

# Negro Sculpture\*

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If Carl Einstein's name sounds vaguely familiar today, it will likely be as the author of *Negro Sculpture* (1915), a monograph comprised of an introductory text, reprinted here, and more than a hundred images of objects from various regions of sub-Saharan Africa and diverse periods of its history. That few people today will recall the book's argument but will recognize quite a few of those images is due to *Negro Sculpture's* deeply divided reception. In the decade following its publication, those images were eagerly adapted by scores of artists from the whole spectrum of European primitivism, from German Expressionism to French post-Cubist "black deco," adapted in ways Einstein's text did not endorse. But then, if the reception of the plates was a failed success, that of the text was a failure *tout court*: few contemporaries read it closely, fewer understood it, and hardly anyone engaged with its argument more than superficially.

What then was this text, and what might it be today? It was and is not a significant contribution to properly academic knowledge of African art. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Einstein's close friend and one of his most attentive readers, said as much when he told him in 1921 that he liked everything about *Negro Sculpture* but the title, for he felt that what Einstein had actually written was a study of "sculpture as such." What he meant by that lofty designation was, in fact, a project that came with a precise historical index. *Negro Sculpture* is a theoretical exploration of sculpturality as a model of object experience in modernity, and by the same token it is a critique of certain definitions of subjectivity supported by other sculptural paradigms popular at the time. Einstein's critical insight was to have realized that for all their seemingly dramatic differences, the practices of Adolf von Hildebrand and Auguste Rodin (at least the "Impressionist" Rodin that emerged in the writings of Georg Simmel and others) had a shared purpose. Both promoted a sculptural paradigm that could seem to yield an exhaustive perceptual experience of an

\* *Negerplastik* (Leipzig: Verlag der Weißen Bücher, 1915; Munich: Kurt Wolff, 1920); reprinted in Carl Einstein, *Werke*, vol. 1, 1908–18, ed. Rolf-Peter Baacke and Jens Kwasny (Berlin: Medusa, 1980), pp. 245–391.

object, and so create islands of totality in the contingent environment of the modern city, whether that was the punctual totality-as-knowledge of the Hildebrandian relief, designed for the inferential exploration of a neo-Kantian subject, or whether it was the processualized, psychologically charged totality of Simmel's Rodin, an infinitely dilated totalization inspired by Henri Bergson's philosophy of becoming.

Against these two paradigms Einstein pitted his own, addressing, like them, a fundamental issue that any free-standing sculpture must deal with: the fact that, as three-dimensional object, sculpture will never be fully available to be viewed from any one vantage point. Hildebrand's relief had encouraged the viewer to complete that lack himself by treating the sculpture as effect of a familiar set of causes, the synthesizing retrieval of which constituted the aesthetic experience, so that in the act of perceiving the sculpture, the subject discovered that what seemed to be an inchoate phenomenal world was but awaiting his mental activity to become whole. Calling this illusion relief's optical *naturalism*, because it naturalizes the world as something utterly dependent on the subject who perceives it, Einstein contrasted it to the formal *realism* of African sculpture: the fact that certain examples in *Negro Sculpture's* plate section can be seen as factoring elementary information of their back view into their frontal aspect, and in such a way that, unlike Hildebrand's, the totality punctually given to vision here is so given as fundamentally differential, and as empirically complete. Differential, because these objects articulate the irreconcilable qualitative difference of two opposite movement directions within a single temporal moment, and so opened an interval of heterogeneity within a quantifying, homogeneous viewing time. Empirical, because according to Bergson's ontology, which Einstein studied very closely, such qualitative heterogeneity is the existential condition not just of sculpture but of anything that possesses a form: because it alone, and not quantitative homogeneity, can account for the imbrication of difference and repetition that is necessary to generate the change and novelty of form in the first place. The "realism" of these objects was then that, unlike Hildebrandian relief or a sculpture by Simmel's Rodin, they did not refer the viewer on to a transcendental identity of which they were but examples, or else turned the infinitely postponed consummation of that identity into an aesthetics of becoming. They produced an identity themselves, yet one that was that identity only insofar as it was animated by a constitutive difference.

*Negro Sculpture* is open to being rescued against its own outdated primitivist speculations about African culture, for terms like "religion" and "transcendence" enable its writer above all to think a new sculpturality of formal immanence. When Einstein claims that African "idols" are "worshipped" because they do not represent but rather *are* the god, he is making the point—over and above a host of other, more familiar ones, such as a critique of genius aesthetics—that religious sculpture simply lends the task of *all* sculpture a special urgency: to produce an object that generates its significance entirely from within itself, without reference either to an iconographic content or the major premise of a syllogistic inferential

vision. That object is bound to appear to be “sculpture as such”—but to a very specific historical subject: a Western subject ca. 1915, whose visual purview is here not extended to include new, “primitive” objects, but whose very own optical naturalism is subjected to a primitivization by an alien perceptual modality, which, beyond its necessary negativity, holds out the promise of a future restructuring of vision.

