

Approaching Africa

The Reception of African Visual Culture in Germany

1894-1915

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father who
has always been there for me.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the approaches to African visual culture in German publications between 1894 and 1915. Considering the development from a purely ethnographic analysis towards an art historical and art scientific discourse, it brings together formerly unconnected fields of research. By introducing theories from translation studies this thesis will identify how scholars from different disciplines analysed and interpreted African art in order to mediate their function, meaning and formal aspects to a German audience.

The main focus is on the changing convention from approaching African art with a developmental attitude towards discussing its stylistic peculiarities. By looking at ethnographic publications, art and popular culture this thesis investigates the role of art historical writing on African art in the wider academic and popular discourse. In particular four publications - Ernst Grosse *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894), Karl Woermann *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* (1900), Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) and Carl Einstein *Negerplastik* (1915) – are considered to give a historiographical insight into the development of intellectual thought of non-European art as well as art itself.

Bringing together the theoretical framework of translation studies with published sources and archival material, this thesis considers the diverse descriptions of African art by a variety of different scholars. By presenting analyses of these publications this thesis aims to give a fuller picture of contemporary ideas that had a direct or indirect impact on the reception of African art. It comes to the conclusion that although each of the scholars approached African art in unique ways, their publications were an important step towards the integration of non-European art in general, and African art in particular, into a canon of art that is not solely defined and confined by the classical ideal of beauty.

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Introduction

The importation of African material culture into Germany already had a long history at the end of the 19th century. However it was at this time that a more comprehensive appraisal of the existing collections and more recent acquisitions began. These new, broad and scientific approaches to the material and visual culture from Africa are the focus of this thesis. In particular it was during the period under consideration that African objects were no longer merely categorised as ethnographic objects but were integrated into art historical research. It is the primary focus of this thesis to investigate how this integration of African visual culture into the domain of art history changed, on the one hand, the reception of African visual culture and, on the other hand, equally changed understandings of the reach of the term ‘art’ - and art historical research as a result.

Looking at the different ideas that are encompassed in the notion of African visual culture as ethnographica and as art objects provides the contextual underpinning that guides the analysis in this thesis. This analysis is largely focussed on selected publications and scholars whose work on African visual culture was informed and impacted by specific approaches to the foreign objects in German collections. These selected publications are those that first embraced African objects as artworks and brought them out of the realm of the ethnographic museum and ethnographic writing to be scrutinised by a wider audience.

Before turning to an analysis of the current state of research it is necessary to look at the use of some specific terms and concepts that will be used in this work. To begin with we look at the choice of the phrase ‘visual culture’ in the title of this thesis. It was decided to use the phrase ‘visual culture’ instead of the term ‘art’ as the thesis itself scrutinises the use and meaning of the term ‘art’ in the relevant time period. While the phrase ‘visual culture’ might be equally discussed and negotiated, this was chosen here in order to distance the title of the thesis from the concepts discussed within.

The end of the 19th century is a time of great change in Germany as well as the rest of Europe, including modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation (see chapter 1). Specific to Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland is a shared intellectual and cultural tradition supported by a common language. While the common intellectual pool of theories and ideas cannot be ignored - and very important concepts like the Austrian Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* will be considered later on - this thesis will be mainly concerned

with ideas that evolved in the German state as defined by its borders at the time. Dealing with political and disciplinary frameworks that were specific to Germany it is necessary to define borders that in actuality were more fluid than its geography.

Within these geographical borders there are further parameters of a philosophical kind that have to be negotiated before a coherent argument can be put together. Firstly, the terms ‘ethnography’, ‘ethnology’ and ‘anthropology’ had different meanings in 19th century Germany than they have now in either German or English. Anthropology, as defined in 19th century Germany, was largely concerned with an individual person, including their psychology and physiognomy. While the social behaviour of an individual could also be part of anthropology, it excluded the study of collective social behaviour and groups of people. Groups of people, especially large groups, were the subject of *Völkerkunde* [the study of peoples], closer to today’s use of anthropology in English-speaking countries, where it may be further broken down into ethnography and ethnology. While the term ethnography might be defined as the description of foreign cultures and the term ethnology as the study of the same, these terms were mostly used interchangeably at the time. If a scholar used the two in a particular differentiating way, this definition was often restricted in use to a few people and was often very subtle. For the sake of this thesis I will be using the term ‘ethnography’ and only retain the use of ‘ethnology’ if it appears in an original quote.

Moreover, it should be made clear that German theories on art at the time were referred to by four different terms with slightly different connotations. It is possible to distinguish between *Ästhetik* [aesthetics] *Kunstgeschichte* [history of art] *Kunstphilosophie* [philosophy of art] and *Kunstwissenschaft* [science of art]. Often *Ästhetik*, the study of perceivable beauty, and *Kunstphilosophie*, the study of the connection between aesthetics and culture, were used interchangeably. At the same time, *Kunstgeschichte*, the collection of historical data concerning art, and *Kunstwissenschaft*, the scientific processing of the historical data, were often seen as parts of the same process. While a closer look at the subtle differences between the four will be discussed in chapter 1, it is important to point out that the boundaries between the different fields were fluid in 19th century Germany and different circles of academics used different definitions. Today, the terms *Kunstwissenschaft* and *Kunstphilosophie* are no longer used and their 19th century meanings have largely been integrated into the fields of *Kunstgeschichte* and *Ästhetik*,

respectively. However in this thesis all four terms will be needed with their earlier connotations as outlined above.

Referring to cultures outside of Europe under the umbrella term non-European - and thus referring to a range of very different peoples not by who they are, but only by who they are not - is from today's point of view rightly contested. However, as this thesis is concerned with German intellectual thought at a specific time when its premise is to filter the development of one nation's reception of the visual culture of its 'Other,' and in particular of sub-Saharan Africa, it has to work within the particularities present in its primary sources. Hence, as German thought was fostered around the dichotomy of what is European and what is not, this thesis will use the term 'non-European' in order to characterise these attitudes. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning here that these attitudes were mostly unaffected by contemporary notions of Social Darwinism, other than as they may have been known from British or French sources. While a more detailed consideration of this notion and its uses in Germany can be found in chapter three, it is a sustainable generalisation that before the turn of the 20th century many German ethnographers openly opposed these notions.

It will become apparent in the coming chapters that not every author divided 'primitive art' into the arts from different peoples, countries or even continents. After the turn of the century it was in particular African art, as opposed to Australian or North American art, which found a special mention in art historical research. First and foremost, but not just, through Einstein's well-known work *Negerplastik*, it was African art that influenced German 'primitive' art practice as well as German art history. While one could have written about the reception of other non-European art in Germany at the same time,¹ or included other countries and continents to discuss the reception of the 'primitive' in general, the author has decided to limit this study's scope to the reception of Africa in order to allow a thorough examination of the sources in question.

As such, the thesis offers a detailed historical account of different ways in which African art was approached between 1894 and 1915 in Germany. In particular it distinguishes between developmental and stylistic approaches that were established on either side of the turn of the century. Within the parameters of these different approaches four main themes will be discussed that negotiate ideas of the beginning or beginnings of

¹ See for example the work on Aboriginal art in Germany by Friederike Krishnabhakdi-Vasilakis or the work on Japanese art in Germany by Marie Yasunaga.

art (chapter 2), the problem of how to integrate non-European art into the existing canon (chapter 3), the engagement with non-European objects in German collections and the psychology of style (chapter 4), and the progression from comparing non-European art to European art to the concentration of formal aspects (chapter 5). These different themes correspond to the overall agendas of four particular books published at the time - Ernst Grosse *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894), Karl Woermann *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* (1900), Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1908) and Carl Einstein *Negerplastik* (1915). A chapter will be devoted to each in turn.

These four books in their different ways facilitated the inclusion of African art into German art history: Grosse was the first to request the analysis of African art by art historians, Woermann was the first art historian to include African art into a survey text on all art, Worringer was the first to change art history's theoretical structures in order to include African art as part of art itself and Einstein was the first to overturn the standing hierarchy of style with European naturalism at its peak.

As this thesis will show, these four books are also connected by a common intellectual problem. They all considered the questions of what is 'art' and what is 'Africa'? At the time, the discussion of 'Africa' turned from being envisioned as an intellectual idea - of a place far away, that is inherently 'Other' to Germany - to it becoming a physical space, a continent with different countries within it and different peoples living there with different traditions and customs. Simultaneously, this physical manifestation of Africa in intellectual discussions was connected to the age-old question of what is 'art.' If using the phrase 'African art' required a definition of 'Africa', the term 'art' as it stood until then in its mainly European setting also demanded revision. The four books, considered in this thesis, track these changes. Beginning with the first authors - the philosopher Grosse and the art historian Woermann - African art was considered a legitimate part of art historical research for the first time; in more specific works, Worringer tackled the implications for art theory and Einstein focussed on African art in particular. Together, these four books make it possible to trace the development of these two key intellectual concepts in Germany between 1894 and 1915.

In particular, this thesis will consider the way in which ethnographers have described their collections in scholarly and popular publications. These publications had an important influence on the aesthetic considerations of the four scholars we are

considering, but have not yet been fully integrated into a study of the artistic reception of African art. By presenting important contemporary events and ideas (such as the industrial exhibition in Berlin in 1896 and notions of Social Darwinism) and combining them with detailed analyses of these publications, the thesis aims to give a fuller picture of contemporary ideas that had a direct or indirect impact on the considerations of the first scholars to embrace non-European art in their studies.

As such, this study is a unique response to the current state of literature which, until now, has yet to address the four studies in an in-depth analysis of the reception of African art in the German Empire. The contextual events and ideas that make up the themes considered in each of the chapters have been analysed separately but have yet to be related to this body of literature. I have selected these particular books and the corresponding themes not just because they were the most influential of their time, but also because only by juxtaposing them, can one understand the development of thought that led to the use of the term 'art' for African visual culture.

Some existing works have given attention to broad ideas, ranging from specialised studies on one person² or an aspect of their life³ to an overview of a specific field⁴ or the development of ideas.⁵ For example, in *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic*

² For example on Leo Frobenius: Suzanne Marchand, "Leo Frobenius and the Revolt against the West," *Journal of Contemporary History* 32, no. 2 (1997); Fritz Kramer, "Empathy — Reflections on the History of Ethnology in Pre-Fascist Germany: Herder, Creuzer, Bastian, Bachofen, and Frobenius," *An Independent International Journal in the Critical Tradition Committed to the Transformation of our Society and the Humane Union of Theory and Practice* 9, no. 1 (1985); Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, *Die Fremde Welt, das bin Ich: Leo Frobenius, Ethnologe, Forschungsreisender, Abenteurer* (Wuppertal: P. Hammer, 1998).

³ For example on World Fairs: Robert Bogdan, "When the Exotic Becomes a Show," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Paul Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions from London to Shanghai 1851-2010* (Winterbourne, Berkshire: Papadakis, 2011).

⁴ For example the primitive art movement: Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap Press, 1986); William Stanley Rubin, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern. Vol.2* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984); Frances S. Connelly, *The Sleep of Reason: Primitivism in Modern European Art and Aesthetics, 1725-1907* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

⁵ For example Social Darwinism: Paul Dombrowski, "Ernst Haeckel's Controversial Visual Rhetoric," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (1971); Hans-Günter Zmarzlik, "Social Darwinism in Germany, Seen as a Historical Problem," in *Republic to Reich: The Making of the Nazi Revolution*, ed. Ralph Manheim and Hajo Holborn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Richard Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859-1895," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 3 (1993); Richard J. Evans, "In Search of German Social Darwinism: The History and Historiography of a Concept," in *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Manfred Berg, Geoffrey Cocks, and Institute German Historical (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Mike Hawkins, *Social*

Museums in Imperial Germany,⁶ Glenn Penny has already given a clear and very detailed outline of the status, the research agendas, and subjects of Imperial German ethnography. Penny analyses the collecting, researching, and networking practices of ethnographic museums in Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden, and Leipzig stressing the non-Social Darwinistic attitude of German ethnographers before the 20th century. Although these works have provided a useful historical context for this thesis they neglect discussion of ‘art’ and art historical writing, something this thesis seeks to rectify.

Two further scholars have dedicated studies to the development of art history at the time. However, their work is broad in scope leaving room for a study such as this one, examining these four specific texts in considerably more detail. In the book *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*,⁷ Ulrich Pfisterer⁸ and Marlite Halbertsma⁹ have written on different aspects of German art historical discussions of non-European art. Pfisterer has given a survey of German art historical discourse, especially the difference between *Kunstgeschichte* [history of art] and *Kunstwissenschaft* [science of art] and their connection to ethnography and psychology. Halbertsma has concentrated on the way art historians and ethnographers – and especially Franz Boas - used similar ways of discussing European and non-European art in German-speaking traditions between 1900 and 1933. Both essays mention some of the publications I will be working on. While Pfisterer mentions all of them but only discusses Grosse and Worringer more closely, Halbertsma takes a closer look at Woermann and Einstein but does not take Grosse or Worringer into consideration.¹⁰

Other scholars have given attention to individual works. Many of these studies have added important perspectives to the historiography of non-European art, the history of art history and the wider history of intellectual thought. While the first two books, by Grosse

Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁶ H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapel Hill and London: North Carolina Press, 2002).

⁷ Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme, *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

⁸ Ulrich Pfisterer, "Historiography: Envisioning Global Approaches in the Study of Art Origins and Principles of World Art History: 1900 (and 2000)," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

⁹ Marlite Halbertsma, "The Many Beginnings and the One End of World Art History in Germany, 1900-1933," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried Van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008).

¹⁰ For another study on the development of the reception of non-European art also see Susanne Leeb, "Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne" (Doctoral Thesis, Europa Universität Viadrina, 2007).

and Woermann, only recently came to the attention of scholars and have, thus, received little analytical attention, those by Worringer and Einstein have been examined by many scholars from many different disciplines and angles.

Notable is the work of Wilfried van Damme on Ernst Grosse.¹¹ Van Damme has published several articles on Ernst Grosse and his work which used ethnographical methods to approach the aesthetics of non-European art. Van Damme's articles give an insight into Grosse's ideas and as the philosophical studies that influenced him that will be referenced later. Equally important is Ingeborg Reichle's work on Ernst Grosse who has contextualised his writings by relating them to contemporary ideas on evolutionary theory and fine art.¹² The only in-depth study published on Karl Woermann and his *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten*, is written by Thomas Gaehtgens.¹³ This article investigates the full three volumes of Woermann's book as well as the influential survey texts that had preceded it. Moreover, Gaehtgens gives an insight into the reception of each of the volumes and the second edition, forming a comprehensive review of the full work. Although he does look at the inclusion of non-European art, his explanations are not very detailed and can only be seen as an introduction to the topic.

