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1. *In the last thirty years, images have been a focus of scholarship from many different viewpoints, and they have been pivotal in the many scholarly movements, or “turns”, attempting to methodologically reframe the study of art history in general. Can you briefly explain which was your original focus of interest and in which directions your scholarly approach developed over the course of time?*

In the classical tradition of ethnology applied to the arts of Africa, my first research focused on the manifestations of sculpture in traditional medicine among the Bana, a Bamileke ethnic subgroup (Western Cameroon). If the question of functionalism was dominating, that of the phenomenological perception of the image, as a mental symbol, participating in the restoration of the psycho-physiological and sociological balance of being, opened up beautiful breaches in my general conception of ancient iconography in Africa. In this sense, the notion of symbolic efficiency, shaped in Lévi-Strauss's *Structural Anthropology* (*Anthropologie structurale*) (1958), invited us to go beyond the classic Western perception of the fixed, narrative, descriptive or reflexive image, in favour of an immersive, interactive and systemic vision. Such a transition was made possible by the phenomenal impact of the ritual which, like a placebo effect, clearly acts on the collective consciousness of a group of beliefs. By subsequently directing our research towards prehistoric arts, it was a question of testing the very essence of this mental structure of the image, in reality quite constant in the primitive human mind from one continent to another, but finding in the ancient extra-Western arts the most exemplary manifestations of its conceptual and material regeneration.

2. *Please name up to three books that you consider to have played an important role in orienting your research.*

In order, these books have allowed us to take a new critical look at research concerning the prehistory, history, and contemporaneity of art in Africa. On prehistory, E. Anati (2003)¹ provides a holistic approach to the origins of art from one continent to another. It highlights the most notorious and ancient concentrations in Africa, which bears witness to an early and diffuse historical awareness of the image on the continent, while challenging certain evolutionary assumptions on the matter. However, we must regret the author's tendency towards a lazy comparison between prehistoric arts and the tribal arts of

non-European societies. Quite disconnected from the classical tradition of ethnology, *African art* by J.-J. Kerchache et al. (1988),² dares take on a new philosophical approach, bouncing cheerfully on the formalist question well introduced by C. Einstein (1919), to come to an epistemological reflection on the very meaning of notions and their cultural transfer. This leads the authors to counterbalance a classic Western hierarchy of the visual arts, based on the art of representation, mimesis, and atmospheric perspective, in favour of an African conception whose art of “presentification”, dominated by symbolism and allegory, would determine its graduation. But we are still far from a metaphysics of creation which, following the example of British social anthropology, has been concerned with bringing the artist out of his anonymity. In the tradition of prolonged field experiments, the research of S. Kasfir (2000) on *Contemporary African Arts (L’art contemporain africain)* has the merit of freeing itself from the prerequisites of the aesthetic-stylistic classifications linked to university theories, but also those fixed by the globalized market and museum system. Also, the author approaches recent arts from a historical perspective that takes into account as much the survival of ancient iconography, struggling with colonial art workshops (the progenitors of the school of conventional art), than the rise of a new popular culture, in phase with the processes of industrialization (rise of the printing press) and urbanization.

3. *What is your assessment of traditional art history, with its emphasis on controversial notions and often rigid distinctions between “style” and “iconography”? What do you see as its hermeneutic limits and advantages? Do you think it should be thoroughly replaced with new approaches, or simply revised and integrated into the present-day art-historical discourse?*