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*Notes on Method*

There is scarcely any art that the European approaches as warily as that of Africa. At first he is disposed to deny that it is art at all and responds to the distance that separates these objects from the European attitude with a contempt that generated a veritable terminology of negation. This distance and the prejudices that derive from it impede any aesthetic assessment; indeed, they render it completely impossible, for such an assessment presupposes initial proximity. Yet the Negro is from the outset considered inferior, the object of a ruthless investigation, and his works are condemned a priori as deficient. Vague evolutionary hypotheses were carelessly applied to him; to some he has served to demonstrate a misguided concept of the primitive, while others abused their helpless object for the purpose of polishing such equally seductive and false phrases as “people of an eternal prehistory” and so forth. One hoped to capture in the Negro a kind of origin, a condition that would never evolve beyond its initial stage. Many opinions about the African rest on such prejudices, concocted to serve a comforting theory. In all of his judgments the European proceeds from one assumption, namely that of his own absolute, indeed fantastic, superiority.

In truth our lack of respect for the Negro simply reflects our ignorance of him, which burdens him unfairly.

Perhaps the *illustrations* in this book will establish this much: the Negro is not undeveloped; a significant African culture has gone to ruin; perhaps the Negro of today relates to what may have been an “antique” Negro as the fellah relates to the ancient Egyptian.

Several problems in recent art have provoked a less superficial engagement with the art of the African peoples. As always, current artistic developments led to the construction of an appropriate history, and within it the art of the African peoples assumed a central position. What had seemed meaningless up to now acquired significance from the latest efforts of contemporary artists; one discovered that scarcely anyone had addressed certain spatial problems or practiced a given mode of artistic production with such purity as had the Negroes. It became clear: the earlier verdict on the Negro and his art applied more to the judge than to the judged. This new attitude was soon matched by a new fervor; Negro art was collected as art; passionately, which is to say, legitimately, one now constructed a newly interpreted object out of the old material. This short study of African art

cannot disregard the experience of more recent art, especially since what is effective in history is always a consequence of the immediate present. These contemporary connections, however, will be explored only later so that we may stay focused on a single topic and not distort it by comparisons.

Our knowledge of African art is on the whole slight and imprecise; apart from a few examples from Benin nothing is dated; several types of art objects are commonly identified according to the sites where they were found, but I believe there is nothing useful to be gained from this knowledge. Tribes migrated and shifted throughout Africa; moreover, we must assume that here as elsewhere tribes fought over the fetishes and that the victorious tribe appropriated for itself the gods of the defeated so as to benefit from their powers and protection. Completely different styles often originate from the same region; several explanations can be offered for this phenomenon without any possibility of determining which is the correct one; it might be suggested, for example, that it is a matter of earlier and later art forms, or that two styles emerged alongside each other, or that a type of art had been imported. In any case, for now neither our historical nor our geographical knowledge permit even the most *modest* determinations about this art. The obvious objection would be that, using the methodological framework of stylistic critique, one might force an historical sequence into being, and proceed from the simple to the complex. But one should disabuse oneself of the illusion that the simple and the originary could possibly be identical; all too happily one deludes oneself that the precondition and the method of intellectual thought are like the beginning and the nature of the historical process in general; when in fact every origin, by which I mean an individual, relative beginning—for we can never factually ascertain any other kind—is highly complex, since in specific cases human beings would like to express so much, indeed too much.

Hence, the attempt to say anything about African art appears rather hopeless. Particularly since the majority still demands proof that this is art at all. It is to be feared, therefore, that we will have to limit our study to a description of external facts that never yield anything more than, for example, that a loincloth is indeed a loincloth, which at no point leads to any general conclusion about the larger domain to which all those loincloths and protruding lips belong. (To view art as a means to anthropological and ethnographic insights seems to me dubious, since artistic representations reveal hardly anything about the facts upon which this kind of scholarly knowledge is based.)

Even so, we shall proceed from fact and not from some specious surrogate. The fact that I consider more reliable than all possible ethnographic or other knowledge is this: the African sculptures themselves! We will bracket out subject matter and the contextual associations related to it, and instead analyze these objects as formal constructs. We shall try to determine whether we can extrapolate from the sculptures' formal properties a total concept of form that is homologous with that of artistic form. In the process it is imperative that one method be followed while another is avoided: we must limit ourselves to the visual domain and proceed

within its specific laws; never should we impute the structure of our own reflections to that visuality or to the creative impulse that we are examining; we must refrain from interpolating comforting evolutionary schemes and from equating our thought process with the process of artistic creativity; we must disabuse ourselves of the prejudice that psychic processes could simply be reversed, and that reflecting on art is simply the opposite of creating art; rather, the former is a fundamentally different process, one which, precisely, *exceeds* form and its world so as to subsume the work of art under the general process.

Describing sculptures as formal entities achieves considerably more, however, than does an account of their subject matter; the latter moves beyond the given object, by treating it not as a formal construct but appropriating it as guide to some practice outside of its proper domain. Formal analysis, on the other hand, remains within the domain of the immediate; its argument presupposes the existence of forms, which serve the analysis better than individual things because they also contain information about ways of seeing and laws of vision, and so precisely compel us to practice a kind of knowledge that remains within the sphere of the given.