After the rediscovery of Worringer's work in the 1990s, his *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* has been at the core of many academic studies.¹⁴ For example, Neil Donahue has compiled one of the first comprehensive studies on Worringer and his theoretical enterprise. The edited volume *Invisible Cathedrals* (1995) includes contributions from

¹¹ See amongst others Wilfried Van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the 'Ethnological Method' in Art Theory," *Philosophy and Literature*, no. 2 (2010); "Not What You Expect: The Nineteenth-Century European Reception of Australian Aboriginal Art," *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 81, no. 3 (2012).

¹² Ingeborg Reichle, "Vom Ursprung der Bilder und den Anfängen der Kunst," in *Image Match visueller Transfer, "Imagescapes" und Intervisualität in globalen Bildkulturen*, ed. Martina Baleva, Ingeborg Reichle, and Oliver Lerone Schultz (Paderborn: Fink, 2012); "Charles Darwins Gedanken zur Abstammung des Menschen und die Nützlichkeit von Weltbildern zur Erhaltung der Art," in *Atlas der Weltbilder*, ed. Christoph Marksches, et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011).

¹³ Thomas W. Gaehtgens, "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," in *Synergies in Visual Culture/ Bildkulturen im Dialog*, ed. Manuela De Giorgi, Annette Hoffmann, and Nicola Suthor (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013).

¹⁴ Neil H. Donahue, *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Kitty Zijlmans and Jos Hoogeveen, *Kommunikation über Kunst: eine Fallstudie zur Entstehungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte des 'Blauen Reiters' und von Wilhelm Worringers 'Abstraktion und Einfühlung'* (Leiden: Alpha, 1988); Mary Gluck, "Interpreting Primitivism, Mass Culture and Modernism: The Making of Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*," *New German Critique* (2000); Hannes Böhringer and Beate Söntgen, *Wilhelm Worringers Kunstgeschichte* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002); Helga Grebing, *Die Worringers: Bildungsbürgerlichkeit als Lebenssinn: Wilhelm und Marta Worringer (1881-1965)* (Berlin: Parthas, 2004); Claudia Öhlschläger, *Abstraktionsdrang: Wilhelm Worringer und der Geist Der Moderne* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2005); Sebastian Preuss, "Geistiger Rauschzustand Sebastian Preuss über Wilhelm Worringer und die Kunst der Moderne," *Deutsche Guggenheim Magazine* 8 (2009).

scholars from different fields that have been assembled to establish Worringer as the central figure of German modernist writing about art. In the case of Carl Einstein and his *Negerplastik*, which has since seen an academic revival, there are even more studies published.¹⁵ Heike Neumeister has dedicated a doctoral thesis to Einstein and his ethnographic and art historical enquiry. One of her main contributions is to focus on the connection between Einstein's theories and the art produced by the avant-garde in Europe.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the publication of Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*. After the scholarly appraisal of Einstein's literary and theoretical work started to take shape about 40 years ago, *Negerplastik* was often deemed to be the first work to have emphasised the aesthetics of African art. Published at the same time that the critical acclaim of expressionist artists was increasing, it was assigned a pioneering role. These expressionist artists, working right at the verge of modernism, are known for their referencing of non-European visual culture in the style of their work (chapter 5). Since then, expressionist artists who had previously been seen as the trail blazers in the appreciation of African art, have been contextualised and, in some studies, left aside in order to analyse the academic ideas of the time - often according Einstein and, in some cases, Worringer (*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, 1908), prominent and defining roles.

This study is designed not only to use Worringer and Einstein as a context through which to analyse artistic practice in Europe, but to investigate the wider intellectual context in which they published their work. As this thesis will show, the aesthetic, formal and artistic appreciation of African art had already been advocated by Ernst Grosse and Karl Woermann, before Worringer and Einstein had formulated their theories, and before the expressionist artists had taken these 'primitive' objects as inspiration for their own practice. Moreover, it is the aim of this examination to demonstrate how circumstances and beliefs that affected the whole *Zeitgeist* also influenced the appreciation of African art, not just by art historians but also the popular press and especially ethnographers. While they were aiming to enhance their own agendas and their newly established academic field, German ethnographers, in their description or, as I would deem it,

¹⁵ Z. S. Strother, "Looking for Africa in Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*," *African Arts* 46, no. 4 (2013); Hans Joachim Dethlefs, *Carl Einstein: Konstruktion und Zerschlagung einer ästhetischen Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Qumran, 1985); Christoph Braun, *Carl Einstein: Zwischen Ästhetik und Anarchismus: Zu Leben und Werk eines expressionistischen Schriftstellers* (Munich 1987); Sebastian Zeidler, "Totality against a Subject: Carl Einstein's 'Negerplastik'," *October* 107 (2004); Heike Neumeister, *Carl Einstein's Negerplastik: Early Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Encounters between Art and Ethnography* (Doctoral Thesis, Birmingham City University, 2010).

‘translation’, of African art played a vital role in sparking the interest of philosophers and art historians in analysing the objects in their museums.

However, this study is not based solely or even mainly in secondary sources or new readings of the original texts but has also sought out other primary sources located in different archives and museums.¹⁶ This thesis’ specific interest in the language and the linguistic structure of each of the primary sources lies behind the decision to give priority to the primary source and over the many secondary sources which give fragmentary accounts of the books which are at the core of the thesis. Hence, each of the chapters has one section that concentrates solely on the publication in question. As the premise is that the description of a ‘foreign’ object works as a form of translation, this section will focus on analysing the book according to specific theories adopted from translation studies.

The use of translation studies as a theoretical model for art historiography is a new venture and one that invites a close reading of the original text. Here, each of the sections that facilitate this close reading will begin with a summary of the general subject, the particular interests and the findings of the original author, to give an overview of the book in question. A detailed analysis of the texts will then make up the largest part of this section in each chapter by employing the notion of visual translation studies.

In her study on the Ethnological Museum Berlin, Christine Stelzig pointed out that around the 1900s “the mere writing on and discussing of the foreign did not suffice anymore, what was asked for was the ‘translation’ of the described into the ‘language’ of their own culture.”¹⁷ It is this ‘translation’ into the ‘language’ of one’s own culture that is the theoretical focus of this thesis. It will be determined how this translation, or rather these different translations, were a central part to the wider reception of African art. In order to see the objective of using translation studies for art historiographical studies one only needs to look at the history of other art historical theories. Feminism and Marxism, as well as the study of historiography itself, were all borrowed from literature; the leap towards borrowing from comparative literature in order to work on the intercultural reception of art is thus only a small one.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Bibliography for a list of Archives.

¹⁷ C. Stelzig, *Afrika am Museum für Völkerkunde zu Berlin 1873 -1919* (Herbholzheim: Centaurus Verlag, 2004), 19.

¹⁸ Ethnographic museums have already been considered by using theories of translation studies, see for example Marie-Noëlle Guillot, "Cross-Cultural Pragmatics and Translation," in *Translation: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Juliane House, Palgrave Advances in Language and Linguistics

To take a closer look at how such an analysis might be of interest, a common understanding of two things has to be established:

- (1) Art historical and ethnographic writing are using language in order to convey a message. This message is the interpretation of an object, whether a painting, a sculpture or any other form of material culture. Thus, by using language, art historical as well as ethnographic writing is implicitly a linguistic act.
- (2) The Translator/Interpreter uses language to convey a message. This message is the interpretation/translation of a written or verbal text in a language that differs from its own by time or space. Hence, by interpreting something and conveying it through language it is in effect a translation.

Following these two statements, one may also call art historical and ethnographic writings linguistic acts of translation - or, as is proposed here, visual translation - as it is conveying a message in written form that derives from interpreting a visual object and its meaning in co-text and context. By 'co-text' is meant a message from within the same string of signifiers [same text or image] and by 'context' a message from outside this string of signifiers.

In order to apply this theory to an ethnographical or art historical translation of visual culture we have to reconsider the three kinds of translation, described by the Czech structuralist Roman Jakobson.¹⁹ Jakobson's very influential concept is solely based on verbal signs and distinguishes between three different kinds of translation;

- (1) Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language;
- (2) Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language;
- [and] (3) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.²⁰

Implementing Jakobson's characteristics of linguistic translation for a study concerned with the translation of visual culture, it is necessary to re-examine the implications of

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); John Mack, *"Exhibiting Cultures" Revisited: Translation and Representation in Folk*: Journal of the Danish Ethnographic Society (43, 2002).

¹⁹ Roman Jakobson, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

²⁰ Ibid.

these aspects. This study proposes that the three aspects of visual translation would read as follows:

- (1) Intraviscual translation or 'resymbolising' is an interpretation of visual signs by means of other signs of the same culture, for example the use of a Flag to symbolise a nation.
- (2) Interviscual translation is an interpretation of visual signs by means of signs from a different culture or time, for example the use of non-European symbols and objects in the paintings of European modernists.
- (3) Intersemiotic translation is an interpretation of visual signs by means of signs of non-visual sign systems, for example the written interpretation of art works by art historians.

In this proposed model the translation of African art is part of the intersemiotic translation as ethnographers and art historians used words in order to explain the meaning of the foreign visual signifiers.²¹ As a translation that happened between two very different cultures it is subject to the same power-relationship that has been discussed in post-colonial translation studies for some time now. As much as a translator of literary works holds the power to define character traits of the source culture in his translation, the ethnographers and art historians were able to influence their reader's attitude towards the source culture. By choosing which objects to focus on, how to talk about them and what to say and what to omit, they held the power to present the source culture in a certain way.

The thesis will use three different theories of translation that each give a specific entry point into the primary source in question. In particular one is able to reconsider the reception of African art on a disciplinary, visual and cultural level. These levels are reached by projecting three particular notions of linguistics and translation studies onto art historical writing; art history as a *lingua franca*, the 'verbal visual syntagm,'²² and the

²¹ Marco Sonzogni has worked on Jacobson's notion of intersemiotic translation and its application to changing book cover designs. See Marco Sonzogni, *Re-Covered Rose: A Case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 2011).

²² Robert Neather, "'Translating Tea: On the Semiotics of Interlingual Practice in the Hong Kong Museum of Tea Ware'," *Meta: journal des traducteurs / Meta: Translators' Journal* 53, no. 1 (2008).

‘foreignization and domestication’ of African Art.²³ The following paragraphs will give a brief introduction to these notions that will be used to approach the sources in this thesis.²⁴

A *lingua franca*, often defined as a trade language, is the common language that is used in order to communicate between two parties. As such, the theories involving a *lingua franca* are purely of a literary and linguistic nature that includes translation proper; the transmission from one language to another. As such, one should not see the translation of African visual culture in art historical German as *lingua franca* proper but as a metaphor for using the linguistic conventions of one discipline to communicate an emergent field of study to an audience within the same language. As already mentioned, the writing of art history is a linguistic act, therefore one can also think about different disciplinary language conventions that, although they work within the same language, can be quite particular. In Germany at the end of the 19th century, the discourse on art history and philosophies of aesthetics was seen to be essential to a well-rounded university education. As such, most members of the educated middle classes would have taken art history classes at some point during their years at university and would hence be familiar with the language used to talk about art (see chapter 1). It can be seen that most people from the educated middle class, whether art historians or not, when confronted with a foreign visual culture, reverted back to an art historical language. By classifying the discipline-specific language of art history as a *lingua franca*, it is possible to get a unique insight into the way specific terms were used in order to convey certain messages.

Robert Neather’s idea of the ‘verbal-visual syntagm’ concentrates on the relationship between text and image and how this relationship may influence the reader. Neather uses this theory to analyse translations within museums, mainly museums of applied arts. However, the adoption for ethnographic and art historical writing, especially historic writing, appears to be seamless and fruitful. In his article, he refers to Mieke Bal, whose notion of the synecdochic and metaphoric reading of the museum environment is crucial for his ideas. Objects are either seen as synecdoches, “as part of a greater whole,” or as metaphors, “standing for a particular aesthetic.”²⁵ For example, objects in an

²³ Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).

²⁴ For a longer discussion on the use of translation studies and a case study involving the Benin Bronzes see Manuela Husemann “Translations of African Art” in Appendix.

²⁵ Neather, ““Translating Tea: On the Semiotics of Interlingual Practice in the Hong Kong Museum of Tea Ware”,” 222.

ethnographic museum are, as a symptom of their role as representative of a particular culture, only part of a greater whole and are thus a synecdoche for the culture. Objects in art museums, in contrast, are usually regarded for their aesthetic values in their own right and thus do not require the beholder to see them as part of the culture in which they were made. Both, synecdochic reading and metaphoric reading indexicalise²⁶ the objects in question. However, this happens in two distinct ways.

Neather goes on to refer to Bal and her account of visiting a Czech ethnographic museum. Due to the lack of English translations of labels, Bal relied on a metaphoric reading of the exhibition, "resulting in a different response to that intended."²⁷ Applying these two modes and Bal's experiences in the Czech museum to German ethnographic museums at the end of the 19th century, it becomes clear that classification, translation and the transmission of ideas were not carried out in the exhibition space, which was overcrowded, highly disorganised and unlabelled.²⁸ The museum exhibitions at this time could only result in a metaphoric indexicalisation of the objects, leaving the synecdochic indexicalisation to ethnographic writings in books and journals.

Furthermore, Neather looks at the verbal-visual interaction of wall text and object/image within the museum space.²⁹ He exemplifies this interaction with a set of photographs showing someone making a specific type of tea; only in connection to the text does the actual meaning of the photographs become apparent and the viewer is able to follow the process described in the images. Without the text, the viewer would be forced to read the photographs metaphorically, as explained by Bal. In terms of the historiography of writing about African art, this verbal-visual syntagm becomes increasingly interesting in texts published in the popular press.

A third theory to be considered for its use in the analysis of the historiography of African art is Lawrence Venuti's notion of Foreignization and Domestication.³⁰ In a previous paper, I have discussed the reception of the Benin Bronzes in Britain and

²⁶ Indexicalisation can be understood as placing something into a concrete or theoretical framework, either consciously or unconsciously. The synecdochic indexicalisation, referred to here, means that it is only the ethnographic writings that allow the viewer to perceive the displayed object as representative of the culture that produced it.

²⁷ Neather, "'Translating Tea: On the Semiotics of Interlingual Practice in the Hong Kong Museum of Tea Ware'," 222.

²⁸ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 5.

²⁹ Neather, "'Translating Tea: On the Semiotics of Interlingual Practice in the Hong Kong Museum of Tea Ware'," 232.

³⁰ Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*.