Insofar as there does not exist a unilateral history of art (any more than that of thought), its classic object of study is probably not apprehended in the same way from one continent to the other. If in the West, the theoretical debate was animated by supporters of stylistic attributions or classifications (formal referents) and those of iconological approaches (cultural history of the image), in Africa a similar debate has opposed an ethnological vision to a formalist one. In terms of ethnology, it must be said that the pre-eminence of functionalist approaches has not completely superseded the arguments of some proponents of structuralism. Thus, the work *The way of masks (La voie des masques)* by C. Lévi-Strauss (1979) undoubtedly represents a fine experience in line with the Panofskyan school, in particular as concerns the structural analysis applied to the iconography of the masks of the Pacific Indians. In the tradition of formalism, *Negerplastik* by C. Einstein (1915) undoubtedly appears as one of the first scientific recognitions of the formal contribution of “negro art” to early 20th century artistic avant-gardes in Europe. A response to this formalistic tendency was given by scholars promoting different approaches, such as the ethno-aesthetics of J. Delange (1967)³ and L. Stéphan (1985),⁴ or the ethno-morphology applied to African art by L. Perrois (1966).⁵ In the absence of an ancient written tradition in Africa, the oral one, still relatively viable during the colonial periods, could nevertheless have offered valuable sources for other theories such as authorism, the social history of art, the ethnolinguistics, the psychology of art... Let us note, however, certain

pioneering authors in the field, such as L. S. Senghor (1956)⁶ or H. Memel-Foté (1967)⁷ on the subject of ethnolinguistics applied to African aesthetics; F. M. Olbrecht (1940)⁸ whose approach to stylistic signatures (as in the case of the “master of Buli”) is as decisive in the history of African art as the work of G. Morelli on Italian Renaissance paintings; M. Trowell (1966) and his avant-garde work on African design,⁹ just like the psychoanalytical theories introduced by Eckart von Sydow (1930),¹⁰ and well applied to the study of African fertility dolls by P. Roumeguere and G. Roumeguere Eberhardt (1960).¹¹

4. Since the 1990s, our field has experienced many different “turns”, each laying emphasis on one of the multiple dynamics in which images are involved. To what extent did your research benefit from such scholarly debates?

Beyond the classic relationships between art history and philosophy, the 1990s highlighted the permeability of the discipline to ICT, multimedia, and cultural industries, which had already been prefigured by movements such as the Bauhaus school and by discussed theories such as Benjamin’s “aura”. All fields and objects of study in the history of art are affected to a greater or lesser extent. Considering the example of our study (N. S. Tchandeu and S. Hassimi 2021) on the sculpted monoliths of the Cross River (Nigeria-Cameroon),¹² the discipline also took into account technological advances in terms of inventory and survey (drone, high-resolution photography), as well as 3D photogrammetric reconstruction of damaged specimens. In fact, the development of methods of visual anthropology contributed a lot to the scientific documentation of an ethnological dimension that is still alive, but in the process of irreversible disappearance in the face of accelerated processes of urbanization. Also, graphic art techniques such as comics and animation have become such popular mediums of communication that they do not even spare prehistoric arts in the cultural industries of image and movie. This gives us an opportunity to pay a posthumous tribute to a colleague torn from life very early, Bienvenu Gouem Gouem, SAFA (society of africanist archaeologists) prize 2021, for the comic strip on the archaeological site of Lom Pangar in Cameroon.¹³

5. In your opinion, which specific notions have become particularly relevant to our present-day understanding of images, and how have they affected your own approach?

The notions of “imaginary museum”, “transfiguration of the banal” and “aura” seem to us to have had a significant impact on the destiny of African art in particular and that of art history in general:

– the “imaginary museum” of A. Malraux (1962)¹⁴ which returns to the classic essence of the museum, that of displaying objects which, being deprived of their function, are supposed to be invested with an enhanced intrinsic expression of pure form. In fact, this relatively anthropocentric and “elitist” conception of the museum resists neither the perspectives of the “new museology”, which is more conceptual and participatory and involves the social and environmental body, nor the option of a living culture or even an interactive cosmology as perceived in the imaginary of art in Africa, even less than that of the virtual museum;

– the notion of the “transfiguration of the banal” introduced by Danto, in the shaping of an analytical aesthetics particularly suited to the understanding of “readymade” and conceptual art in general; we come to a questioning of the very definition of art, leading to a disintegration/dematerialization of the subject and the technique of representation to which the ideal contemplation responds;