If a formal analysis concerned with the specific unities of spatial creation and vision proves to be possible, then it is implicitly demonstrated that the configurations in question are art. One may perhaps object that a tendency to generalize and an assertive will secretly dictate such a conclusion. This is false, for the individual form contains all the legitimate elements of vision within itself; indeed, it represents them, since they can be represented only as form. The individual case has nothing to do with the specificity of the concept, however; rather, the two have a dualistic relationship to each other. It is precisely the essential congruence between the general vision and its concrete realization that defines a work of art. One should also remember: artistic creation is just about as “arbitrary” as the necessary tendency to combine the individual forms of vision into laws, for in both cases one strove for organization and achieved it.

### *The Pictorial<sup>1</sup>*

The European’s usual incomprehension of African art matches its stylistic power, for this art represents a significant example of sculptural vision.

European sculpture, one may argue, is strongly permeated by pictorial surrogates. In Adolf von Hildebrand’s *Problem of Form* we possess the ideal reconciliation of the pictorial with the sculptural, and, striking as it may be, French sculpture up to Auguste Rodin seems concerned with, of all things, the dissolution

1. The German title of this section is “Das Malerische,” usually translated as “painterly,” as it is in the case of Heinrich Wölfflin’s “linear” and “painterly.” But as is clear from the text, Einstein is referring not to “painterliness” in Wölfflin’s sense, but is contrasting “das Malerische” with “das Plastische,” the pictorial with the sculptural, i.e., an essentially two-dimensional mode of vision and of representation with a three-dimensional, sculptural one. Hence, “pictorial” seems to convey more effectively his meaning and avoids conflation with the usual connotations of “painterly.”

of sculptural form.<sup>2</sup> Even frontality, which is frequently considered a rigorously “primitive” manifestation of form, must be characterized as an essentially pictorial treatment of cubic form, for here three-dimensionality is summed up in a few planes that suppress its cubic nature; one stresses the forms closest to the beholder and arranges them as planes, while the more distant parts are treated as incidental modulations of the foreground plane, whose dynamic character is thereby weakened. One emphasizes the most frontally placed motifs. In other cases, one replaced the cubic by finding a formal equivalent for movement in the motif itself or one conjured away the decisive element—the unmediated expression of the third dimension—through a drawn or modeled movement of form. Sculptural vision was undermined even by experiments with perspective. For this reason, one can easily understand that the firm and necessary boundaries between freestanding sculpture and relief have been steadily dissolved since the Renaissance, and that pictorial excitation, playing about a mass that is cubic only in a material sense, overgrew every three-dimensional formal construction. It is thus easy to understand why painters and not sculptors asked the key questions about three-dimensionality.

It goes without saying that given these formal tendencies it was inevitable that our art had to pass through a period of a complete conflation of the pictorial with the sculptural (the Baroque) and that such a practice could culminate only in a total defeat of sculpture, which, in order to capture at least the artist’s excitation and convey it to the beholder, had to be thoroughly pictorial and impressionistic. Three-dimensionality was eroded by optical sensation; personal handwriting dominated. This history of form was necessarily beholden to psychic processes. Artistic conventions seemed like paradoxes; the consensual goal was a maximally augmented creator and, consequently, a maximally stimulated beholder; the dynamism of individual processes held sway. These were valorized, and they received special attention. Preludes and postludes became the decisive phases, as increasingly the work dissolved into a conduit for psychological excitation; the individual flow, cause and effect, became fixed. These sculptures were professions of a genetics rather than objectified forms, a charged, instantaneous contact of two individuals; the histrionics of aesthetic judgment was often accorded more importance than the work of art itself. Inevitably, any concise canon of form and vision had to be dissolved.

2. Adolf von Hildebrand, *Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (Strasbourg: J. H. E. Heitz, 1893); English translation of the complete text, “The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts,” in Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikononou, eds. and trans., *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873–1893* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities; distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 227–79. See also Einstein’s comment on Hildebrand in a 1912 review: “To fix Hildebrand one must either accept or reject his method. I choose the latter. . . . It is completely wrong about a lot of things and especially about what is good in older sculpture; often his guiding thought seem to be, how can I get by without the properly sculptural.” Carl Einstein, *Werke Band 1. 1907–18*, ed. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1994), p. 67.

One strove for an ever-increasing differentiation of sculptural form, an increasingly disjunctive proliferation of technical means. The legend of the “palpably apprehended” life model, spruced up as realism, was no remedy against the actual absence of sculptural form, rather it confirmed precisely the lack of a fundamental, unified conception of space.

This attitude destroys our distance to things and valorizes only their functional significance for the individual. Such an art represents the potential accumulation of the greatest possible functional effect.

Indeed, we saw that in several recent experiments that this potential factor, namely the spectator, was made virtual and visible. In Europe, only a few styles diverged from this path, most notably the Romanesque-Byzantine style, yet, it demonstrably had its origins in the East and quickly evolved into an art of movement (the Gothic).

From that point on the spectator was woven into the sculpture; he became an inseparable functional component of it (e.g., perspectival sculpture), through a largely psychological act of valorization he merged with the maker’s personality, or else rejected it through a judgment. The sculpture was the subject of a conversation between two persons. This kind of sculptor was bound to be interested above all in predefining the effect and the beholder in advance; he was inclined to transform himself into the beholder (Futurist sculpture) in order to anticipate and test the effect, and the sculptures ought to be considered descriptions of that effect. Temporal-psychological factors completely outweighed spatial definition. To achieve the goal, even if unconsciously, one produced an identity of beholder and maker, for only in this way was an unlimited effect possible.