Germany by applying this theory.³¹ In accordance with the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, Venuti points out that Foreignization “leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him.” Domestication, on the other hand “leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.” Hence, the translator can either chose to “register the linguistic and cultural difference” of the source and make this visible in his translation or he reduces the “foreign text to target-language cultural values” and, thus, heightens the intelligibility of the translation for his readers.³²

Nevertheless, Foreignization and Domestication are no binary opposites but, “heuristic concepts [...] designed to promote thinking and research [...] they possess a contingent variability, such that they can only be defined in the specific cultural situation in which a translation is made and works its effects.”³³ This, according to Venuti, means that the terms may change meaning across time and location. What does not change, however, is that Domestication and Foreignization deal with “the question of how much a translation assimilates a foreign text to the translating language and culture, and how much it rather signals the differences of that text.”³⁴ By analysing the shifting treatment of objects and their makers in publications, these two methods of translation make it possible to trace the development of the historiography of African art.

By applying these theories to the analysis of writing on African art, one is able to get a unique insight into the working of a publication on art. Only by applying the notion of a *lingua franca* is it possible to explain the use of art historical conventions and the terms ‘works of art’ in German ethnographic writing of the time. Similarly, only with the application of the notion of verbal-visual syntagm does it become apparent that the ethnographers and art historians were signalling very specific messages in the way in which they structured and organised their work. And only by applying the notion of foreignization and domestication does it become apparent how the reception of African art changed back and forth between foreignization to domestication, and how the objects were integrated or left outside of a European pictorial programme.

I begin the thesis with a general introductory chapter on the period concerned and the leading ideas of the time that sets up discussion of the intellectual environment of the

³¹ Manuela Husemann, "Golf in the City of Blood: The Translation of the Benin Bronzes in 19th Century Britain and Germany," *Polyvocia: SOAS Journal of Graduate Research* 5 (2013). See appendix.

³² Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 19/20.

³³ Ibid., 19.

³⁴ Ibid.

period between 1894 and 1915. The following five chapters are organised in two parts that look at the different approaches to African art; the first one deals with developmental approaches, and the second one with stylistic ones. Within these parts, the different chapters are organised according to an overarching schema. Each will begin with a section on different publications, ideas or events that are connected to the theme of the chapter before concentrating on one particular book that will be discussed in detail, including the biographical history and attitudes of the author.

The most detailed section will be the one on the text itself. In order to give a complete overview of the different books - the thoughts, discussions and innovative ideas of the authors - this section will begin with a summary of the main ideas to be conveyed in the publication. Subsequently, the author's unique translations of the art discussed will be considered. As mentioned above, this section will concentrate on the primary source itself. This discussion will rely on the theory discussed above, and is designed to give a full consideration of the changes and innovations that took place in the general reception of African art as well as the specific differences between the books discussed in each chapter. Lastly, each chapter will include a section on the reception of the book itself in the years following its first publication. This way, the impact of the different works on the intellectual thinking of the time will be revealed.

The Premise

The Formation of the German State, Art History and Ethnography

This first chapter will consider the theoretical, societal and disciplinary underpinning of the notions discussed in this thesis. The establishment of the disciplines of art history and ethnography in Germany are closely connected to the ideal of *Bildung* [education, culture, self-cultivation] and the onset of the division of the *Wissenschaft* [science] into *Naturwissenschaft* [natural science] and *Geisteswissenschaft* [humanities]. As Denise Phillips has pointed out in *Epistemological Distinctions and Cultural Politics*,³⁵ the conflict between the two scientific camps emerged in the 1820s during the debates about the educational policy of the Gymnasium, the German secondary school that prepares students to enter university. The main dispute in these debates was the integration of the *Realien* [disciplines like modern history, modern languages and the natural sciences] into the curriculum which was still widely based on humanistic interests, like history, law and theology, to train the *Geist*.

As a result of these conflicts, the division of the *Wissenschaft* into two strands that not only cover different topics but also communicate different forms of knowledge became common. However, despite what is sometimes suggested, the mid-19th century did not constitute the turning point from the spiritual or the ideal to *Realismus* [the pedagogical tradition centred on the *Realien*] but rather, the two stood in a productive relationship to one another.³⁶ Hence, one cannot speak of ‘two cultures,’ as, although there certainly were tensions between the *Naturwissenschaftler* and the *Geisteswissenschaftler*, German academic life as a whole was still shaped by the common acknowledgement of the importance of *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung* in general.³⁷

The following sections will consider how these ideas of *Bildung* and *Wissenschaft* influenced the way German politicians unified the different German states, German academics defined culture, and how art history and ethnography were established as autonomous university disciplines. Part of this consideration will be a brief overview of the unification of Germany and the following *Gründerzeit* during which modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation caused great changes in Germany. As will be discussed in section two, the idea of culture and different cultures has occupied German

³⁵ Denise Phillips, "Epistemological Distinctions and Cultural Politics: Educational Reform and the Naturwissenschaft/Geisteswissenschaft Distinction in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen*, ed. Uljana Feest (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010); Mitchell Schwarzer, "Origins of the Art History Survey Text," *Art Journal* 54, no. 3 (1995).

³⁶ Phillips, "Epistemological Distinctions and Cultural Politics: Educational Reform and the Naturwissenschaft/Geisteswissenschaft Distinction in Nineteenth-Century Germany," 29.

³⁷ For a more detailed look at this debate see *ibid*.

philosophers long before the unification. Once Germany became an Empire, these ideas gained a new relevance and the explanations of the differences in cultures were especially taken up by the new field of ethnography who categorised them as *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*. While the different ideas surrounding the term culture will be discussed in section two, its relevance for ethnography will be discussed in section four. As it is not just the terms *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* that influenced German ideas of Africa and the study of the peoples in Africa, the section on ethnography will provide an overview of the institution of ethnographic museums and its first steps as a university discipline. Section three will consider the history and establishment of art history as a university discipline in Germany in order to give an insight into the different theories and ideas that influenced the scholars examined in this thesis.

Chapter 1.1 The building of a nation

By the time scholars started to engage with the possible aesthetic relevance of non-European art, the German Empire had been in existence for over two decades. Nevertheless, many aspects of daily life, and especially cultural life, continued to be impacted by the different counties (the former member states of the Holy Roman Empire) and the creation of a unified Germany was far from being completed in all areas – including culture, history, literature and many other ideas of shared values. Hence, the last decades of the 19th century were shaped by an underlying search for these shared values in all aspects of society. As this new establishment of German ideals and values had an important impact on the reception of African art, the following section will consider the unification of the German Empire and its impacts on society and colonialism.

This section will particularly concentrate on the political unification of Germany and the separate social unification. This social unification was realised much more slowly in the decades to come and shaped the attitudes of a whole generation. The building of a nation had a great impact on cultural life as literature, art and music from the different member states were welded together to form a German style. This search for a German style was further influenced by the great changes of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation all over Europe, which will be briefly looked at in this section. As the need for a differently trained workforce became apparent, Germany underwent a change in education that would also have an impact on the disciplines of ethnography and art history. As this section will show, this was also the time that shaped German colonial politics and popular ideas that had a great influence on ethnography, which is to be discussed in section three.

When the German Emperor was officially proclaimed on the 18th of January 1871, Wilhelm I of Prussia, spoke of the “restoration of the German Empire” and the renewal of the German imperial dignity, “that had been dormant for more than 60 years.” With this speech, the freshly proclaimed German Emperor put the newly founded German Empire into the tradition of the Holy Roman Empire which was broken up in 1806. By doing so, he consciously contrasted the loss of the Holy Roman Empire, caused by a

defeat in the Napoleonic wars against Napoleon I, to the victory in the Franco-Prussian war against Napoleon III.³⁸

Between the loss of the one empire and the erection of the other lay several decades of disputes and conflicts between the different and fully autonomous German states as well as with neighbouring countries. At the same time, alliances were put in place that drew on their common history - for example, a confederation, including many parts of today's Germany, under the presidency of Austria, or the *Zollverein* which was envisioned to ease inter-German trading.³⁹ Another factor in the unification of Germany was the Prussian minister-president Otto von Bismarck. His prime aim, following his appointment in 1863, was to protect the power of the crown in Prussia, to solve the crisis of the reorganisation of the army as well as to secure his own, very vulnerable, position.⁴⁰

While Germans did feel a traditional connection as fellow 'Germans,' most people did not see the need or the value of a unified nation. That does not mean that there were no nationalist movements in Germany but they remained mainly middle-class ventures and did not have an actual impact on politics.⁴¹ In the end, the driving force of German unification was "blood and iron," in Bismarck's terms, or "coal and iron," in Maynard Keynes' terms.⁴² Opportunities for political and economic advancement through unification led, especially in Prussia, to a more serious consideration of the establishment of a German Empire. The actual unification was then instigated by the political conditions created during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1 and is hence often called a "revolution from above."

This "revolution from above" meant that the German Empire did not grow together but was forced into unity because of politics. In effect, the new empire was neither liberal nor nationalistic. The preamble of the first constitution reads that the empire is founded as an "everlasting confederation for the protection of the national territory and the law which is valid within, and to care for the welfare of the German people. This confederation will be called empire."⁴³ This excerpt is an example of the way in which

³⁸ Ernst Deuerlein, *Die Gründung des Deutschen Reiches 1870/71 in Augenzeugenberichten* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977), 12/3.

³⁹ David G. Williamson, *Bismarck and Germany, 1862-1890* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), 2.

⁴⁰ Michael Hughes, *Nationalism and Society: Germany, 1800-1945* (London: Arnold, 1988), 113/4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 112-6.

⁴² Matthew Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871-1918* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 55.

⁴³ Quoted in Michael Stürmer, *Das Ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866-1918* (Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1983), 99-100.

the constitution only refers to Germany as a 'nation' in terms of its territory and how it lays out conditions of an empire that is in fact nothing more than a confederation of the individual member states that remained in control of most decisions that would affect the lives of their citizens.

The lack of nationalistic ideals amongst the driving political forces is also evident in the fact that Germany, as it was formed in 1871, possessed neither a national flag until 1892 nor a national anthem until 1919.⁴⁴ The actual symbol of German unity was the Reichstag with its 397 members. These members, elected by universal male suffrage, met for their first session on the 21st of March 1871.⁴⁵ As Keynes' remark of "coal and iron" shows, economic factors were generally speaking, far larger than the nationalistic motivation in the unification of Germany.

Even if nationalism as a movement did not emerge in Germany until after the unification, a German national consciousness as one people had existed in large parts of Germany since the reign of Napoleon I (1806-1813) at the beginning of the 19th century. The movements of classicism, romanticism and idealism all contributed towards shaping German self-consciousness.⁴⁶ Nationalist ideas were generally pursued by the predominantly Protestant, urban, male middle-class and the National Association (1859), the principal organisation to support German unification, never had more than 25,000 members. However, Bismarck's "revolution from above" would have not been possible without the small-scale sentimental formation of the nation that happened in clubs, societies and cultural festivals in the years before 1871.⁴⁷

German poetry, philosophy, science and music had been created without a German nation and was still accredited as being a cultural phenomenon, but 'German culture' as such remained undetermined, and so did German art. As Suzanne Marchand has pointed out, the individual states had their own cultural institutions and traditions and the mere pooling of these traditions was not an option.⁴⁸ The largest city, Berlin, was decisive for scholarship and science but was not the cultural centre, as was the case with the largest cities in other European countries, like Britain and France. Instead, the cultural diversity

⁴⁴ Williamson, *Bismarck and Germany, 1862-1890*, 44.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 45; Deuerlein, *Die Gründung des Deutschen Reiches 1870/71 in Augenzeugenberichten*, 15.

⁴⁶ *Die Gründung des Deutschen Reiches 1870/71 in Augenzeugenberichten*, 17/8.

⁴⁷ Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871-1918*, 57.

⁴⁸ Suzanne Marchand, *Germany at the Fin De Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 153.

of the member states supported many different thriving cultural centres in the cities of the seats of former princely courts.⁴⁹ This cultural prospering of various cities opened up many possibilities but also generated a sense of anxiety about too much diversity and the creation of a 'styleless age.'⁵⁰ However, as the aspirations to endorse German influence on the European political, scientific and cultural scenes where high (a venture which proved very fruitful in the sciences), this 'stylelessness' had to be prevented. After the unification of political, economic and military Germany had been completed, the active search for a German culture began as an aspect of the assertion of a 'national' talent and character.

Robert Berdahl's argument that "nationalism is generated among a people by the growing awareness of its economic backwardness and by the desire for a modern economy"⁵¹ is certainly applicable to Germany in the *Gründerzeit* [often translated as promoterism]. At the beginning of the 19th century, the German states were known for their industrial backwardness and mainly generated an income through the export of raw materials.⁵² But as in many other parts of Europe, industrialisation and urbanisation brought crucial changes to German cities. The industrial turn reached the German states from the middle of the 1860s onwards and saw an even greater upsurge after the proclamation of the empire. As Germany changed from a loosely connected region of rural states to an industrial nation, the national product grew from 15.1 billion Marks in 1867 to 52.4 billion Marks in 1913.⁵³ To put the speed of this development into perspective, the industrial production in England doubled over this time period while the production in Germany sextupled.⁵⁴

At the same time the population in the areas of the German empire also grew: from 39.8 million in 1866 to 67.8 million in 1914, a rise of 70%.⁵⁵ Generally speaking, the *Gründerzeit* brought a rise in living standards to the German population, although it is important to mention that this rise was in no way equally distributed through all sections

⁴⁹ Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 120.

⁵⁰ Marchand, *Germany at the Fin De Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas*, 154. See also debates in contemporary architecture Hans Belting, *The Germans and Their Art: A Troublesome Relationship* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 1998), 46 ff.

⁵¹ Quoted in Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871-1918*, 55.

⁵² Stürmer, *Das Ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866-1918*, 121.

⁵³ Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich: Beck, 1990), 268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

or all parts of the Empire.⁵⁶ Part of this phenomenon was increased leisure time, especially in the new *Bürgertum* [bourgeoisie], which could avail itself of new possibilities to fill free time. The viewer numbers of the cabaret, circuses and spectator sports, like football, increased and cultural institutions like the opera, museums and public lectures flourished.⁵⁷ The *Gründerzeit* was also the time of the *Volksfest* [folk festival]; trade fairs, Christmas markets, county fairs, national exhibitions and harvest festivals were celebrated in different regions.⁵⁸

These municipal establishments became an alternative to (the now less frequented) Sunday Church services and took over the role of transmitting middle-class cultural values that had formerly been played by the princely courts.⁵⁹ The education system saw girls' and boys' schools as significantly different institutions, which were only given equal status from 1908 onwards, the same year that universities finally opened to women.⁶⁰ The school and university system saw large changes in the *Gründerzeit* as education developed as a focus of political and economic life. The Enlightenment's ideal of *Bildung* [education, culture] as an end in itself was side-lined and the practical application of knowledge became more important.⁶¹ The common element, though, was the general emphasis on the importance of education.