– the notion of “aura” introduced by W. Benjamin, which subjected the uniqueness or authenticity of the work of art to the test of mass reproduction made possible by cultural industries (photography and cinematography in particular). In this process of industrialization, the “unique” or the “here and its now” are characterized in negative terms: handmade objects undergo a process of degradation and devaluation which strips it of their authority and sacredness. But finally, as N. Heinich (1983) pointed out,¹⁵ this theory does not really suits the game rules of “who loses wins”, since the reproduction techniques are the very cause of the existence of the aura, therefore of the triumph of the unique, both through the materialization of duplicates and through their omnipresence. Taking as an example the statue of Queen Bangwa (Cameroon), once very little known in the art world despite its singular plasticity, we have to believe that her photograph in 1934 with a model (Adrienne Fidelin) by Man Ray, has undoubtedly contributed to a renewed visibility of the object, to the point of reaching the sales record for an African sculpture in the 1990s.

6. *What is your specific understanding of “meaning” in visual objects? How do images manage to convey messages, and what are the implications?*

Everything depends first of all on the genre of image, in particular on its sensory, mental and intellectual perception, which varies according to whether the referent, relatively classic, is of a naturalist, symbolic or abstract order (in the sense of a formal, iconological, phenomenological, or psychological interpretation); or when it is a more complex contemporary, i.e., conceptual, experimental, interactive, generative, digital or robotic medium (such as a cerebral shock, a participatory or situational experience, or a fictional immersion). Then, just like people, the image has a cultural and social life whose genesis, evolution, exchanges, and cultural shocks determine its destiny. Also, beyond the simple anachronistic education of taste, dear to certain art critics, it is necessary to develop an image culture that may limit errors of interpretation over time and space. A major mistake would be to interpret images of yesterday or elsewhere with the codes of today or here. In these cases, because of its essentially symbolic mode of representation, African art has been particularly exposed to all sorts of misunderstandings dictated very often by a Eurocentric gaze. Thus, we recently discovered that the famous kneeling “beggar woman” of the Baluba (J. Maes 1935)¹⁶ is actually a worthy ritual pot-bearer of the Bakuba (J. Volper 2017);¹⁷ that the point-like prominences on the sculpted heads of the Ikoi do not represent horns, but very traditional hairstyles for women (K. Nicklin and L. Salomon 1984);¹⁸ that certain statues with berets do not represent ancestors but candidates for initiation (B.C. Bela 2006)...¹⁹ Examples are legion. But the external gaze alone does not justify all the faults, since *in situ*, the cultural shocks of the colonial peri-

ods in Africa have led to a very often irreversible and sometimes radical conversion of gaze, taste, and endogenous values. For the little anecdote, it happens to me, during some of my teachings at the University of Yaoundé 1, to project old photos of scarified Africans, with mutilated teeth, lips, ears, and/or genitals. Always taking care to remind students (in order to somehow capture their empathy) that these body arts were mostly shared by local communities before being banned during the colonial period, they are paradoxically met, barely a century later, with a general feeling of denial, rejection or refusal to assume such a heritage.

7. To what extent is “meaning” determined by factors not immediately associated with the specific visual appearance of images, such as mise-en-scène strategies, conditions of visibility, and more generally the experiential dimension of viewers?