It says something about this state of affairs that one regards the effect on the beholder mostly as the inverse of the creative process, even though it involves little intensity. The sculptor subordinated himself to the majority of psychological processes and transformed himself into the beholder. While working he always adopted a distant vantage point corresponding to that of the future beholder, and he would then go on to model the effect accordingly; he shifted the emphasis to the visual activity of the viewer and modeled with *touches*, so that the construction of the actual form would be left to the viewer. The construction of space was sacrificed to a secondary, indeed to an alien means, namely that of material movement; cubic space, that precondition of all sculpture, was forgotten.

A few years ago in France we witnessed the crisis that redefined the issues. A tremendous effort of consciousness revealed the questionable basis of the procedure. A few painters were strong enough to turn away from mechanically routine craftsmanship; distancing themselves from the usual means, they investigated the elements of spatial vision and the factors that generate and determine it. The results of these important efforts are sufficiently known. Around that time, and necessarily so, one discovered Negro sculpture and recognized that, in isolation, it had cultivated pure sculptural forms.

The efforts of these painters are usually called abstraction, even though it

cannot be denied that it was only through a prodigious critique of misguided metaphors that an unmediated conception of space could be approached. But this is essential, and it powerfully sets Negro sculpture apart from the art that has looked to it and has gained self-awareness in the process; what appears as abstraction in the latter is immediately given nature in the former. In formal terms, Negro sculpture will prove to be the strongest realism.

The artist of today is not entirely a partisan of pure form. He still senses its opposition to his own prehistory, so that an all-too-reactive strain is woven into his efforts; his critique, necessary as it is, reinforces the analytical side.

#### *Religion and African Art*

The art of the Negro is determined above all by religion. As with many an ancient people, the sculptures are worshiped. The maker creates his work as the deity or its guardian, i.e., from the beginning he maintains a distance from the work, which either *is* or contains the god. The sculptor's labor is a form of remote adoration and the work is therefore a priori autonomous, more powerful than its maker; the more so as he infuses it with all of his intensity and, as the weaker being, sacrifices himself to it. His labor must be characterized as a form of religious service. As a deity the work is free and independent of everything else; both artist and worshiper stand at an immeasurable distance from it. The work will never mingle in the process of human life, and if it should, then as something powerful and remote. The work's transcendence is presupposed and conditioned by its religious nature. It is created in adoration, in dread of the god and such is its effect. Maker and worshiper are a priori psychological, which is to say essentially identical; the effect resides not in the work of art but in its preestablished, unquestioned being as a god. No artist would presume to compete with the god by striving for an effect; for the effect is a given and is predetermined. Any attempt to make the work of art for the sake of effect is pointless, especially since the idols are often worshiped in darkness.

The artist produces a work that is self-sufficient, transcendent, and unentangled. To this transcendence corresponds a spatial vision that precludes every function of the beholder; it is an exhaustive, total, and unfragmented space that must be given and guaranteed. Here the isolation of the space does not amount to abstraction but is rather unmediated sensation. The self-containment of the work is guaranteed only if a cubic space is fully realized, such that nothing further can be added. The activity of the beholder is not even considered. (In the case of religious painting, the image is entirely confined to the picture surface so as to produce a similar effect. This kind of painting cannot be achieved by a decorative or ornamental approach; those qualities are merely by-products.)

I said that three-dimensionality must be perfectly and undiminishedly realized, that the visual experience is religiously predetermined and reinforced by religious canon. This determination of vision results in a style that is not subject to any

individual willfulness but which is instead canonically determined and can be changed only by religious upheaval. The beholder often worships the images in darkness, and in prayer he is wholly devoted to and consumed by the god, so that he will scarcely affect the character of the sculpture or so much as take notice of it. The situation is the same when a king or chieftain is represented; indeed, even in the sculpture of the common man something divine is envisioned, revered even, so that here, too, this divine quality determines the work. In such an art the individual artist's model and the portrait have no place; at best they constitute a profane, marginal art that is either difficult to distinguish from religious art or else contrasts with it, as a little regarded, less essential area. The work is erected as a typological manifestation of venerated power.

Characteristic of Negro sculptures is a pronounced individuation of their component parts; this, too, is motivated by their religious purpose. The parts are aligned, not according to the beholder's point of view, but from within themselves. They are perceived as confined by mass, not as diminished by distance; as a result, both the individual parts and their contours will be reinforced.

There is another striking feature: most of these works dispense with a base and other features related to display, which one might find surprising, since by our standards the statues are extremely decorative. But the god is never presented except as a self-sufficient being, unneedful of any aid. There is no shortage of pious, reverent hands when he is borne by worshipers.