In 1866 Germany had 19 universities, but by 1908, five new ones were founded. Additionally, the number of students increased from 18,000 in 1869 to 79,000 in 1914. This quadrupling is significantly above the growth of population, as discussed above. A university education became a status symbol, and many hard-working middle-class families tried to fund their sons' admittance. In accordance with this striving for a university education the State invested in research and revised and widened the content and scope of general education. The reform of 1872 introduced history, geography and the description and study of nature to the curriculum and reduced the stress on religion and music. These changes in the curriculum had an impact not just on schools but, as can be seen in the last two sections of this chapter, also influenced the way new disciplines

⁵⁶ Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, 111; Nipperdey gives a detailed account about the development of living standards in his book: Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist*.

⁵⁷ *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist*, 170. Marchand, *Germany at the Fin De Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas*, 3.

⁵⁸ Stürmer, *Das Ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866-1918*, 33.

⁵⁹ Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, 122.

⁶⁰ Rob Burns, *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 18.

⁶¹ Stürmer, *Das Ruhelose Reich: Deutschland 1866-1918*, 134.

like ethnography and art history saw their own work and tried to fit into the existing academic framework (which was shaped at this point).

Mass literacy was already on the rise from the 1850s onwards and was largely achieved by 1880.⁶² This progress of literacy and the promotion of reading also made Germans a 'nation of newspaper readers.' Newspapers attracted people from all classes, including the petty bourgeoisie, farmers and women, with papers directly catering to each of them.⁶³ In the years between 1850 and 1880 the number of newspapers rose from 1,500 (in the entire German area, including Austria) to around 2,400 (in little Germany alone). The average number of newspapers published rose even more rapidly, from 2,604 titles in 1885 to 9,438 titles in 1918.⁶⁴

At the same time, the number of journal publications and books grew and with it came an upsurge in image production.⁶⁵ Art works, such as illustrations and prints, came out of the realm of the museum and were taken into the private sphere. Art essays and criticism were not just published in art and culture journals but also in family journals and newspapers. Art historical books, especially the generalised surveys of art, became a staple for the educated middle and upper classes and even found their way into the girl's schools.⁶⁶ As the public awareness of art as national heritage and as a tool to locate and create German culture was heightened, museums and art galleries shifted in character and focus. The traditional collections, owned by royal or princely houses, were made accessible to the public and new galleries and museums were established. The new importance given to museums and galleries was accompanied by the commodification of art as an economic asset in education and to improve tourism.⁶⁷

The search for the 'Self' as German, instead of Prussian, Bavarian or Westphalian, proved more difficult than the intelligentsia in 1871 may have hoped for. As this search was in progress the interest in the 'Other' grew stronger.⁶⁸ This curiosity about other peoples had certainly been of some importance in German popular culture, and disciplines like ethnography and physical anthropology enjoyed a great deal of support. However,

⁶² Burns, *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, 22.

⁶³ Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist*, 797.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 798/9.

⁶⁵ Burns, *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, 30.

⁶⁶ Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1866-1918. Vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist*, 693/4.

⁶⁷ Burns, *German Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, 34.

⁶⁸ In recent years, studies suggest to look at Germany not as a nation but as a polycentric collection of 'tribes,' see for example H. Glenn Penny, "German Polycentrism and the Writing of History," *German History* 30, no. 2 (2012).

when Germany first unified Bismarck thought colonies to be a cause of weakness, as they would be hard to defend for a largely land-locked Germany. Hence, he “wished only for coaling stations acquired by treaty from other nations.”⁶⁹ The decision to acquire large colonial territories in 1884/85 has, hence, been discussed in various different ways. These range from the idea that it was an attempt to deflect attention from social tensions in Germany to indicating that Bismarck wanted to engage in the ‘scramble for Africa’ all along and just waited for the right time to strike.⁷⁰ The upper classes promoted this venture into colonialism, as can be seen from the 1882 foundation of the *Kolonialverein* [colonial society] which wanted to promote colonial acquisition. Moreover, German overseas merchants must have been in favour of the acquisition of German colonial territories as well, as they were increasingly facing competition in Africa and the Pacific from the early eighties onwards.⁷¹

In the spring of 1884 Bismarck took action in colonial matters and Germany got its first colonial territories and actively pursued more. The idea was that the trading companies would take the responsibility for internal matters in the colonies and the Reich would take care of external protection.⁷² Between 1884 and 1900 Germany had managed to build a vast empire which was the third largest in territory and the fifth largest in population. It included parts of today’s Namibia, Tanzania, Togo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda, Burundi, Papua New Guinea, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Nauru, China, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Federated State of Micronesia, and Western Samoa. However, none of the colonies, managed by the trading companies, proved to be profitable and inner turmoil and rebellions made it inevitable that German troops would intervene.⁷³

This discrepancy between the initial hopes of a cheap and easy colonial empire and the actuality of high maintenance and low profits made the colonial territories look more like a burden than an asset to the new Chancellor Leo von Caprivi in 1890. Even though 1890 finally saw the setting up of a Colonial Department in the Foreign Office⁷⁴ Caprivi was hesitant to advance the German Empire. However, the exchange of Zanzibar for Heligoland caused an outcry amongst German colonial supporters. In turn it was due to

⁶⁹ Williamson, *Bismarck and Germany, 1862-1890*, 142/3.

⁷⁰ sources

⁷¹ Williamson, *Bismarck and Germany, 1862-1890*, 82.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire, 1871-1918*, 174.

this treaty with Britain that the group of colonial supporters gained a large number of enthusiasts from all sections of society. When Bernhard von Bülow became Foreign Minister in 1897 he used this new popularity of colonialism as a stepping stone for his social imperialism which brought him the chancellorship in 1900.⁷⁵ This popularity was not just evident in politics but also affected German society in many ways, some of which will be discussed later on in this thesis.⁷⁶

As can be seen from this short account, the unification of Germany was not brought on by a sense of unity of its citizens but rather by political deliberations. The changes brought on during the *Gründerzeit* were beyond the modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation, which were noticeable throughout Europe. Additionally, Germany was actively trying to make the bond procured by politics palpable through, tradition, culture and *Bildung*. The interconnection between culture and *Bildung*, through this German unification and its stem in the German language will be further discussed in the next section.

⁷⁵ Mommsen, *Imperial Germany 1867-1918: Politics, Culture, and Society in an Authoritarian State*, 80/1.

⁷⁶ For a more detailed discussion of German colonialism see for example Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Chapter 1.2 Defining culture

The term ‘culture’ is one of the most used, discussed and critiqued terms in the English language, but at the same time it is also one of the least defined. In his chapter titled *the trouble with culture* Appiah exclaimed that you have to reach for your dictionary when you hear the word ‘culture’ as “the notion seems to be that everything from anorexia to zydeco is illuminated by being displayed as the product of some group’s culture.”⁷⁷ It is for this reason that this chapter, despite its title, neither sets out to define nor elaborate all the different meanings of the term ‘culture.’ It merely attempts to give an outline of the positioning of two uses of the term ‘culture’ in Imperial Germany and their importance for this study.

According to House it is possible to define the concept of culture as “whatever a person needs to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to it’s (i.e. a society’s) members.”⁷⁸ At a time when German identity was yet to be fully defined, knowing what was acceptable as ‘a German’ was somewhat arbitrary and discussions about the development of the German people from its origin through history until the present day were widespread. As was discussed above, the unification of the different German provinces in 1871 created a nation of people that did not share one cultural tradition. Instead, the German ‘community’ was very much in line with Benedict Anderson’s ideas of an ‘imagined community.’⁷⁹

It was an ‘imagined community’ as not all Germans had face-to-face relationships and did not have one common descent, and because it was a state put together by politics rather than developed out of long traditions and a communal, linear history. The definition of what was not German and quintessentially ‘Other’ proved easier to define than what was German in the first place. German ethnographers classified these ‘Others’ by distinguishing between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*. *Naturvölker*, or ‘natural peoples,’ were seen to be ‘primitives’ without a written history and *Kulturvölker*, or ‘cultural peoples,’ were those with a long standing tradition and history, like Europeans.

⁷⁷ Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2005), 114.

⁷⁸ Juliane House, "Moving across Languages and Cultures in Translation as Intercultural Communication," in *Translational Action and Intercultural Communication*, ed. Kristin Bührig, Juliane House, and Jan D. Ten Thije (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2009), 9.

⁷⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 2012).

This differentiation between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* is often seen as the German answer to British Social Darwinism and the French Civilising Mission.⁸⁰ While there certainly was a hierarchical aspect to these terms, it is important to point out that the German ‘culture’ and the French ‘civilization’ carried different connotations. While the French ‘civilisation’ was a universal ideal that took the political and economic position into account, the German term for ‘culture’ referred to the highly individual religious, artistic and intellectual authenticity of a people.⁸¹ As Eagleton describes in his book *The Idea of Culture*, if the sociable term of ‘civilisation’ ‘is formulaically French, the [spiritual ‘culture’] is stereotypically German.’⁸²

This idea of culture came into being during the German period of Romanticism (late 18th to early 19th century) and especially due to the opposition to the universalism of the Enlightenment. At this time, German political and cultural practices were brought into question, by Roman and Parisian consensus. For example, the German language, split up into many different variations, was not seen to be refined enough for poetry and philosophy. In order to spare the German language the fate of the Germanic Franks, which was swallowed up by French, it was consciously refined by poets and intellectuals to make it more expressive and turn it to intellectual use.⁸³

Towards the end of the Romantic period, the critique on modern living and commerce grew louder. In the spirit of the elevation of the German language, Johann Gottfried Herder was one of the first to critique the universal civilizing endeavours and repression of ‘unrefined,’ local folk traditions happening during the Enlightenment. Instead, he demanded that even if another nation’s language and traditions were in some sense better, each nation should keep true to its own cultural attributes.⁸⁴

Moreover, Herder introduced the modern way of thinking about culture as a distinctive way of life, rather than as a universal linear concept of progress. In his book *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [This too a Philosophy of the History of the

⁸⁰ Look at chapters 1.4 and 2.1 for the use of these terms in German ethnography specifically.

⁸¹ For a more detailed look at the difference between civilization and culture see Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 9-11.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 10/1.

⁸³ Martin Bernal, "Race, Class and Gender in the Formation of the Aryan Model of Greek Origins," *Nations, Identities and Cultures: The South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (1995): 1003.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* For a discussion on Herder’s criticism on literature in Germany see Karl Menges, "Particular Universals: Herder on National Literature, Popular Literature, and World Literature," in *A Companion to the Works of Johann Gottfried Herder*, ed. Hans Adler and Wulf Köpke (Rochester: Camden House, 2009).

Formation of Humanity], 1774, Herder laments the fact that “the best historian of ancient art,” Johann Joachim Winckelmann, whose work I will briefly discuss in the third section of this chapter, applied a Greek standard to his judgement of Egyptian art. He points out that the Egyptians did not know of the charm, action and movement in Greek sculpture and that the mummies, that are lacking these Greek qualities, do exactly what they were meant to: represent the dead body.⁸⁵ He proposes that each nation’s cultural, political and societal peculiarities, which he calls their *Volksgeist*, should rather be seen with its own standard in mind, pointing out that “each human perfection is national, secular and, considered more closely, individual.”⁸⁶

In his later volumes *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [*Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*], 1784-1791, Herder emphasises this point by writing: “what one nation holds indispensable to the circle of its thoughts has never entered into the mind of a second, and by a third has been deemed injurious.”⁸⁷ As Eagleton has pointed out, Herder actively opposes the idea of ‘culture-as-universal-civilization’ by asserting that every one of these different cultures has its own distinct way of life and its own laws of progression. By doing this, Herder introduces the practice of using ‘culture’ in its plural form, as is customary today, referring not only to different nations but also diverse social and economic groups within different nations.⁸⁸ Furthermore, he made a judgement about art that was radical for its time; he claimed that there is no distinct hierarchy between the different cultures and that “the Hottentot criteria for beauty is as valid as those of Europe.”⁸⁹ While it took several decades until this last statement was contemplated again, the assertion of multiple cultures instead of a universal culture played an important part in the reception of African art.

Here it is fruitful to distinguish between Culture, as the development of the mind through education and its embodiment in ‘high culture’, and culture as the shared understandings and identity of a group. The lower-case sense of culture, in its adherence to heritage, is what Herder was striving for when pluralising the term and is also very much in line with the anthropological sense today.⁹⁰ Going back to the Imperial German

⁸⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, ed. Hans-Georg Gadamer (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1967), 23/4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁷ Herder *Reflections* p. 49 quoted in Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12/3.

⁸⁹ Bernal, "Race, Class and Gender in the Formation of the Aryan Model of Greek Origins," 1003.

⁹⁰ See Friederike Krishnbhakdi-Vasilakis, "On the Reception of Aboriginal Art in German Art Space" (University of Wollongong, 2009), 31. Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, 43/4.

differentiation between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*, the different meanings of culture become increasingly important. While the term *Volk* and its plural *Völker* can be translated as people/s, nation/s, folk/s and culture/s, meaning the culture in terms of one's heritage and identity, the prefixes *Natur* [nature] and *Kultur* [culture, as the object of social ambition] entail an ambivalent categorization of the different peoples.

The dichotomy of *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* was most famously promoted by the ethnographer Adolf Bastian who will be discussed further in the last section of the chapter. While the *Naturvölker* were thought to be 'simpler' in their cultural and social structure they were also thought to be closer to nature as well as completely dependent on it. *Kulturvölker* on the other hand, had not only built complicated social structures and acquired a 'high culture' but had also managed to master nature through modern technology and science. This ability to control nature instead of being completely dependent upon it was seen to be not only the deciding quality of a people to become a *Kulturvolk*, but also the reason for their higher social and cultural standing.

On the one hand, this dichotomy can be seen as the differentiation between 'primitive' and 'civilised,' or colonised and coloniser, and as such to bear a value judgement and hierarchical order between the two types. But, on the other hand, the opposition of these two terms - nature and culture - was not as rigid as it is thought of today. Terry Eagleton pointed out that the etymological origin of 'culture' comes from agriculture, as one of its meanings is the tending of natural growth, so etymologically speaking, nature is not derivative of culture but culture derives from nature.⁹¹ This then, is how most 19th century German ethnographers would have seen the relationship between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*, as symbiotic rather than hierarchical. Here, it is important to note that this derivation of culture from nature is not to be understood in the evolutionary sense, which was vehemently contested by the first generation of ethnographers,⁹² but rather as interdependent.