As soon as we leave the classic register of art in itself or the imaginary museum, to visualize objects in an interactive, systemic, functional or ergonomic ecology, its meanings can be dependent as much on the art of communicating as a sign, symbol or icon, and as situational art related to the experience of perception in/ex situ, as well as empirical art, in terms of operability, finality and end of the image. The transfer of African objects from their ritual contexts to museum collections is quite indicative of a situational dynamic of the senses. Of course, within the museum, only the aesthetic sense is retained, although the latter, depending on the whim of the collector, can already be biased. This is the case, for example, with the *nkissi* statues of the Bavili: some collectors, worried about their “strange” combinations of nails and mirror, removed such elements from the wooden frame before exhibiting them. Even objects recognized for their aesthetic qualities, such as the engraved calabashes of the Fulani, sometimes do not escape a misunderstanding of their ethnological meaning, as their specific display seems to imply: we had the opportunity to observe one such misunderstanding at the Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Museum (S.-L. Betzogo, C. Evina Miaché et al. 2022).²⁰ Two different levels of reading justify this observation. The first, that of unity, highlights the exposure of each object on its concave face, a point of view that is no doubt satisfactory for western European optical conventions, but is entirely at odds with the Fulani ways of perception, which always display objects in a profile from which the peduncle has been amputated and from which the design is modulated. At the second level, that of the group, the mosaic-like museum exhibition clashes with the Fulani approach, which is dictated by a decreasing hierarchy of size in a north-south direction, in honor of the cardinal position of women (R. Dognin 1989).²¹ Considering the functional object par excellence, the mask, how can we hope that, in the imaginary museum, it will rediscover, in the eyes of the African, the phenomenological sense that irresistibly associates it with the wearer, with music, dance, season, time, circumstance, and a specific ritual place?

8. In your view, are we now better equipped to reconstruct and more deeply understand the complex relationship between the visual appearance of an image and the expectations of its viewers?

If we consider the entire history of the image, including that of its modern distribution circuits (museums, galleries, fairs, festivals, biennials, press and broadcast media, etc.), it is clear that the rise of ICT radically liberalized, democratized and dematerialized visual contents, while universalizing access to the current global village. All this to say that values – of industrialization and digitization, both linked to the liberal realities of post-modernism, correspond to the gradual erosion of classic and modern values – attached to the material, durable, sacred, elitist, exclusive or authentic dimensions of the artistic image, than to a new order of institutionalization, regulation and international validation of art. In this perspective, as much as one can question the current status of art and artists, grappling with the diktat of institutions (state, media and stock market) of validation, ideological-political programs and an increasingly more hermeneutic and prescriptive approach, we can also see a certain rupture between the most conceptual tendencies of contemporary art and beholders of all kinds. However, in this movement of rupture of the “paradigm of contemporary art” (N. Heinrich 2014),²² the cultural shock seems less marked in the pilot civilizations of the West, producers of “software” (sometimes to the detriment of the general public), than in other cultural traditions, such as those of Africa, which are collateral consumers of a program that is inseparable from colonial history. Thus, just as the “colonial museum” attracts a large audience only among expatriates who are more or less enamoured of exotic sensations, contemporary art exhibitions in African galleries (worthy daughters of Western parent galleries) seem to respond more to the requirements of programs and markets elsewhere, than to the aspirations of local audiences.

9. To what extent can images contribute to informing their viewers’ understandings of other images and other aspects of reality and experience?

Like the child who is introduced to the realities of the world through the modelling of clay, or even the apprentice who is initiated into art by first copying the works of the master, the aestheticized or “artificialized” image (N. Heinrich 2012)²³ knows how to make being visible, thus allowing the transfer, at the level of art, of the Heideggerian ontological question “What is being?”. We come to the conclusion that as much as creating is an exhibition of the artist’s imaginative self, contemplating is the discovery of the public’s imaginary self. However, this play of the imagination has gradually been able to push its limits throughout the history of Western art, moving globally from the religious or symbolic capture of an extra-artistic referent (Antiquity, Middle Ages, and Renaissance) to the experience of art in itself (Modern), to the trivialization of the object of representation and its dematerialization (Contemporary). From this point of view, the advent of modern art, largely motivated by the democratization of the image via photography, once again makes it possible to take a detour to its other source of inspiration: African art. Indeed, by its pure forms, its independent volumes, its subjective planes and rhythms, its whimsical decorations and above all its freedom from the grip of any real extra-artistic referent, the latter constituted an undeniable plastic alternative to the reinvention of the modern Art. So, it is difficult to credit some of these artists who, driven by a certain snobbery, reject its influence on their work, as evidenced by the paradoxical attitude of P. Pi-

casso, a “passionate” collector of African art, whose denial of the latter’s influence on his own creation has remained famous: “Negro art, I don’t know”. Thus art, as mediocre as it may appear to some, has never really fulfilled its purpose unless it is a mockery of itself and its own history, but also when it knows how to destabilize our perception of reality and changes the beaten track.