Such an art will seldom objectify the metaphysical, which is taken to be self-evident. The metaphysical must reveal itself entirely within the completed form and condense itself in that form with astonishing intensity; form, in other words, is organized so as to achieve a maximum of self-containment. A powerful realism of form will emerge here, for only in this way do those forces become active that achieve form not in an abstract or reactively polemical way but which are themselves unmediated form. (The metaphysics of today's artists betrays even now the preceding critique of the pictorial and is incorporated into their representations as an essence of form and subject matter, so that the absoluteness of religion and art, their strictly delimited correlativity, becomes entangled in a destructive mixture.) In formal realism, which should not be understood as a mimetic naturalism, transcendence is a given, for imitation is out of the question. Whom would a god imitate, to whom would he submit? The result is a consistent realism of transcendent form. The work of art will be viewed not as an arbitrary and artificial creation but as a mythic reality, whose power surpasses that of nature. The work of art is real by virtue of its closed form; since it is self-sufficient and exceedingly powerful, the sense of distance will compel a tremendously intense art.

While the European work of art is subjected to an emotional interpretation even of form in that the beholder is summoned to active optical participation, the Negro work possesses an unequivocal definition, due not only to formal reasons but also to religious ones. It signifies nothing, it does not symbolize; it is the god, who preserves his hermetic mythic reality into which he

draws the worshiper, transforming him, too, into a mythic being and dissolving his human existence.

Formal and religious unities correspond to one another; so, too, do formal and religious realism. The European work of art became the very metaphor of the effect that invites the beholder to indulge in an effortless freedom. The religious work of art of the Negro is categorical and possesses a concise being that resists any modification.

In order to organize formally a delimited existence for the work of art, every temporal function must be eliminated; any movement around the work, that is, any tactile apprehension, must be prevented. The god has no genetics; that would contradict his legitimate existence. Hence, the need to invent a kind of representation that immediately expresses itself in solid material without recourse to *modèle*, which would signal the presence of an impious, personal, and hence, diminishing hand. The spatial vision evinced by this kind of work must totally absorb cubic space and express it in a unified way. Perspective or the customary frontality are prohibited here; they would be irreverent. The work of art must provide the entire spatial equation, for it is timeless only when it excludes a temporal interpretation based on ideas of movement. It absorbs time by integrating into its form what we experience as movement.

#### *Cubic Vision of Space*

Every conceptual argument, however attentive it may be to visual experience, must necessarily dislodge itself from it, and in order to maintain its own specific structure it will not take into account the full diversity of artistic practice.

First we shall examine the specific formal organization of the mode of vision that is the foundation of African sculpture. We may completely disregard the metaphysical correlate since we have identified it as a self-evident contributing factor of formal organization, and since we know that it is precisely the work's religious determination that compels us to posit the existence of an independent form.

This presents us with the task of a formal analysis of the mode of vision manifested in this art. We shall avoid the mistake of degrading the art of the Negro to an unconscious memory of some European art form, since African art has a formal character that sets it apart.

Negro sculpture presents us with an instance of undiluted sculptural vision expressed as fixed, stable form. Sculpture's task is to render three-dimensionality; hence, to naive people it will seem a perfectly straightforward practice, for it works with a mass that is already defined by three dimensions. Yet if one considers that three-dimensionality is to be represented not as some object in space but rather as *form*, the task becomes difficult; indeed, initially it may seem almost insoluble. In thinking about it one is overcome by an almost indescribable excitement: this three-dimensionality, which we cannot apprehend in a single glance, must be

organized not as some vague optical suggestion, but as a self-contained, actual expression. Our eyes are accustomed to European solutions to this challenge, which, conditioned as we are by habit, we find convincing; yet when judged against African sculpture these same solutions turn out to be ways of avoiding the problem. Frontality, multiple viewpoints, transitional *modélé*, and sculptural silhouette—these are the most common devices.

Frontality concentrates all power into a single aspect and essentially cheats the viewer out of the experience of the cubic. It arranges the foremost parts according to a single viewpoint and endows them with a degree of plasticity. The simplest, naturalistic aspect is chosen, the side closest to the beholder, the one that habitually orients him psychologically and representationally. Through a pattern of rhythmic interruptions, the other, subordinate aspects suggest a sensation that corresponds to an idea of three-dimensionality based on our ideas of movement. The mental synthesis of abrupt movements—movements that are motivated above all by the motif—generates the idea of a spatial unity that has no formal legitimacy.

The viewer is subjected to the same process by sculptural contour, which, occasionally supported by perspectival tricks, offers a mere suggestion of the cubic. On closer inspection it will stand revealed as a convention derived from drawing, which is never a sculptural element.

All of these approaches are characterized by pictorial or graphic procedures; depth is suggested, but rarely constructed directly as form. These techniques are rooted in the prejudice that the cubic effect is more or less a guaranteed by-product of material mass, that the metaphorical inscription of an inner excitation into that mass or a single-sided formal directive would suffice for the cubic to exist as form. Such methods are content with merely suggesting or signifying the sculptural instead of addressing it in a consistent fashion, which, at any rate, would be hardly possible for them since they conceive of the cubic as mass rather than as unmediated form. Mass, however, is not identical with form, for it cannot actually be perceived at a single glance; these procedures are always bound up with the psychological experience of kinesthetic acts, which dissolve the form into something genetic and thereby utterly destroy it. Thus arises the difficulty of fixing three-dimensionality in a single act of optical representation and viewing it as a totality, so that it may be grasped as a *single* integration. But what, in cubic terms, is form?