While the differentiation and relationship between cultures was hinted at and worked out by ethnographers, the search for German culture was a national task, even if it was mainly carried out by the middle and upper classes. Being able to contrast the undefined entity of German culture, the epitome of a *Kulturvolk*, with behaviours of the *Naturvölker* gave new perspectives on the notion of German-ness and made the small differences

⁹¹ *The Idea of Culture*, 1.

⁹² For a longer discussion of the influence of evolutionism on German ethnography see chapter 3.3.

between the German provinces seem immaterial. In his memoir, Friedrich Meinecke describes how “a new and deeper longing for the genuine and true but also a new awareness of the problematical fragmentation of modern life awoke” at this time and how it “tried to dive down again from its civilized surface into the now eerie, now tempting depths.”⁹³ It was not so much about either modernism or anti-modernism but rather about the ambivalence of looking backwards and forwards at the same time, of combining tradition with innovation and of the construction of a shared history and heritage in order to envision a common future and culture.

This common future and culture was especially visible in the universities, where culture was taught to the future generations. As such the two next sections will consider the path of two disciplines, art history and ethnography, to become autonomous university disciplines.

⁹³ Marchand, *Germany at the Fin de Siècle: Culture, Politics, and Ideas*, 5/6.

Chapter 1.3 The history and science of art

In order to get a full picture of the preconditions that informed the reception of African art at the turn of the century one also has to take into consideration the discipline that shaped and informed the different publications considered here. Beginning with the most influential philosophers, this section will provide an outline of the history of art historical thought in Germany, the status of museums and its advancement to a university discipline. As with many other historiographies of art history, I will start with the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68). Often named as one of the founders of the modern discipline of art history, Winckelmann may not have been directly involved in its academisation but certainly had a huge impact on its development until it became a common university discipline. His *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* [*History of Ancient Art*, 1764] was instrumental in generating a structure of art historical research and writing. Winckelmann's 'principal object' in presenting his 'system' was to gather "the essentials of art, on which the history of the individual artist has little bearing."⁹⁴ He was the first scholar to argue that the aesthetics of a particular art were dependent on the cultural context of their production. Moreover, he was adamant about the supremacy of Greek art,⁹⁵ whose highest accomplishment he saw as the Apollo Belvedere. His 'system' of historical writing is structured around the notion of the ideal of beauty in the classical tradition.⁹⁶

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whose work *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* [This too a Philosophy of the History of the Formation of Humanity], 1774, has already been discussed above has been instrumental in taking further the development of Winckelmann's original thesis. Herder criticised Winckelmann for failing to account for the possibility of similar aesthetic and moral values arising under different circumstances and at different times. As has been noted, Herder advocated judging each people's material and cultural output by their own standards and not by another's, as Winckelmann had done with Greek art.

Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was influenced by both of these approaches when he gave his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, which were posthumously published by his

⁹⁴ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*, trans. Giles Henry B Lodge (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1856), 149.

⁹⁵ E. H. Gombrich, *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 27.

⁹⁶ Regine Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte: Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft* (Köln: Deubner, 2004), 32.

student Heinrich Georg Hotho (1802-73) in 1835.⁹⁷ Hegel picked up on Herder's idea of the *Volksgeist*, however, unlike Herder, Hegel did not use this notion to undermine the belief in one culture's superiority but only adopted the idea that art is specific to the time and people which produced it.⁹⁸

Most important, in Hegel's art history is the *Geist*, which can be translated as spirit, mind, psyche or intellect. In accordance with Herder's *Volksgeist* and the philosophy of the time, a possible translation has to be seen as a hybrid between spirit and mind. On the one hand this concept of *Geist* can be seen as a kind of overarching scheme of the world and the expressions of ideas of different peoples at different times; and on the other hand it also incorporates how the human mind interacts with, and on, the material world around it.⁹⁹ He points out that the work of art needs (1) to be a natural product that has been made through human activity, (2) to have been made for human sensory appreciation, and (3) to contain an end.¹⁰⁰ He, moreover, draws a distinction between "the art which is free in its end as in its means" and ornaments that are "not independent, not free, but servile."¹⁰¹ Hegel's famous concept of the history of art has to be seen in relation with the first kind of 'free' art.

Here, Hegel distinguishes between three different types of art; the symbolic, the classical and the romantic, which can be seen as developing sequentially through history.¹⁰² He points out that "the types of art are nothing but the different relations of content and shape, relations which emanate from the Idea itself, and furnish thereby the true basis of division for this sphere."¹⁰³ The first type, the symbolic, which according to Hegel can be witnessed in the art produced in the time between ancient India and ancient Egypt, can be further broken up into unconscious symbolism, fantastic symbolism, and genuine symbolism. At this stage, he points out, the "natural objects are [...] primarily

⁹⁷ Gaiger pointed out that these works have to be used cautiously as it is hard to distinguish between Hegel's original ideas and Hotho's additions. Jason Gaiger, "Hegel's Contested Legacy: Rethinking the Relation between Art History and Philosophy," *Art Bulletin* 93, no. 2 (2011): 185/6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Hegel's use of the term *Geist* see for example Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation*, Modern European Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43-52.

¹⁰⁰ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, "Lectures on Aesthetics," in *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Jason Gaiger, Charles Harrison, and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 62.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁰² For a more detailed account of the three stages of art according to Hegel see for example David James, *Art, Myth and Society in Hegel's Aesthetics*, Continuum Studies in Philosophy (London: Continuum, 2009), 7-61.

¹⁰³ Hegel, "Lectures on Aesthetics," 66.

left unaltered”¹⁰⁴ and that “the plastic shape of symbolic art is imperfect, because, in the first place, the Idea in it only enters into consciousness in abstract determinateness or indeterminateness, and, in the second place, this must always make the conformity of shape to import defective, and in its turn merely abstract.”¹⁰⁵

The second stage in the development of the artistic expression of the *Geist* is the classical age, as best seen in Greek sculpture. Here, Hegel, like Winckelmann, praises the harmony and balance shown in the human figure but does not agree with Winckelmann that Greek art had attained a timeless aesthetical ideal. He writes that “the classical phase sets up the perfect amalgamation of spiritual and sensuous existence as a conformity of the two” an amalgamation in which the *Geist* cannot be represented truthfully, as “*Geist* is the infinite subjectivity of the Idea, which, as absolute inwardness, is not capable of finding free expansion in its true nature on condition of remaining transposed into a bodily medium.”¹⁰⁶

This problem of the amalgamation of body and mind is solved in the romantic stage of art which goes beyond the bodily form of expression. “In this third stage the object (of art) is a free, concrete intellectual being, which has the function of revealing itself as spiritual existence for the inward world of [*Geist*].”¹⁰⁷ “This inner world that forms the content of the romantic, and must therefore find its representation as such inward feeling, and in the show or presentation of such feeling,”¹⁰⁸ is, according to Hegel, best revealed in the art of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Correggio and Titian. Moreover, Hegel also mentioned the *Vorkunst* [pre-art] which he defined as the art equivalent to pre-history. He used this term in order to integrate rudimentary forms of art, like symbols for example, that did not fit into the standards of European fine art.¹⁰⁹ For Hegel the decline of the peak of expressiveness in art sets in with the artists’ sole interest in secular matters, the depiction of the *Geist* especially the religious *Geist* is abandoned for everyday concerns. Thus, Hegel was able to provide a linear development of art and a structure that would allow the scientific analysis of the art of different cultures – different both in their historical setting and/or their heritage – from another culture’s perspective.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 68/9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Leeb, "Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne," 201.

Hegel's ideas played an important part in the development of the academic discipline of art history, even if in some cases this was only due to the fact that scholars criticised him. Art historians, especially in German-speaking countries, began to draw on far-reaching ideas from numerous different academic disciplines in order to validate, negate or carry on further Hegel's aesthetics.¹¹⁰ This upsurge in interest in art historical and aesthetic thinking gave art history and science the historic momentum to gain recognition as a university discipline.

As has been mentioned before, art history in Germany had formed part of a well-rounded university education of the educated middle classes since the beginning of the 19th century. However, art history was not an autonomous discipline¹¹¹ but was rather seen as a complimentary part of an academic discourse on the practice of art, one could study combinations like 'archaeology and art history,' 'literature and art history' or as part of philosophy and the academic drawing classes.¹¹² Art academies began to include theoretical training into their curriculum. The academy in Berlin for example set up lectures in the winter months that were open to the public but were mandatory for their students from 1790 onwards.¹¹³ At the same time, the first university post of art history was given to Johann Dominicus Fiorillo (1748-1821), the keeper of the prints collections and a drawing-master in Göttingen, who was hired by the Göttingen University as an associate professor in 1799 and a full professor in 1813.¹¹⁴

Fiorillo worked mainly on the history of certain masters and their schools, which is indicated by his published survey text on the *Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste in Deutschland und den vereinigten Niederlanden* [The History of the Graphic Arts in Germany and the United Netherlands], and did not invest his time in finding a concrete structure of art history.¹¹⁵ The same was true for his successor Carl Wilhelm Friedrich Osterley (1805-1891) who became an associate professor in 1829 and a full professor in 1842. However, once Osterley became court painter in Hannover, in 1845, the tradition of a theoretical art education in Göttingen ended.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ Gaiger, "Hegel's Contested Legacy: Rethinking the Relation between Art History and Philosophy," 179.

¹¹¹ Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte: Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft*, 108.

¹¹² Heinrich Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 175.

¹¹³ Ibid., 189.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 177.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 179.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 182/3.

‘Theory of the history of the visual arts’ had been a subject at the University of Berlin (today’s Humboldt University) from its foundation in 1810 onwards. This subject had been represented by Alois Hirt (1759-1837) until 1837, and assisted by Ernst Heinrich Toelken (1785-1869) from 1823. From 1829 onwards Heinrich Gustav Hotho gave lectures on ‘objects of aesthetics, art and literary history’ as an associate professor.¹¹⁷ In his very popular lectures, Hotho followed Hegel’s ideas of aesthetics but did not try to expand them. Accompanying this development of university positions was a trend towards university art collections in order to fulfil Hirt’s call for the teaching of art history in places “where a range of art works from different times, schools and masters are exhibited.”¹¹⁸

As the keeper of the Prussian king’s antiquities collection, Hirt supervised Gustav Waagen (1794-1868) in the formation of the *Berliner Gemäldegalerie* from 1823 onwards. Once the *Gemäldegalerie* was officially founded in 1830, Waagen became its first director and thus was the first art historian to fill a position like this, which had traditionally been held by artists.¹¹⁹ With the opening of the *Gemäldegalerie*, Hirt wanted to realise his idea of a ‘museum for academic studies,’ by hanging the paintings chronologically and filling gaps with copies. However, Waagen, with the support from others, was able to promote his own scheme and hung the paintings in separate cabinets, celebrating the individual art work and stressing the aura of the paintings.¹²⁰

In letters to the minister of state and the Prussian King, Waagen repeatedly emphasised the importance of an art historical education at universities in order to support the collections in Berlin. Subsequently, this vehemence resulted in Waagen’s appointment as an associate professor in 1844. He gave lectures about the history of the fine arts in Europe since the French Revolution and about the history of painting from the 5th to the 18th centuries.¹²¹ However, his teaching activities neither advanced the scientific leverage of modern art history nor did it yield the desired funds for the university.¹²² It seems that during the first half of the 19th century, it was not the art history lectures that promoted the discipline but rather the emerging *Kunstvereine* [art societies]. Hence, it does not come as a surprise that in 1843, Jakob Burckhardt (1818-1897), a Swiss art historian

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 195.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁹ Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte: Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft*, 133/4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 134.

¹²¹ Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin*, 190-4.

¹²² Ibid., 194.

working in both Switzerland and Germany, praised the *Kunstvereine* as having provided art with a bigger audience and, thus, brought it to new life.¹²³ The first ordinary chair of art history was established in 1860 at the University of Bonn, addressing the question; ‘is the modern science of art a science based on solid principles? – Reasons why not. – Necessity of change.’¹²⁴

The first German speaking art congress was held in Vienna in 1873, only two years after the establishment of the German Empire, and gave an opportunity for the newly established and mainly non-academic art historians to gather and discuss their thoughts on the new field. One of the major aspects deliberated at this time was art history’s distinction from other forms of history. It was pointed out that while history was based on linguistic monuments, art history was seeking to understand a different language of culture; the language of images, objects and architectural monuments.¹²⁵ This congress stood at the beginning of the main surge of the advancement of art history as an academic discipline in the last quarter of the 19th century. Thus, the universities in Bonn, Leipzig and Strasbourg established institutes of art history in 1873, Berlin in 1875 and Tübingen in 1894 which, subsequently, increased the number of people teaching art history at universities. By 1912 there were 132 scholars employed as art historians at universities, 27 of whom were professors and 15 associate professors.¹²⁶

Another important phase in the popularisation of art history and its elevation to an autonomous academic discipline was marked by the publication of books published after Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in the 19th century. On the one hand, books on specific ages, masters or schools were published, like Jacob Burckhardt’s *Erklärung der Kunstwerke der belgischen Städte* [Explanation of the Artworks in Belgian Cities] and Gottfried Kinkel’s *Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den christlichen Völkern* [History of the Fine Arts of the Christian Peoples]. Another important set of books that should be mentioned is the *Conversationslexikon für bildende Kunst* [Encyclopaedia of Fine Arts]

¹²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 213.

¹²⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 21.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 235/6.

¹²⁶ Charlotte Schoell-Glass, "Art History in German-Speaking Countries: Austria, Germany and Switzerland," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley, Thierry Lenain, and Hubert Locher (Brill, 2012), 336/7.

by Johannes Andreas Romberg, Friedrich Faber and Lorenz Clasen, published between 1845 and 1857.¹²⁷

These encyclopaedic volumes on art were accompanied by the emergence of more global art historical survey texts. The first scholar to mention is Franz Kugler (1808-1858) who had been lecturing as an associate professor at the University in Berlin since 1834 before he was appointed as the councillor of ecclesiastical, educational and medical matters in the Prussian Ministry in 1843 and resigned from his teaching activities.¹²⁸ In 1842 Kugler published his *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* [Handbook of Art History] in which he discussed the history of art from its origins in raw material needs up to the debates of his own day.¹²⁹ He organised his book into four different parts; looking at (1) “the art in its earliest developmental stage,” (2) “the history of classical art,” (3) “the history of romantic art” and (4) “the history of modern art.”¹³⁰ Thus, he roughly followed a Hegelian organisation of art and also saw a theoretical affiliation as he points out that “the origins of art lie in the needs of men to tie their thoughts to permanent matter, to create a monumental form and place for memories as the expression of their thoughts.”¹³¹ However, unlike Hegel, Kugler did not try to explain this global appearance of art through the underlying *Geist* and did not endorse a teleological view of the development of art.¹³²

At the same time, Karl Schnaase prepared his *Geschichte der Bildenden Künste* [History of the Fine Arts], published in eight volumes between 1842 and 1879. Trained as a lawyer, Schnaase developed his interest in art while travelling and before he became the secretary and then president of the ‘society of art for the Rhineland and Westphalia.’¹³³ In a review of the first volume, Kugler pointed towards the differences of the two survey texts and accuses him of generalizing each art historical moment in a Hegelian fashion.¹³⁴ Schnaase, however, did not see the connecting element of art as the *Geist* and rather believed that

art is one of the necessary expressions of humanity; yes we can perhaps say that in art the genius of humanity is more complete and specific than in religion itself,

¹²⁷ This encyclopaedia was however never finished and reached only up to ‘*Heiligenbild*’ [Icon] Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin*, 173/4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 174.