10. *What is your assessment of the materiality of images?*

Whether it is materialized for purposes of contemplation, communication, apology, divinization, self-fulfilment, etc., the artistic image has not only known a sympathetic historical destiny, but has also been exposed to all sorts of misadventures, going from *icono-inhumane*, to icono-phobia, iconoclasm/chromoclasm, up to drifting into a contemporary conceptual or post-conceptual immateriality. Our judgment on the materiality of the image therefore remains fundamentally conditioned by the relationship of causality and end, the reasons for the production being able to be in adequacy or not with the finality. Considering the objects of African art on display in Western museums, their purely contemplative purpose would participate in the materiality of dead, inert, and inanimate images, in total contradiction with the reasons for their creation, in particular those of making living and moving images in the context of social and religious activities. In the Batéké (Bas-Congo) for example, icono-functional codes make it possible to distinguish on the one hand the living statue, animated by the *butti* spirit and provided with a mass of abdominal remedy. On the other hand, mention can be made of the dead statue *tege*, whose absence or drug discharge signals the spirit’s absence. But as we have already indicated, the strangeness of such assembled sculptures, including the famous “fetishes” *nkissi* with nails and mirrors of the Bavili, very often led collectors to strip the wooden frame of all its accessories.

11. *In your view, how can we approach the “social life” of images? In what sense can we assume that images interrelate with their viewers and users?*

On this subject, the sociology of art has often replaced ethnology in Africa, linking the status of art or artists on the one hand, the geographical determinism of the environment and the classification of forms of social organization on the other hand. In the latter case, some authors such as S. P. Blier (1998)²⁴ have been able to highlight the characteristics of a court art or royal art, made by promising professional, sometimes ennobled, artists, who very often gave shape to cooperatives. The latter gave birth to works whose major characteristics – the precious or non-precious nature of their materials (gold, silver, bronze, ivory, iron, pearls, wood, etc.), the type of decoration (figurative or geometric), or their more or less monumental aspect – are codified by social hierarchies. By differentiation, in the so-called not centralized societies or with strong initiatory institutions, we observe the activity of artists with more intermittent statuses, even quite marginalized in certain cases (as with, e.g., blacksmiths-sculptors). Their production is characterized by an art that is more sober in materials and relatively modest in size, predominated by the theme of initiatory brotherhoods with masks, figures of ancestors, and agrarian rites. Tak-

ing into account this time the determinism of the environment, the example of architectural expressions makes it possible to take the measure of the great stylistic ensembles: those of Sudano-Sahelian Africa whose masterpieces are undoubtedly the cob architecture from the famous mosques of the Kanga Moussa era; those of forest areas of Africa where the reign of wood was best celebrated by the monumental palaces with pillars and carved opening frames in Grassfield, Cameroon; those of the Guinean coasts adapting the constructions to support on piles or to an ingenious water sealing system such as the Yoruba/Edo/Ashanti “impluvium” architecture; those between the Rift Valley and the Rhodesian complex which bequeathed some wonders of humanity in terms of Stone Architecture such as the rock churches of Lalibela (Ethiopia) and Great Zimbabwe. But it also happens in some cases that the works do not obey any of these geo or socio-structural constructions, either because their ancient production is totally foreign to the current societies which have fortuitously inherited them; or since the geographical distance from the original focus of production leads to a heavy loss of meaning, as much linguistically as epistemologically and metaphysically.

