, how the individual establishes contact with and expresses the invisible force, etc. The individual expresses the whole just as the whole is in the individual. Every art object is a vital force which contains the whole class or species of that force. Images may represent series of "natural" beings — all are forces — to proclaim the solidarity of vital force, the unity of living forces, humour, etc. Through acts of consecration and the magical power of words, art objects represent the ancestors. Masks refer to invisible forces — death, ancestors, etc. As the dwelling places of ancestral spirits, they constitute the media through which the living generations gain

contact with the whole vital-force which establishes the unity of human community. In this way, the African can imaginatively and intuitively see and hear the silent but eloquent language of life. Thus, the most important thing in African art is the mythological role of vital forces and the interaction of those forces. The art objects are alive, not only in the universe of forces but in the minds of their creators and owners. The minds, being cultural products and vital forces too, produce "objects" which conform with the forms of belief. The ability of the artist to represent in art objects the forms of beliefs opens up an inquiry into the interaction of "mind" and "matter". In the African case, the problem does not exist because there is no duality between mind and matter. Masks, images, art objects, etc. represent the forms of experience reality. In pursuit of this goal, the artist explains solely the essentials. The essentials are not "style", "balance", etc. but the belief which is general for the whole community, the belief which unifies feelings, emotions, integrates all individuals and elevates their minds and emotions to ideals even beyond conscious understanding. Even when the individual freely expresses himself or herself in art or music, the general rule still prevails. In other words, individuals conform with the norms of their artistic expressions within their groups or communities in spite of innovations. Thus, the African pays more attention to the form and nature of vital force not to "material things" and their details. African art as well as aesthetics do not depend on the analysis of art objects into concepts, theories, etc. suggested by the Western culture. The nature and form of the vital force determines the whole artistic expression. The study of individual artists the context of African community, general beliefs, the world of aesthetic continuum would suggest that the individual lives and creates in an isolated world of his own. In other words, the personality of the artist is not as significant as the work

of art because the artist is the secretary of his community — the beliefs, mythology, religion, experience of the people. It is not the individuality of the artist but the universality of the belief and collective soul that are vital in the artistic work. Consequently, an artist is not questioned whether he is an expert or an authority or not. It is sufficient to pay attention to the religion, mythology, beliefs of the people and see whether the norms, principles, customs, etc. are embodied in the art work. Consequently, the essential is the content not the analysis of the appearance of art objects. The content is not the expression or creation of an individual but of the collective belief, experience and unconscious. The reality or content is collectively known. The artist expresses it according to generally accepted rules, words, rites, etc. As a result, African art and aesthetic are expressions of profound beliefs and faith which are enduring. In spite of social changes, the enduring form and quality of art remain because they stem from religion. Beliefs and ideas rise and decay, but not the creative spirit which is religion. It is meaningless to insist that Africa has become "modern" or to trace African activities solely to Christian, Islamic and Western influences. In reality, such influences have never aided the development of African art, religion, world-view, etc.

African art is African religion. It goes beyond isolated individuals, beyond death, beyond what eyes can only see, to capture the vital force, a living reality, which must be strengthened. Thus, African art is at the service of life, not only to unify the whole man with collective life but to create qualitative enrichment of life. The African mind penetrates into the mystery of the universe with imagination and feels the vital presence of the world in the form of myth. As a result, African art symbolizes the mystery of personally experienced reality. Ultimate reality is not grasped by the external senses but symbolically and imaginatively. Art objects, therefore,

enable the African to perceive reality, a reality which is beyond measurement, analysis and classification into its component parts and sets of rules. As personal reality, it can only be grasped in the realm of religion and of profound living. Thus, one must feel and sympathetically put oneself in the African cultural premise, accept its concepts and theories, and the way it generalizes its activity in order to grasp the nature of African cultural activities. Art, therefore, is essentially that of living meaningfully and significantly. All vital activities are rhythmical because the world of aesthetic continuum has rhythmical order. Dancing, as Leopold Senghor pointed out, is an act of creation, union, knowledge and endurance.

Art and music are the intensification of the human living, of ordered relationships, of human experience of a living reality. To die in the Other so as to be reborn is an act of transcendence. To arrive at the eternal order of reality, a timeless region, the power of symbolism is essential. Thus, the symbolic act expresses the inwardness of life hence the African artistic values spring from the depth of the soul or vital-force. In the timeless order, time ceases to exist. As a result, the experienced reality absorbs the African mind and integrates all individuals. The African art expressed the unity of life, environment, constitutes the sources of discipline and touches on all levels of reality. Collective knowledge, expectations, hopes, fears, memory, conscience, etc. are embodied by art and music. This unity of life and purpose can only be symbolically expressed - masks, ancestral figures, figurines, etc. All the symbols embody the African belief about life, its process, relationship, order and transcendence. They summarize African emotions, thought, perceptions, ideals. Since African art touches on all African activities and are inseparable from life, one must not isolate art objects to define them in terms of aesthetic norms of technique, style, etc.

ARTISTIC APPRECIATION

Since the Renaissance period in the West, art has been disassociated from life and from other human activities. All modern problems are viewed as scientific and technical problems. Truth is regarded solely as scientific truth. Art no longer related to living, to the form of life, of selfhood and integration. Thus, human sensibility and world become fragmented. Life is left without any nourishment and deep expressions and becomes merely theatrical. Everything is dissolving and decaying for want of universal and enduring form or standard. As a result, nothing appears relevant, vital and significant. Scientific understanding, something artificial and provisional, deforms the growth of the whole man and nullifies the power of self-integration. Every symbol that embodied wisdom and truth has been destroyed. The river, the moon, snake, tree, lightning, etc. are no longer mysterious manifestation of invisible forces but things. As a result, the emotional and psychic energy necessary for the support of symbols has grown weak. Faith, religion, science, art, ethics etc. are now isolated things which can no longer restore the unity of life and activities. Since truth is regarded solely as scientific truth, the most vital and living truth of religion, art, faith, philosophy art, etc. is regarded as a matter of individual opinion. Thus, human beings — fragmented selves — grow old but never grasp the meaning and the paradox of life, and they retire with nothing to retire on; no enduring belief, no profound experience and expression, no inspiration and no authority. They no longer see themselves as parts of the whole universe and feel that the order of the society depends on the order of the universe. The greatest in man — spirit, feelings and emotions of ideals, imagination and intuition — is allowed to decay. Man is thus a heap of bones and figures. The pursuit of comfort and leisure led to the opposition between individuals and community hence the absence of organic life today in industrialized nations. With the disintegration of the community, personality disappears. All attentions are focused on politics and economics,

that is, on mutual exploitations of individuals.

Art is now a commodity, a value whose significance depends on money. As a result, art is robbed of vision and imagination and no sooner is it produced than it grows old. With no enduring value and quality, people crave for the new, novelty, believing that the latest is the best. Myths, community, life, etc. cannot support culture any longer but museums. Thus, all sources of inspiration have dried. Empirical facts replace reflection. Visual aid replaces imagination. A community is the expression of reality and all individuals live and die in it. Today, people live and die lonely and in isolation. Life is not a "good time" but the supreme value and reality which require discipline, imagination, insight and beliefs to live it meaningfully. Without the unitary view of life, the world and the eternal, the study of African art will have no meaning. All African cultural activities must be approached as events in the world of aesthetic continuum and as vital forces in constant interactions. Art is religion and religion in art.

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