¹²⁹ Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” 25.

¹³⁰ Franz Kugler, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Ebner Seubert, 1842).

¹³¹ Ibid., 3; translated by Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” 25.

¹³² Peter Paret, *Art as History: Episodes in the Culture and Politics of Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton, N.J. ; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1988), 19.

¹³³ Prange, *Die Geburt der Kunstgeschichte: Philosophische Ästhetik und empirische Wissenschaft*, 138/9.

¹³⁴ Schwarzer, “Origins of the Art History Survey Text,” 26.

because in religion, after all, the form of thought or the spiritualized feeling predominates, while in art, the sensual nature is completely incorporated and satisfied. No nation is therefore entirely without art, it appears unconsciously; but certainly, nowhere near all the peoples are in possession of all art or all the arts, perhaps none has practiced all with the same fortune.¹³⁵

In the tradition of Winckelmann, Schnaase saw the *Volksgeist* as an important part of an artist's work which, according to him was a connection between people and religion, culture and nation, and art and history.¹³⁶ Both Kugler and Schnaase saw art change cyclically between religious and more secular types and did not follow Winckelmann in the idea of a single true progress of style.¹³⁷ Within this paradigm, they saw their *Handbook* and *History* not as encyclopaedias but as cultural histories for the educated *Bürger*.¹³⁸ However, despite including Ancient Egyptian, Asian and American art, both refrain from taking African and non-European contemporary art practice into account. This complete global art survey was not to be available until 1900, when Woermann published his *Geschichte der Kunst*, which will be analysed in chapter three.

¹³⁵ Schnaase quoted in Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin*, 208.

¹³⁶ Schwarzer, "Origins of the Art History Survey Text," 27.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Dilly, *Kunstgeschichte als Institution: Studien zur Geschichte einer Disziplin*, 210/1.

Chapter 1.4 The ethnographic project

As Ivan Karp has stated in his essay 'Culture and Representation,' it is arguable that exotic objects, displayed in such a uniquely Western institution as a museum, can only convey the story of Western imperialism and their own colonial appropriation.¹³⁹ Moreover he suggests that "Cross-cultural exhibitions present such stark contrasts between what we know and what we need to know that the challenge of reorganizing our knowledge becomes an aspect of exhibition experience."¹⁴⁰ While Karp has mainly concentrated on museum exhibitions the representations of these objects in publications, like the art survey text, work in similar ways. Thus, in order to be able to understand the extent of 'translation' taking place in the publications, it is important to establish the preconditions of ethnographic knowledge and practice in Germany.

The humanistic tradition, fully ingrained in German *Geisteswissenschaften* [humanities] during the course of the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment, informed the beginnings of ethnographic enquiries significantly. Andrew Zimmerman called Germany "the most important centre of academic humanism"¹⁴¹ of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, this humanistic knowledge, according to Zimmerman, focussed only on the European self, which in the 18th and early 19th century led to the exclusion of other peoples. In the early 19th century the humanities were particularly interested in the historicity of tradition.

For the work of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel, whose *Lectures on Aesthetics* are mentioned above, this attention to historicity influenced his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, given in the 1820s and first published posthumously by his student Eduard Gans in 1837. As we have noted, Hegel did not follow Herder's use of the notion of *Volksgeist* to undermine the belief in one culture's superiority over another. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* it actually becomes clear that he uses the *Volksgeist*, instead, to determine the importance of a people and their relevance in world history. According to him, many non-European peoples were not worthy of study because of their inferior *Volksgeist*. His discussion of Africa ends as follows:

¹³⁹ Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 16.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁴¹ Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.

With this we leave Africa, never to mention it again. For it is not an historical part of the world, it exhibits no movement or development. What has happened in Africa, which is to say, in its northern part, belongs to the Asiatic and European world [...]. What is properly understood by Africa is without history and closed within itself, it is still entirely trapped in the natural spirit. It had to be presented here only on the threshold of world history.¹⁴²

In accordance with Hegel, the political and philosophical historian, Georg Gottfried Gervinus (1805-1871), also saw non-European peoples as without history which he made clear in a letter to a colleague in the 1830s. According to him, only Europeans are historical as only Europeans have historical documents and Oriental peoples should instead be “explained by their natural, psychological, and physiological characteristics.”¹⁴³ Furthermore, he pointed out that the study of Oriental peoples is part of the natural sciences rather than history. By the time Johann Gustav Droysen wrote his *Outline of the Principles of History*, 1868, the dismissal of non-European cultures in historical enquiries had become common practice. Droysen claimed that societies “change insofar as they have history and have history insofar as they change.” Moreover, he directly rejected Adolf Bastian’s work as “schematic, doctrinaire [and] unhistorical” which could only reveal “*Nichtkultur*” [not-culture].¹⁴⁴

This exclusion of non-European peoples from historical investigations and the open rejection of ethnography and ethnographic collections as insignificant were the biggest obstacle the first scholars that called themselves ethnographers had to overcome. Born out of the Romantic period and the general striving for *Bildung* [education, culture, self-cultivation], German ethnography owed many of its early ideas and thinkers to the debates between the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment projects. In the mid-1790s Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), the founder of the original University of Berlin, combined Herder’s ideas of the *Volksgeist* and human perfection with his own work on *Bildung* which he saw as the striving for individual human perfection.¹⁴⁵ Humboldt agreed with Herder that a people’s traditions, customs, religion, language and art – which,

¹⁴² Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961). As translated and quoted in Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 40/1.

¹⁴³ *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 42.

¹⁴⁴ J.G. Droysen, *Grundriss der Historik* (Veit & Comp., 1868). Translated and quoted in Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 43.

¹⁴⁵ Matti Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From *Volksgeist* and *Nationalcharakter* to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 21.

according to him, are the manifestations of the internal *Nationalcharakter* [national character] – are highly individual to their distinct culture and should not be judged by any external standards. Humboldt indicated that “comparative anthropology should encompass the entire human race”¹⁴⁶ but only focus on the nations that had reached higher self-realisation, like the Germans, English, French, Italians, and the ancient Greeks.

Humboldt envisioned that his ethnographical work would unify the “various spirits of the natural scientist, the historian, and the philosopher” by treating “empirical materials speculatively [and] historical objects philosophically.”¹⁴⁷ His aim was to find the underlying *Gattungs-Charakter* [character of the species], the common nature of humanity that he hoped to be able to construct once he could define the different historical details that belonged to the various nations. Although Humboldt’s *Plan einer vergleichenden Anthropologie* [Plan for a Comparative Anthropology] was not itself recognised as a contribution to general scholarship, it was an important step for his own scholarship. Many of his later, very influential writings, were based on these early ideas.¹⁴⁸

At the same time his brother Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was working on his lectures on the natural world that would later build the basis for his most famous work *Kosmos*, published in five volumes between 1845 and 1862. Humboldt saw nature as “a unity within the diversity of phenomena” which he sought to investigate empirically (following Herder), classify (following Kant) and approach inductively (following W. von Humboldt).¹⁴⁹ By compiling the physical reality of the natural world Humboldt aimed to establish empirical laws that illuminate the regularities of observed occurrences. Ultimately though, the compilation of these empirical laws is designed to lead to the natural laws governing the natural world. However, Humboldt pointed out that while the elaboration of these natural laws might be attainable in more uncomplicated fields like

¹⁴⁶ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Albert Leitzmann, 17 vols. (Berlin 1903-1936), I, 394; As translated and quoted in Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” 22.

¹⁴⁷ Humboldt, *Wilhelm von Humboldts gesammelte Schriften*, I, 390-7. As translated and quoted in Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” 22.

¹⁴⁸ “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” 24-7.

¹⁴⁹ Alexander von Humboldt, *Cosmos*, trans. E. C. Otte, vol. 1 (New York 1864). As quoted in Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” 38.

astronomy – he refers to the “high degree of simplicity to the mechanics of the heavens”¹⁵⁰ – he cautioned that these might never be possible for the complicated phenomena on earth.

Although Humboldt focussed on physical geography his publications and teachings were highly influential in the development of anthropological and ethnographical studies in Germany. By describing every aspect of the landscape and nature in distant countries and putting them in relation to the European environment, Humboldt sought to create a total empirical and harmonic picture of the world. This notion was taken up by his student Karl Ritter (1779-1859) who worked on the relationship between the natural and human worlds. Ritter followed Herder and Alexander von Humboldt in considering that the environment of a people had an important impact on their history and culture. He made this most clear in his *Erdkunde* [Geographical Studies]: “The customs of individuals and nations differ in all countries, because man is dependent on the nature of his dwelling-place.”¹⁵¹ Thus, the Humboldt brothers laid the groundwork for a German ethnographical tradition that would manifest itself in a more rigid form later in the 19th century.

This rigid form was particularly followed by two groups of scientists that set out to study non-European peoples from distinct points of views as explained by Paul Radin in his summary the state of German ethnography in 1933:

It is not surprising that the theories, couched in the customary philosophical terminology, were definitely ascendant. These theories centred around two men, one of them an outstanding figure in the history of geography of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Ratzel, the other a vastly overrated and muddle headed thinker named Adolf Bastian, a man of tremendous capacity for work and an almost equally tremendous capacity for not digesting the data. The first stood primarily for the theory that similarities in culture were to be interpreted as due to diffusion, and the second for the theory of psychical unity, viz., that the same ideas, beliefs and customs have been repeated again and again, at different times among different peoples. All German ethnology since their time has revolved around the discussion of these two theories.¹⁵²

Indeed, early German ethnography was primarily influenced by these two men and their schools of geographical diffusion and the psychic unity of mankind [*Einheit des*

¹⁵⁰ Humboldt, *Cosmos*, 1, 64; As quoted in Bunzl, "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture," 40.

¹⁵¹ Carl Ritter, *Geographical Studies*, trans. William Leonard Gage (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1863), 318; As quoted in Bunzl, "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture," 41.

¹⁵² Paul Radin, *The Method and Theory of Ethnology: An Essay in Criticism* (Basic Books, 1966), 72; As quoted in Kramer, "Empathy — Reflections on the History of Ethnology in Pre-Fascist Germany: Herder, Creuzer, Bastian, Bachofen, and Frobenius," 337/8.

menschlichen Geistes]. As such these two men were also the main source of ethnographic influence on the scholars discussed in the later chapters of this book. While chapter two will focus on their ideas and some of their writings on non-European objects, this section will consider their general ideas and give a brief outline of their influences on ethnographic research.

The “outstanding figure in the history of geography of the nineteenth century,” Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), is best known as the founder of anthropogeography and political geography. Schooled as a zoologist, he had worked and published on Charles Darwin’s, and his German promoter Ernst Haeckel’s, ideas about natural selection and the survival of the fittest. However, as will be discussed below, after initial support for their findings Ratzel would later publicly oppose their ideas. Instead, Ratzel began to work on Ritter’s and Alexander von Humboldt’s findings of the relationship between humans and nature. His most famous work *Anthropogeographie* was published in two volumes in 1882 and 1891 in which he set out to investigate the “effect of nature on the body and spirit of individuals and entire peoples.”¹⁵³ He linked physical anthropology and ethnography to his ideas and argued that “through the application of anthropogeographical methods, it was possible [... to] find the historical relations of peoples.”¹⁵⁴

The (in Radin’s terms) “vastly overrated and muddle headed thinker” Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) was, unlike Ratzel, a museum ethnographer and hence in close contact with ethnographic collections of material culture. As Alexander von Humboldt sought for global explanations for geographical novelties in Europe, both Ratzel and Bastian believed that studying the different peoples of the world would bring them closer to understanding human beings. But while Ratzel searched for the one beginning and traced its diffusion throughout the world, Bastian followed Wilhelm von Humboldt and believed in the psychic unity of mankind and a multilinear development of similar cultural traits.

Both Ratzel and Bastian worked within what we call physical anthropology today - measuring skulls, body parts and full bodies, comparing skin colours and hair structure - and both looked at material culture, although as a museum ethnographer Bastian laid more stress on this; but their ideas of the dispersion of similar traits were very different. As

¹⁵³ Friedrich Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 2. Aufl. ed., vol. 1 (Stuttgart: J. Engelhorn, 1899), 77/8; As translated and quoted in Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture,” 42.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

mentioned above, Ratzel believed in diffusion from one particular point. Bastian, however, was more flexible in his explanation of similar traits in different parts of the world. On the one hand, he supported the idea of independent invention but, on the other hand, he also thought it possible that diffusion did happen to a certain degree,¹⁵⁵ as he believed that there were “essentially next to no peoples left on earth who are without historical influences.”¹⁵⁶

Although Ratzel was based in Leipzig, removed from the centre of German ethnography in Berlin,¹⁵⁷ he had a large following and his ideas were very influential in ethnographic and geographic circles. Even though Bastian lived in Berlin, was the director of the Ethnographic Museum in Berlin and hence had the advantage of being at the centre of ethnographic research – both in terms of location and institution – Bastian and Ratzel were equally well known and equally respected. Moreover, both men gave courses on ethnography at German universities: Ratzel, after teaching in Munich, held a professorship in geography in Leipzig from 1886 and Bastian became an honorary professor of ethnography – the first in Germany – in Berlin in 1866.

As these two famous ethnographers demonstrate, although ethnographers did work and teach at universities, they were either honorary professors or were not employed as ethnographers, but as geographers, medical doctors or zoologists. The University of Berlin offered courses in *Anthropologie* or *Anthropologie und Psychologie* throughout the 19th century but students could only take single courses or study ethnography as part of geography. With the establishment of the Anthropological Institute in Munich in 1886, Johannes Ranke (1836-1916) held the first chair in physical anthropology. But this remained the only institution of its kind until 1907, when Herman Klaatsch (1863-1916) founded, and largely funded, an institute in Breslau.¹⁵⁸ The first doctorates of physical anthropology and ethnography at the University of Berlin were not established until 1915

¹⁵⁵ "Franz Boas and the Humboldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture," 51.