12. *Does the experience of images exclusively imply the exercise of sight, or do other senses also play a role? If possible, please cite a relevant case from your research field.*

In Western civilizations where the classical classification of the arts, at least from Plato to Schopenhauer via Hegel, is well defined, it is necessary to believe that the evolution of the conception of art (*techné*, plastic arts and visual arts), corresponds to the gradual shift from an initially mechanical or tactile experience of the image to a purely retinal and finally analogical and digital perception. This very taxonomic, exclusive, and evolutionary approach to the notion of visual image is paralleled in African traditions by a more functional, inclusive, participatory, and organically dynamic experience. The example of the traditional cult called *Bwuiti-Ombwiri* (N. S. Tchandeu 2021),²⁵ very widespread and still very much alive in several groups (Apindji, Mitsogho, Fang) of the equatorial forest, gives a good overview of the perception of the image as a phenomenon of “total art”, which brings together the visual, rhythmic, tactile, and even gustatory arts, in a process of contemplation of the *Bwuiti-Ombwiri* spirit. Thus, any faithful of the *Bwuiti-Ombwiri* who accesses the temple dedicated to it, must first taste the hallucinogenic plant called *iboga*. This introductory rite prepares everyone for a cosmic journey in which the decor and atmosphere of the temple participate from start to finish: players of the famous zithers with cephalomorphic necks; singers in chorus and dance steps following a well-codified choreography; a central pillar whose iconography often traces the myth of the *Bwuiti-Ombwiri* spirit and its cosmic power. All of this prefigures in a certain way certain revolutions in modern and contemporary arts, in terms of breaking taxonomic boundaries between art forms and the promotion of multimedia.

13. *Recent studies have emphasized that “iconicity” (or “visual efficacy”) is not an exclusive property of artistic images but can also be regarded as an attribute of non-figurative objects, such as elements of landscape, natural materials, and living beings. To what extent can such objects be included in an art-historical narrative?*

Of course, and that's the whole history of contemporary art, at least since the ready-made. But this entire still involves a conceptual process that justifies the public being exposed, consciously or not, to a cognitive/reflective/destabilizing experience in relation to the transfiguration of the ordinary, the diversion of the causality of the object or even to the re-sublimation of the waste. To take the example of one of my favorite objects of study, megaliths, research in the Mandara Mountains (Cameroon-Nigeria) (N. S Tchandeu and A. Mezop-Temgoua 2017)²⁶ highlights stones erected by man, and those that are natural, but whose unique appearance and/or history justify their being re-appropriated and personified in the name of a "rock spirit". But worked by man or not, all these stones have in reality no visual and emotional charge in the eyes of the mountain dwellers, unless they bear traces, constantly revitalized, of the deposits and anointing of consecrated products (white millet wine, blood and sacrificial guts of animals). And among the expected visual effects, the most impressive is undoubtedly a kind of litho-phobia which justifies that the mountain dweller, especially of the female sex, avoids touching, or even staring at these representations for a long time and too closely. Moreover, in the Bamileke country (Cameroon) where certain megaliths, called *tsu-Ssi* (literally, places of God) are located in "sacred groves", they have participated for several centuries in sustainably saving the ecosystem and preventing the exploitation of inalienable resources (N. S. Tchandeu, W. V. Kengne et al., 2021).²⁷ Also, the concept of "art of sacred environments" has necessarily been integrated into our work, which of course does not have the same semantic content as the contemporary notion of land art, but does not move away from it in the perspective of returning art to nature.

14. *Many studies have focused on the dynamics by which images originally meant for a specific viewing context come to be transferred to, appropriated by, and transformed and reshaped in another. Which hermeneutic tools can be useful in our analysis of such phenomena?*