This much is clear: this form must be apprehended all at once, yet not as a mere suggestion of an object; a kinetic act must be arrested, must be fixed to become an unconditionality. Three-dimensionally situated as they may be, all parts of the composition must nonetheless be represented simultaneously, i.e., the dispersed space must be integrated into a single field of vision. Three-dimensionality may be neither interpreted nor rendered essentially as mass, but must be concentrated as a determinate mode of being; what generates the visual experience of three-dimensionality and is habitually and naturalistically sensed as movement is here constructed as a formally fixed expression.

Every three-dimensional point within a mass can be interpreted in infinite ways; this fact alone seems to present insurmountable obstacles to any unambiguous determination and to rule out any possibility of totality. Even the continuity of the point's relations in fact impedes any hope of a definite solution, as much as one may flatter oneself that one might suggest to the observer a definite unified impression through a gradual, slowly directed function; no rhythmic arrangement, no graphic relationship, no proliferation of movement, no matter how rich, is capable of deceiving us into believing that the cubic has here been directly concentrated into the unity of form.

The Negro seems to have found a valid, pure solution to this problem. He discovered what must initially seem paradoxical to us: a formal dimension.

The idea of the cubic as form—only this, and not any material mass, is the business of sculpture—directly leads one to the first task, to determine just what constitutes that form, namely, all the parts of a composition, including those that are not simultaneously visible. They must be gathered with the visible parts into a total form, which in a single act of vision defines the viewer and corresponds to a fixed three-dimensional visual experience, so that the otherwise irrational cubic form manifests itself as something visibly formed. The optical naturalism of Western art is not the imitation of external nature; rather, the nature that is passively imitated here is merely the vantage point of the viewer. Whence the geneticism, the excessive relativism that characterizes most of our art. This art adapted itself to the beholder (frontality, distant image), and increasingly the production of the final optical form was entrusted to an actively participating beholder.

Form is an equation, like the representations produced by our minds; this equation is artistically valid when it is grasped unconditionally and without reference to anything extraneous. For form is the perfect identity of vision and individual realization, which are structurally isomorphic and hence do not relate to each other as concept and individual case. Vision may encompass several possible cases of realization, but it has no higher qualitative reality than they do. It follows that art represents a special case of unconditional intensity and that quality must be generated undiminished within it.

It is the task of sculpture to form an equation in which naturalistic sensations of movement, and hence of mass, are completely absorbed and in which their successive differentiation is converted into a formal order. This equivalency must be total, in order that the work will no longer be felt as an equation of mutually opposed human tendencies, but rather as something unconditional, self-enclosed, and autonomous.

The dimensions of ordinary space are threefold, but the third dimension, a dimension of movement, is merely quantified rather than being investigated for its specific nature. Since the work of art generates specificity as such, this last dimension undergoes a bisection. Movement is usually conceived as a continuum, which delimits space by strolling through it. Yet because visual art by definition fixes its object, this unity is split into two opposite directions and so articulates

two completely divergent tendencies that elsewhere, e.g., in the infinite space of the mathematician, are quite meaningless. In sculpture, however, thrusts into depth and into the foreground are entirely distinct ways of producing space. Their difference is not gradual; rather they constitute supreme differences of form, assuming they are not fused impressionistically, again under the influence of naturalistic ideas of movement. From this knowledge we can see that sculpture is in a certain sense discontinuous, especially since it cannot dispense with contrast as an elementary device for creating space. The cubic should not be obscured as a secondary, suggestive *modèle* and for that reason should not be introduced as a materialized relation; rather it should be foregrounded as essential.

The viewer of a sculpture readily believes that his impression is constituted by a combination of seeing on the one hand and of imagining the more distant parts on the other, yet because of its ambiguity, such an effect would have nothing to do with art.

We have stressed that sculpture is not a matter of naturalistic mass but solely of formal elucidation. Therefore the important thing is to represent the nonvisible parts in their formal function, as form, the cubic—or the depth quotient, as I should like to call it—as form in the visible parts; to represent it, to be sure, only as form, without mixing it up with the object, with the mass. The parts, therefore, must not be represented materially and pictorially, but rather in such a way that the form through which they become sculptural and which is present naturalistically in the viewer's act of movement becomes fixed as a unity and is made simultaneously visible. Each part, that is, must become sculpturally independent and must be deformed in such a way that it absorbs depth, so that the mental image of how it appears from the opposite side is incorporated into the frontal, yet nevertheless three-dimensionally functional side. Every part is therefore a result of the formal idea that creates space as a totality and as a complete identity of the individual optical phenomenon with the general mode of vision, and which rejects the surrogate compromise that weakens the spatial effect by reducing it to mass. Such sculpture is strongly oriented toward one side because that side now offers the cubic as an undistorted totality, as a resultant, whereas frontality merely summarizes the foremost plane. This sculptural integration must generate functional centers around which it is organized; these cubic *points centrales* readily produce a powerful and necessary division that may be characterized as a vigorous individuation of parts. Understandably so, for it is precisely the naturalistic mass that is irrelevant here. The famous compact, unperforated mass of earlier art is of no importance. Besides, the figure is treated here not as an effect but in its immediate spatiality. As the dominant presence the body of the god withholds itself from the synthesizing hands of the craftsman; the body is apprehended functionally from within itself. Negro sculpture is frequently chided for its so-called errors in proportion; let it be understood that the optical discontinuity of space is translated into a clarification of form, into an order of parts that, since sculptural form is the issue here, are valorized according to their sculptural expressiveness. The decisive factor is precisely