¹⁵⁶ Adolf Bastian, "Ethnologische Erörterungen," (1877). in; Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 4/5.

¹⁵⁸ Benoit Massin, "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," in *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, ed. George W. Stocking (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 84.

and 1922 respectively.¹⁵⁹ Instead, most research and intellectual exchange between scholars happened at the museums and the popular ethnographical societies.

Like many European museums, most ethnographic museums in Germany were developed out of royal collections and those of wealthy entrepreneurs who often accumulated both fine art and ‘curiosities’ from around the world, in order to show their wealth and *Bildung*. The biggest, most influential and best-funded ethnographic museum in Germany, the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, will be taken as an example to give an idea of the state of museum ethnography in Germany at the time. It was not only the first German museum solely devoted to ethnography, but the first museum in the world to do so.¹⁶⁰ Adolf Bastian, its co-founder and first director, saw non-European objects as “symbolic writing”¹⁶¹ which could only be put into a coherent stream of thought in the ethnographic museums established around the country. The *Völkerkundemuseum* was established upon request of the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* [Berlin Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory], founded by Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902) who set up the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* [German Society for Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory] around the same time.

Although, the Berlin Society was the most important and influential local ethnographical organisation in the country, there were similar projects set up in Leipzig, Würzburg, Munich, Hamburg, Freiburg, Bonn, Frankfurt, Mainz, and Heidelberg.¹⁶² As part of the German Anthropological Society, they met once a year in order to present their work, discuss new findings and promote their studies.¹⁶³ While a particularly heated debate during one of these meetings will be discussed in chapter three, the promotion of the field was an important part of every ethnographer’s work in order to raise awareness for their cause and secure funding. Bastian was a cunning marketer of ethnographic thinking and collecting and used his status and academic esteem to promote ethnography as such, but more importantly his museum in Berlin.

¹⁵⁹ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 45.

¹⁶⁰ H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 5.

¹⁶¹ Adolf Bastian, *Die Aufgaben der Ethnologie* (1898), 22/3.

¹⁶² Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 4/5.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

For example, in his numerous books he called ethnography the science of “world trading and cosmopolitan-international commerce,” or stressed the “naturally and beneficial alliance” between ethnography and colonial politics to the point of describing it as “colonial education.”¹⁶⁴ In this way, Bastian managed to build up one of the biggest and most complete collections in Europe. In 1897 he pointed out that “just as in every Museum of natural science, the ethnographic museum’s first duty is to strive for completeness. All classes of animals are included in a zoological museum; in a botanical museum, the selection of characteristic forms does not warrant the remainder of any gaps; and an ethnological museum has to offer displays from all peoples of the world.”¹⁶⁵

The acquisitiveness of German ethnographers is best explained by their urge to lead the scientific field and, as the young Franz Boas put it, “strike while the iron is hot.”¹⁶⁶ In 1888, just four years after Germany became a colonial power, the *Bundesratsabschluss* [federal law] was passed decreeing that all objects collected in the German colonial territories had to be sent to the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin first. It was the Berlin ethnographer’s decision which of the objects they wanted to keep for their museum and which ones they forwarded on to other museums.¹⁶⁷ Hence, the collection grew exponentially in the following years. The collection from Africa alone grew from 3,361 catalogued items in 1880 to 25,105 catalogued items in 1899. The overcrowding of the museum was already notorious before the turn of the century,¹⁶⁸ and the *Nationale Zeitung* [National Paper] even called it an “impossible condition of overfilling.”¹⁶⁹ The display cases started to overflow and the ever-expanding collections took over every part of the building including entryways, walkways, stairwells and offices.¹⁷⁰ The museum increasingly gave the impression of a warehouse rather than a scientific institution.

While the situation in Berlin was extreme, it was by no means the only ethnographic museum in Germany that grew rapidly between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The prolific efforts of German ethnographic collectors and scholars were

¹⁶⁴ Bastian in Cornelia Essner, “Berlins Völkerkundemuseum in Der Kolonialära, Anmerkung zum Verhältnis von Ethnologie und Kolonialismus in Deutschland,” in *Berlin in Geschichte Und Gegenwart: Jahrbuch Des Landesarchivs Berlin: 1982*, ed. Hans-Joachim Reichhardt (Berlin: Medusa, 1982), 67.

¹⁶⁵ Bastian, A. in Sigrid Westphal-Hellbusch, “Zur Geschichte des Museums,” in *100 Jahre Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin*, ed. K. Krieger and G. Koch (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1973), 4.

¹⁶⁶ Boas, F. in Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 30.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁶⁸ Westphal-Hellbusch, “Zur Geschichte des Museums,” 15.

¹⁶⁹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, E 600/04.

¹⁷⁰ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 1.

not just known within the boundaries of Germany but attracted attention throughout Europe. For example, in June 1898 Ormonde Maddock Dalton, a British Museum curator, paid an official visit to the ethnographic museums in Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden and Leipzig (see chapter four). He subsequently published a report on his visits¹⁷¹ that is not just evidence of the royal and public support which German ethnographic museums enjoyed but also of the cooperation between ethnographers from different countries. Despite moments of envy, most ethnographers agreed that the “larger project was ultimately the important one.”¹⁷² Besides occasional visits from foreign scholars, German ethnographers themselves went abroad in order to promote their own work and discuss the latest issues. At a time when the understanding of the German language was common amongst academics all over Europe, German ethnographers were a “powerful presence” at international conferences, as founders of internationally acclaimed journals, and as active participants in “international debates about human history, environmental assimilation, and race.”¹⁷³ Moreover, objects and information as well as catalogues and papers were exchanged constantly between European museums.¹⁷⁴

As much as foreign ethnographers looked to Germany for improvements in scholarship, Germany looked to other nations and their colonial developments. However, it is important to note that a German envy of the British Empire, for example, was on the one hand, only felt by certain groups, and on the other hand, was more an envy of the display of empire than of the empire itself.¹⁷⁵ The first German ethnographers, in fact, were rather critical of the German colonial aspirations and rather followed Herder in his view on colonialism. As was mentioned above, Herder strongly believed in the equality of each culture’s rights and importance. This means that, for Herder, colonisation is not only a meaningless event in terms of the dissemination of European cultures but also that the conversion of a culture by force destroys their individual character.¹⁷⁶ Bastian interprets Herder by pointing out that enforced colonisation is unnecessary as the knowledge of a culture, ascertained through ethnography, can be used to dominate it as

¹⁷¹ Ormonde Maddock Dalton, "Report on Ethnographical Museums in Germany, [to C.H. Read, Keeper of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography]," (1898).

¹⁷² Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 98.

¹⁷³ Penny and Bunzl, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*, 5.

¹⁷⁴ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 97.

¹⁷⁵ David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 38.

¹⁷⁶ Kramer, "Empathy — Reflections on the History of Ethnology in Pre-Fascist Germany: Herder, Creuzer, Bastian, Bachofen, and Frobenius," 339.

“the savages [*Wilde*] who are enveloped by the chains of their own thinking can easily be led on a rope.”¹⁷⁷

Although, Bastian’s interpretation is by no means as liberal as the original Herderian notion of equality, his, and many other German ethnographers, relationship with the German colonial project was ambivalent. On the one hand, colonial rule over their subjects helped collectors and ethnographers secure the objects to exhibit in their museums and study at home, which we have seen above helped particularly the Berlin museum to grow its collection. On the other hand, new borders outside Europe complicated the collection of objects and politicised expeditions as “colonial administrators, officials, and colonists began regarding German ethnologists as first and foremost foreign nationals rather than members of an international scientific community.”¹⁷⁸ But German ethnographers problematised not only the more difficult acquisitions of collections but also colonial politics and the bad treatment of colonial subjects. Bastian argued in the 1870s that “in our own European civilization [...] we would most certainly find a form of mental barbarism that not only equals that of the African or American Indian, but surpasses in stupidity any savage society.”¹⁷⁹ Felix von Luschan (1854-1924) followed his teacher Bastian in the condemnation of the colonial rule of the “white savages [...] who indeed think and act like savages.”¹⁸⁰

However, as has been pointed out above, the new colonial interests of Germany meant that in order to further their academic ambitions the ethnographers had to be careful in their attack on the colonial officials and, rather point towards the usefulness of ethnography as “colonial education.”¹⁸¹ Even though it is undoubtedly true that the colonial interest of politicians played an important role in the development of most ethnographic museums, it is also noticeable that it is neither the dominant nor the most important factor.¹⁸² Instead, the popularity of ethnographic museums, especially amongst the upper and middle classes, was a much more important factor. It not only raised the

¹⁷⁷ Adolf Bastian, *Controversen in der Ethnologie* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1893), vol. 1 p. X. As translated and quoted in Kramer, “Empathy — Reflections on the History of Ethnology in Pre-Fascist Germany: Herder, Creuzer, Bastian, Bachofen, and Frobenius,” 343.

¹⁷⁸ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*. 115

¹⁷⁹ Cited in *ibid.*, 99.

¹⁸⁰ Felix von Luschan ‘Vortrag auf dem VII Internationalen Geographen-Kongress in Berlin im Jahre 1899’ cited in *ibid.* For a more detailed account of German ethnographers attitude to colonialism see chapter 3.1.

¹⁸¹ Bastian, A. in Essner, “Berlins Völkerkundemuseum in der Kolonialära, Anmerkung zum Verhältnis von Ethnologie und Kolonialismus in Deutschland.”

¹⁸² Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 13.

public interest in ethnographic work but more importantly secured benefactors in terms of borrowing/gifting collections and borrowing/gifting money in order to buy objects and improve buildings.

Since the 18th century, German literature, travel writing and scientific texts referenced exotic places¹⁸³ and since the middle of the 19th century middle class journals like the *Illustrierte Zeitung* [Illustrated Paper] included ethnographic accounts.¹⁸⁴ Germany's first colonial exhibition took place in Bremen in 1890. The organisers combined entertaining rides and shows with the edification of a trade and colonial show to attract the masses but still work within German ideals of education as "amusement without some greater goal of self-improvement was seen as déclassé."¹⁸⁵ While presented as a trading exhibition, the trade show also included ethnographic objects from the countries in question and murals of the peoples producing them. Due to the very small revenue and the actual number of goods produced from the newly acquired African colonies, the discrepancy of actual produce and ethnographica on show in the African displays was particularly evident.

The report of the exhibition in the magazine *Daheim* pointed out that "the luxurious display of Indian and east-Asian products [*Erzeugnisse*] are particularly noteworthy. The Orient tempts the eyes with its all-encompassing splendour." The African displays, on the other hand, were especially "interesting to the visitor" because of "the representations" of the murals and ethnographic collections.¹⁸⁶ The Orient was presented as the producer of exotic luxury goods, Africa was represented as exotic. This dichotomy can also be seen in the accompanying catalogue which pointed out that "for handicrafts, [the African] objects without a doubt reveal a certain natural skill; but their taste [*Geschmack*] is still undeveloped." It goes on to describe the objects as "mostly grotesque and bizarre," a description often used for African works displayed in Germany, and the rest of Europe.¹⁸⁷

These first beginnings of a 'popular ethnography' were soon supported by the increasingly common *Völkerschau* [peoples show] in stage performances, zoos, panopticons and international expositions. Over a hundred large scale *Völkerschauen*

¹⁸³ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 12.

¹⁸⁴ Penny and Bunzl, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire*, 5.

¹⁸⁵ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 29.

¹⁸⁶ *Daheim*, 26 (1890) 682, translated and quoted in *ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸⁷ Catalogue of the trade show in Bremen, translated and quoted in *ibid.*, 45.

toured Germany and Europe between 1880 and the First World War.¹⁸⁸ From its beginnings as side attraction at trading shows and international expositions,¹⁸⁹ the *Völkerschau* became a success in its own right as the century came to its close.

The biggest and most famous *Völkerschau* in Germany took place as part of the 1896 Berlin Industrial Exhibition. More than one hundred performers were brought to Germany to live in mock villages, engaging in their 'normal' daily activities, craft making, and performing in shows.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, the show boasted one of the largest telescopes of the world, the first public demonstration of Röntgen's X-rays and was designed to demonstrate Germany's as well as Berlin's industrial might.¹⁹¹ The best known organiser of travelling and static *Völkerschauen* is Carl Hagenbeck (1844-1913), the founder of the Hamburg Zoo and planner of the African display at the Berlin Industrial Exhibition. He brought over 40 Africans from the German protectorate in East Africa and enlisted the help of Felix von Luschan as an expert to help set up the mock village and decide on the performance they thought reasonable for the German public.¹⁹²

German ethnographers not only participated in these *Völkerschauen* as experts on colonial display but they also took the opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge without having to leave the country as fieldwork was not yet common. There are many studies dealing with the different aspects of these shows such as their development and the recruitment and agency of the performers.¹⁹³ While a closer look will be taken in chapter three at this point it suffices to highlight that although the ethnographers sometimes complained about natives being uncooperative or dressing in European clothes, the collaboration between organiser and ethnographer was a fruitful one for both sides. The organiser gained legitimacy for his show and the ethnographers were able to measure and question peoples they might otherwise not have had access to.¹⁹⁴ Johannes Ranke pointed out that "European travellers rarely had the opportunity to make measurements and observations, and, even when they did, the data that they produced were seldom reliable." So, according to him "it was methodologically more sound [...] for anthropologists to

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸⁹ For a more detailed analysis of peoples shows in international expositions see Greenhalgh, *Fair World: A History of World's Fairs and Expositions from London to Shanghai 1851-2010*.

¹⁹⁰ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 24.

¹⁹¹ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 51.

¹⁹² Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 26.

¹⁹³ Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," *Cultural Anthropology* 1993, 341; Hilke Thode-Arora, "Hagenbeck's European Tours: The Development of the Human Zoo," in *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, ed. Pascal Blanchard (2008), 167.