We have already mentioned the problem of the interpretation out of context of the image, whether the transfer is of a temporal order (productions of societies that have disappeared but re-appropriated by new ones), or of a spatial order (transcontinental mobility of images). If it is no longer necessary to return to the anecdotal case of African images transferred to Western museums, it is on the contrary necessary to be interested in the opposite phenomenon, very often trivialized, that of the transfer of images and especially of the Western imagination in the African postcolonial context. In the case, for example, of the apologetic monuments of administrators, civil servants and soldiers, one can observe in several African countries a rise in iconoclastic movements (and this also extends to the former colonial powers). Mainly oriented against controversial personalities, these movements experienced a great student momentum in South Africa with its "Rhodes must fall" period (March 2015). In Cameroon, the activist A. Blaise Essama became famous by repeatedly decapitating the head of the statue of French General Leclerc, even pushing his movement to unbolt about 50 public space signs with French surnames. These textbook cases well justify the theory of "necropolitics" of A. Mbembé (2006),²⁸ presenting such representations as being the extension of "a form of racial terror", supposed to "bring back into the scene of the present the dead who, during their lifetime,

tormented, often by the sword, the existence of Africans". Beyond simple material representations, one must look far into the colonial institutionalization of workshops and art schools of European tradition, to realize to what extent Western imagination has profoundly upset the conception of art, of image or representation in Africa. In fact, several generations of post-colonial artists have been nurtured in ignorance of their iconographic heritage, in favour of an appetite for the history of "high art", from its antiquity to its contemporary forms. But in this process of socio-cultural transformation, the artistic genius has also been able to find original ways of self-fulfilment, in particular by appropriating certain processes or recent art movements (recycling, assemblage, installation/public art, performance, pop art, graphic design, etc.), following semiological codes specific to traditions and local cultural realities.

15. *English is more and more the lingua franca of global art-historical scholarship. To what extent may we avoid applying to non-European contexts notions drawn from an essentially Western European understanding of images and their materiality and meaning?*

The question often arises when it is necessary to determine the presence or not of a notion of the history of art through extra-Western languages, or even worse, when it is a question of applying theories of analysis and interpretation specific to the history of Western art movements to non-Western contexts. In the first case, from L. S. Senghor (1956)²⁹ to R. Somé 1998,³⁰ via R. F. Thompson (1971),³¹ there is luckily enough a relatively rich literature on the designation, in African languages, of the notions concerning classical aesthetics (beautiful, good, good, ugly, pleasant, perfect, etc.), art and representation. This allows us to notice that even if the art historical discipline was largely built in the West, the notion of art has been an object of debate throughout its history. First relegated to the domain of *techné* in Antiquity, the Latin notion of *ars* or *artes* will gradually undergo a conceptual shift of emphasis from the technical means towards the final outcome, culminating with the fairly recent conceptualization of "artistic creation". In fact, since the existence of the art as a cultural phenomenon is witnessed in all human groups (F. Boas 1927),³² the cultural meaning of the notion of art is less problematic, than the paradigms specific to each culture in terms of identification, analysis, interpretation and classification of images. It is therefore not surprising if the societies which have most engaged in conceptualizing the subject, including that much discussed of evolutionism, have also established themselves as a standard for measuring and classifying the forms of arts from one continent to another. What should be done to moderate or counterbalance this trend? Let's hope that the human civilizations that have mainly practiced oral traditions become aware of encouraging new generations to research and write the history of their artistic heritage.

16. *Finally, what are we still lacking? In which direction should we pursue our studies in the following decades?*

In relation to the international orientation of research in art history, the economy of my regrets would readily be expressed on two levels: on the diachronic level, where the

discipline struggles to conquer the field of the oldest arts (prehistory and antiquity), almost abandoned to archaeology, while literature becomes more dense when it goes from the arts of the Renaissance to the Contemporary; on the synchronic level, highlighting this time a resignation from the history of art to the benefit of ethnology when one approaches non-Western classical arts, a paradoxically nuanced observation on the subject of postcolonial productions, often projected as forms of collateral extension of Western modern and contemporary arts. This allows us to conclude by noting that, as the avant-gardes of modern art have been able to reinvent themselves by resourcing in the arts that were once condemned in the mists of time, the history of art would also benefit from revitalizing its theories and research methods from those horizons where it does not dare or does not dare enough.

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