not their relative size but rather the cubic expression assigned to them and which they must represent without compromise. Certainly if there is one thing the Negro spurns—a compromise that tempts the European—it is to treat the interpolation of *modèle* as an elementary means, for if there is one thing that this purely sculptural procedure requires, it is firm divisions. The sides are, as it were, subordinate functions, since the form must be concentrated and intensely deployed in order to be form; for, again, the cubic is represented independently from mass, as resultant and expression. And only this is permissible: for art, being qualitative, is a matter of intensity; the cubic must represent itself in the subordination of viewpoints as tectonicized intensity. This brings us to the concept of monumentality. This notion arguably belongs to periods that, lacking any distinctive vision, measured out their works with yardsticks. Since art deals in intensity, monumentality as magnitude will be eliminated. And we need to dispose of one more thing. These sculptural orders should never be achieved by means of linear interpolations; such an approach merely betrays a mode of seeing weakened by conceptual memories, whereas the Negro's unadulterated realism will be properly understood as soon as we have learned to see how the strictly delimited space of the work can be fixated without mediation. Again, the depth function is not expressed through measurements but through the directional resultant of spatial contrasts, which welds them together instead of representing them additively as properties of the object, and which a visual experience based on the movement ideas of mass will never be able to perceive as unity; for the cubic is located not in the individual, differently placed parts but rather in their overall cubic resultant, which is always apprehended as unity and which has nothing to do with mass or geometric line. Since movement has been absorbed, this resultant represents cubic being as an ungenetic, unconditional result.

Now that we have examined the principles of sculptural concentration, its consequences are easily explained. Some have objected to a lack of proportion in Negro sculptures even as others have treated them as documents of the anatomical structure of members of different tribes. Both positions can be readily dismissed, for the organic, since it merely signifies the actual possibilities of movement, has no particular relevance for art. By equating the reflection on art with the making of art, even if in reversed sequence, one built a theoretical edifice from abrupt concepts, as if art somehow used the model as its starting point and then proceeded to abstract from it. It is evident that this kind of procedure already presupposes a fully developed notion of art; an analytical endeavor ought never leave the plane of its object, otherwise one will be talking about many things, but not about the object in question. Both "abstract" and "organic" are criteria that are alien to art (one is conceptual, the other naturalistic), hence they are completely extraneous. By the same token, vitalist or mechanistic explanations of artistic forms should be disregarded. Broad feet, for example, are not broad because they are load-bearing, but because at times the downward glance expands laterally, or because the artist has sought to create a contrasting equilibrium to the pelvis. Since form depends neither on the

organic nor on mass (the so-called organic occasionally requires a base as a geometric and compact contrast), most Negro sculptures dispense with a base, and if one should indeed be used, it will be accentuated sculpturally, through sharp edges and the like.

But back to the question of proportions. These depend on the degree to which depth is meant to be expressed by the all-decisive depth quotient, by what I am calling the sculptural resultant. The relations of the parts to each other depend solely on the degree of their cubic function. Important parts demand an appropriate cubic resultant. This is how one should understand the so-called twisted joints or limbs of Negro sculptures: this coiled bending represents in a visible and concentrated way the cubic character of two otherwise abruptly contrasting directional movements; recessed parts that could otherwise merely be intimated become active and functional within a focused, unified expression. They become form, and as such they acquire necessity as elements of an unmediated representation of the cubic. The remaining sides must be subordinated to these integrated forms for the sake of that otherwise rarely achieved unification, but they do not remain unworked, merely suggestive material; they become formally active. Furthermore, depth becomes visible as totality. This form, which is identical with unified vision, expresses itself in constants and contrasts. These, however, are no longer infinitely interpretable; rather, the twofold movement into depth, forward and backward, has been bound into a single cubic expression. Every cubic point can be interpreted according to two directions; here it is incorporated and fastened into the cubic resultant and for that reason contains within itself—and not as an interpolated relation—both depth contrasts.

With Negro sculpture, as with so-called primitive art, one may be struck by the unusual slenderness and elongation of some of the statues; in these cases the cubic resultants are not overly pronounced. Perhaps the slender form is the expression of an unbridled will to grasp the cubic in its raw state, as it were. These thin, compressed, simple forms are considered impervious to their ambient space.

I wish to add but a few words about the sculptural group. It visibly confirms what has already been said, namely that the cubic is expressed not by mass but by form; for otherwise the sculptural group would be a ridiculous paradox, as indeed would be any sculpture that is pierced by spatial intervals. The group represents the extreme case of what I would like to call sculptural distance effect; upon close inspection, the relation between two parts of a group is not different from the relation between two distant parts of a single figure. Their connectedness manifests itself in their subordination to a single sculptural integration, unless we are simply dealing with a contrasting or additive repetition of the formal theme. The contrasting figure's charm derives from its reversal of the directional values and hence of the meaning of the sculptural orientation. A sequential organization, on the other hand, gathers the variations of a sculptural system into a single field of vision. Since in both cases we are dealing with a unitary system, both will be apprehended as totalities.

*Masks and Related Issues*

A people for whom art, religion, and custom have an effective immediacy will seek to render visible the powers that dominate and surround them. To tattoo is to turn one's own body into the medium and object of a specific mode of vision. The Negro sacrifices his body and intensifies it; his body is visibly dedicated to the universal, which acquires a palpable form on the body's surface. It is a mark of a despotic, unconditionally dominant religion and humanity when man and woman use tattooing to transform the individual body into a universal one, even as it also signifies an intensified erotic power. What a remarkable sort of consciousness is this, which conceives of one's own body as an unfinished work, and which alters it in an unmediated fashion. All across the surface of the naturalistic body the tattooist reinforces the form sketched by nature, and the body drawing attains its peak when the natural form is negated and an imagined one surpasses it. In this case the body is at most canvas or clay; indeed, it becomes an obstacle that must provoke the strongest application of form. To tattoo oneself presupposes an unmediated self-awareness and, correspondingly, an at least equally strong awareness of the objectively exercised form. Here, too, we find what I called a sense of distance, a tremendous gift for objective creation.

Tattooing is only one part of this self-objectifying activity that seeks to influence the entire body, to produce it consciously, and not only in the unmediated expression of movement as, for example, in dance, or in its fixed expression, as in coiffure. The Negro determines his type so strongly that he transforms it. Everywhere he intervenes in order to give expression an inalterable personal signature. It makes sense for a person who deems himself a cat, a river, and weather to transform himself accordingly; he is these things, and he implements the consequences on his all-too-unambiguous body.

The European, disposed both to psychologizing and theatricality, most readily understands this attitude as it relates to the mask. A human being constantly undergoes minute changes even as he strives to preserve a certain continuity, an identity. The European in particular has turned this attitude into a veritable hypertrophic cult; the Negro, who is less inhibited by a subjective ego and pays honor to objective powers, must, if he is to maintain himself alongside them, transform himself into them, especially when celebrating them most intensely. Metamorphosis is his means of balancing out the destructive act of adoration; he prays to the god, he dances ecstatically for the tribe, and he transforms himself through the mask into the tribe and the god. This transformation offers him the most powerful comprehension of objectivity; he incarnates it within himself, and he himself is this objectivity, in which all individuality is annihilated.

Consequently, the mask has meaning only when it is inhuman, impersonal, which is to say constructive, free from the lived experience of the individual; perhaps the Negro honors the mask as a deity when he is not wearing it.

I would like to call the mask fixed ecstasy, and perhaps also a medium that

may at any given moment serve as a powerful stimulus to ecstasy, because the face of the venerated power or animal is fixed in it.

It may come as a surprise that it is often the religious arts that cling to the human form. To me, the reason is self-evident, for the existence of the mythical being has been consensually established as fact independently of the shape it may take. The god has already been invented, and he exists indestructibly, no matter how he may manifest himself. It would almost be a contradiction for such a formally rigorous artistic sensibility to exhaust itself by tackling issues of subject matter instead of adoringly channeling all its energies into the form, the very existence of the god. For only artistic form corresponds to the being of the gods. Perhaps the worshiper seeks to chain the god to man when he represents him as human, and in the process entralls him through his very piety; for there is no greater egotist than the worshiper, who may offer everything to the god, yet unconsciously makes him human.

Here we should also comment on the peculiarly rigid expression that has been formed on the faces of these masks. This rigidity is nothing but the ultimate intensity of expression, freed from every psychological origin; above all it makes possible a lucid formal structure.

I have included illustrations of a sequence of masks that extends from the tectonic down to the intensely human in order to reveal the diverse psychological capacities of this people.

Occasionally it appears to be virtually impossible to determine which expressive type a given Negro work represents: the terrified or the one who terrifies. Here we have an excellent proof for the ambiguous indifference of psychological expression. After all, our own experience teaches us that the physiognomic expressions of opposite emotions are identical.

I am deeply moved by the animal masks, for here the Negro assumes the face of the animal that is otherwise his prey. The god resides even in the slain animal, and perhaps it is with overtones of self-sacrifice when, by putting on the mask, the Negro makes amends to the slain creature and approaches the god within it; when he recognizes in the animal a power greater than himself: his tribe. Perhaps he escapes revenge for the dead animal if he transforms himself into it.

Between the human and the animal mask belongs the mask that captures the transformation itself. Here we are dealing with hybrid forms that, despite their fantastic or grotesque content, display the classic African equilibrium. A religious sentiment for whose excessive zeal the visible world is no longer adequate generates an interstitial world, and in the grotesque the inequality between the gods and their creature erupts menacingly.

I shall comment only briefly on the style of the Negro mask. We saw how the African condenses sculptural forces into visible resultants. Even the masks resonate with the power of a cubic vision that makes the planes thrust against one another, which gathers up the entire significance of the foremost parts of the face into a few sculptural forms, and which deploys the three-dimensional directional vectors, minor as they may be, in their resultants.