¹⁹⁴ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 78.

study ‘representatives of foreign nations’ in Germany, where one had, and could use comfortably, all the instruments that one might need.”¹⁹⁵

However, even with the popularity of these *Völkerschauen* most Germans would never have encountered people from non-European countries and were more likely to gain their knowledge about how these ‘exotic’ peoples looked from images in the press and advertisement campaigns.¹⁹⁶ The longest prevailing and most famous advertising character was the *Tabakmoor* [tobacco moor]. Represented as a black skinned figure with full lips and a feathery or leafy skirt and head dress, the *Tabakmoor* sums up the complex dichotomy of advertising with non-Europeans in Germany and Europe. The first of these figures appear on tobacco bales in the seventeenth century, representing the exotic origin of the product from the ‘New World,’ and were used to represent this well into the twentieth century.¹⁹⁷

The representations of non-European people in advertisements became more varied with advancements in printing technology, but the generalisation of ‘exotic’ stayed mostly the same. Representations of “Neger” “Indianer” and “Mohren” were, despite the ethnographic research on their origins and different physical appearances, uncannily similar.¹⁹⁸ The association of ‘exotic’ and ‘imported’ were far more important for the advertisers than ethnographic accuracy. However, the publicity surrounding ‘exotic’ and non-European peoples, even if inaccurate, stereotyped and often racist - as much as this term might be applied to a 19th century public - also raised interest in colonial displays and ethnographic museums. As such, it indirectly supported ethnographic research which had migrated from the museum to the university as it sought to find its place within the dichotomy of the sciences and humanities.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this brief summary of the four main frameworks that form the premise for the reception of African art in Germany between 1894 and 1915, the decades leading up to the publication of Grosse’s *Die Anfänge der Kunst* were years of great

¹⁹⁵ As translated and paraphrased in Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 36.

¹⁹⁶ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 107.

¹⁹⁷ For a more detailed account of non-European people in German advertising see *ibid.*, 70, 189.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

cultural and political change. The unification of the German Empire brought changes to society, and art history and ethnography were established as autonomous university disciplines. All these different changes made an impact on the *Bildungskultur* [culture of education].

While the German economy and land mass were united in 1871, the people and their culture took a lot longer to assimilate. As the German population grew rapidly and more and more people moved to the expanding cities, *Bildung* came to the centre of attention in order to prepare and train people for the new jobs that were created through the industrialisation process. Universities grew as enrolment numbers were raised, and newspaper and book publications increased in order to cover the rising demand for entertainment as well as information. At the same time fairs, theatres and museums became more popular, bringing people together to indulge in spectacles of self-edification.

This importance on self-edification grew out of contemporary scholarship on culture and *Bildung* which also influenced the translation of African art. Influenced by Herder's use of culture in its plural form and the present *Volksgeist*, scholars, discussed in this thesis, followed in a long tradition of philosophical reflections on humanity and its many facets. Within the growing universities and the ongoing specialisation of scholars, disciplines, like art history and ethnography were able to establish themselves as autonomous. At the beginning of the time frame under scrutiny in this thesis, both disciplines were still engaging in defining their parameters, within themselves and within the framework of the *Wissenschaften*. These different ideas and notions affected ethnographic writing as much as it did Ernst Grosse's philosophies and reflections on art that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Part 1

The Discussion of the One Beginning or the Many Beginnings of Art

**Researching non-European objects as art
objects and Ernst Grosse's philosophy**

This first part of the thesis, which follows, deals with developmental approaches to African visual culture. Within this scheme, this chapter is particularly concerned with the early questions that arose once African visual culture was increasingly studied by scholars and philosophers of art. This interest was supported by Ernst Grosse (1862-1927) who wrote that his work, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, (1894), would have fulfilled its purpose if it would “convince those researchers of art and culture, who are looking for answers, that answers can be found in the field of studying the natural and cultural conditions of the art of primitive peoples.”¹ Although, his hope of influencing art historians with this book was not in vain, he had to wait another six years before the first researcher of art would publish on the art of ‘primitive peoples’ and even this publication was a mere survey text of the available art and not a study of the natural and cultural conditions that would lead to more profound answers (see chapter three). Nevertheless, Ernst Grosse’s *Anfänge der Kunst* was an important step for the recognition of African art as more than a mere symptom of a people’s character.

As can be seen from the title of Grosse’s book, he was particularly concerned with the idea of non-European art as the beginning of art itself. As will be shown below, Grosse made use of both a Hegelian and a Herderian notion of ‘beginning’ and thus related to contemporary ethnographic research that analysed both avenues. This chapter will focus on these different ideas of beginnings and their importance for the study of African art. In particular it will focus on two quite different ethnographic works, by Bastian and Ratzel that were equally popular and significant. The two authors had conflicting ideas about the notion of beginning and the use of studying visual culture as part of ethnographic enquiries and as such, stand as useful examples for the discussions among ethnographers. Subsequently, the chapter will turn towards Ernst Grosse’s use of the notion of beginning.

Grosse was the first scholar to translate non-European objects in German museums art historically and not just ethnographically as had been done before. In this way, he opened up a conversation that would soon be held between a variety of different scholars. As was mentioned in the last chapter, this conversation between scholars of different disciplines and their diverse audiences was marked by a common background in the study of art history at university level. This common background will also be seen in Grosse’s writing.

¹ Ernst Grosse, *Die Anfänge Der Kunst* (Freiburg: Akademische Verlagsbuchhandlung von J.C.B. Mohr, 1894), 30.

Chapter 2.1 The context

As was discussed in the first chapter, German ethnography before 1900 was mainly headed by two distinguished scholars and will here be represented by two books – *Zur Mythologie und Psychologie der Nigritier* (1894) by Adolf Bastian and *Völkerkunde* (1885) by Friedrich Ratzel – in order to give an understanding of the way the two most popular and influential ethnographers at the time dealt with African art. To do so, this section includes a short synopsis of the aforementioned ethnographers and their ideas. Subsequently, it will analyse the way in which the books translated African objects to their readership before they were recognised as art. These two different translations stand as an example of the disciplinary conventions of ethnography at the time and their procedures of dealing with non-European art within their interpretation of ‘beginnings’.

Adolf Bastian (1826-1905) was educated as a General Practitioner, was living in the capital city, Berlin and was the director of the *Völkerkundemuseum*. Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) was educated as a zoologist, was living in Munich (1875-86) and Leipzig (1886-1904) and taught geography at university. The differences in the curriculum vitae of the most influential ethnographers in Germany at that time is not just exemplary for the whole field, which was not yet established as an autonomous university discipline, but also represents their differences in attitude, method and aim. The most important similarity between the two men is that both, though well-travelled, had not seen all parts of the Africa continent they talked about. Instead, they acquired their knowledge about different countries, environments and peoples from books, interviews with travellers and, on rare occasions, from interviewing people from Africa who had been brought to Germany as part of popular ‘human zoos’ (see chapter 3). The following pages will concentrate on some examples of their work in order to illustrate how African material culture was discussed in Germany at the time.

Bastian took up Herder’s idea of the *Volksgeist* which he interprets in close agreement with Wilhelm von Humboldt’s *Nationalcharakter*. He calls these national peculiarities of a people *Völkergedanken* [national thoughts/ideas] which were a combination of geographical factors and trading relationships with other peoples. In his “thesaurus of scientific research” – the museum – Bastian sought to collect all knowledge of human history for a comparative analysis of “mankind’s many variations.”²

² Bastian, *Die Aufgaben der Ethnologie*, 22/3.

Adolf Bastian was not only one of the founders and the director of the *Völkerkundemuseum* Berlin [today Ethnological Museum in Berlin], which will be discussed below, his numerous articles in ethnographical and geographical journals and his appearance in popular magazines also shaped the image of ethnography in Germany. Trained as a medical practitioner he went on his first journeys to Australia, Africa, India, Mexico and Peru as a ship's doctor. Alongside his duties on board he began the systematic analysis of different peoples in the countries he visited. Later, he participated in the establishment of ethnography as an independent science and was also the first scientist in Germany to become an academic ethnologist employed by a university when he was employed by Berlin University in 1866.³

In his article 'Die Aufgaben der Ethnologie' [The Obligations of Ethnology] (1898), Bastian pointed out that ethnography, as an extension of its "closely related sister" anthropology, is not just concerned with man but with people and the "social sphere" of societies.⁴ "For a more precise definition, anthropology is a matter of the psychophysical individual, man in the narrower sense; ethnology is a matter of man in his zoo-political appearance, both, therefore of man."⁵ Bastian drew the conclusion that the "physical unity of the species man [has already] been anthropologically established."⁶ Therefore, ethnography also comprises the social cohabitation of different groups and cultures which led him to establish the psychic unity of mankind.

Although, broadly speaking, Bastian was a follower of Herder he was also a child of his time. Thus, he, like many other European scientists, was sure that there must be a difference between their *Bildungskultur* [culture of self-cultivation, learning] and the culture of non-Europeans living a life so unlike their own. Bastian divided humanity into the *Naturvölker* [natural peoples] and the *Kulturvölker* [cultural peoples], terms that were commonly used in Germany at the time. According to Bastian, anthropology could only investigate the *Kulturvölker*, and therefore failed to deliver a science of all people, while contemporary ethnography was able to analyse *Naturvölker* as well. Written records of the past of the *Kulturvölker* could easily be explored by historians and philologists in

³ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 19.

⁴ Bastian, *Die Aufgaben der Ethnologie*, 1/2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶ "Ethnologische Erörterungen."; As translated and quoted in Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 22.

libraries, but the history of the *Naturvölker* needed to be established through their visual culture.

According to Bastian, analytical studies of this visual culture were not just important to the understanding of non-European peoples in particular, but also of humanity in general. Following Alexander von Humboldt's empirical method, Bastian hoped to collect the *Völkergedanken* of the diverse *Naturvölker* to compare these with the *Völkergedanken* of the *Kulturvölker*, already assembled by anthropology. By comparing the *Völkergedanken* of different peoples, Bastian strove to provide evidence of the psychic unity of social thoughts. Through the study of the *Naturvölker*, who live, according to Bastian, under the most basic circumstances, he believed one could define the *Elementargedanken*, a "set of seminal ideas from which every civilization had grown," which could therefore become a "methodological tool for unraveling more complex civilisations."⁷ These elementary thoughts can be seen as a broadening of Herder's thoughts on culture, who proposed that the *Geist* that rules all human lives is formed into different *Volksgeister*, shared by a people.

Hence, Bastian thought that the understanding of the *Naturvölker* could be the key to help European scientists and their fellow citizens to better understand themselves. Bastian saw the ethnographic museum as a collection of empirical relations and, although he agreed with Alexander von Humboldt that the prospects of deciphering natural laws from these empirical collections were small, he still argued that "ethnology seemed to offer a ray of hope [...] that we might finally find a solution to the contemporary situation in which our world view is both unsure and fragmented. Ethnology seems to offer the best chance to put the science of man on that same solid base of actual proof as we find now in the natural sciences."⁸

Tying into his training as a medical professional, Bastian began the systematic analysis of the countries he visited.⁹ His book *Zur Mythologie und Psychologie der Nigritier in Guinea (einschließlich des Kolonial-Gebietes Togo) mit Bezugnahme auf socialislische Elementargedanken* [The Mythology and Psychology of the Negroes in Guinea

⁷ Bastian, 'Alexander von Humboldt' in *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 23.

⁸ Bastian, *Heilige Sage der Polynesier*, in *ibid.*, 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

(including the colonial-territory of Togo) with *Regard to the Social Elementary Thoughts*], 1894, will be exemplary for his discussion on African material culture.

In the elaborate introduction, Bastian refers to the benefits of the *Elementargedanken* and compares their identification to the discovery of cells in biology as they both lay out general laws for their respective fields.¹⁰ Moreover, he emphasises that it is “the doctrine of the *Elementargedanken*” that “enables ethnographers to manage the large quantities of material [that can be found in museum collections].”¹¹ As has been discussed in the previous chapter, as in many of his writings, this study on the peoples in Guinea is elusively written and must have been next to incomprehensible for the layman. Moreover, his references to the *Elementargedanken* also allude to his interpretation of the notion of beginnings in the Herderian sense of multitude strands of constant change.

Despite making references to several art forms, Bastian did not name a specific object but rather groups of objects. For example when looking at Fanthi¹² religion, he talks about the representation of the god as idols and notes that these have to be made of material from the region.¹³ However, he does not mention any of the Fanthi objects that he had at his disposal in his collections, nor did his 160-page-long book include any images, apart from a map of Guinea. In general, Bastian does not mention objects very often and when he does, he uses them as he did the Fanthi idols, only in order to talk about the customs and religion of the peoples he is concerned with.

His *Mythologie und Psychologie der Nigritier* is a good example of his work in general as he does not use his collection to look at specific stylistic peculiarities of single objects or treat it as the collection of one people but rather sees it as a repository of ethnographic information. Hence, he is not interested in single objects or groups of objects at all but only in their qualities as aids to indexicalise their makers within his study of the *Naturvölker*. The collections are not synecdoches for a particular style, development of form or art production of a people but only for the underlying *Völkergedanken* of their makers.

¹⁰ Adolf Bastian, *Zur Mythologie und Psychologie der Nigritier in Guinea, mit Bezugnahme auf socialistische Elementargedanken* (Berlin 1894), VII.

¹¹ Ibid., 4.

¹² Today known under the name Fante.

¹³ Bastian, *Zur Mythologie und Psychologie der Nigritier in Guinea, mit Bezugnahme auf socialistische Elementargedanken*, 46.

Friedrich Ratzel gained his zoology degree in Heidelberg, Jena and Berlin and subsequently published a book on the nature and development of the organic world [*Sein und Werden der organischen Welt*, 1869].¹⁴ This book was largely influenced by Darwin's work on *The Origins of Species*,¹⁵ which Ratzel was acquainted with through Ernst Haeckel whose lectures he had sat in on during his time in Jena.¹⁶ A more in-depth look at Haeckel's and Ratzel's views of Darwinian thought and, particularly, Social Darwinism will be presented in Chapter three but it needs to be mentioned here that Ratzel, though influenced by these thoughts in his early work, later distanced himself from Haeckel and came to vehemently oppose Social Darwinism. Nevertheless, throughout his career Ratzel kept true to some of Darwin's general findings; he believed in the unity of all organic life on earth and its constant dynamism through the process of natural selection which, most importantly, included human beings as a part of this whole.¹⁷

After finishing his education in 1868, Ratzel began his extensive travels in the Mediterranean, North America, Cuba and Mexico which were partly funded by becoming a travel correspondent for the *Kölnische Zeitung*. Time spent in the growing cities of the United States of America especially influenced his theory of anthropogeography which dealt with "the problems of large-scale human migration and dispersal of settlement; the process of the physical expansion of the state, its causes and ramifications; and the determining influence exerted by the environment on humans, both as individual organisms but more importantly on the different forms of social life."¹⁸ Today, Ratzel is best known for this theory which he published in a two volume study *Anthropogeography*, named after the theory, in 1882 and 1891. Although this book exemplifies Ratzel's interpretation of beginning in the Hegelian sense, this thesis is not concerned with his ideas on diffusion but, rather, with his treatment of African ethnographica. Hence, this chapter will concentrate on the first volume of his three-volume study on *Völkerkunde* [Ethnology], 1885-1901.

¹⁴ Friedrich Ratzel, *Sein und Werden der organischen Welt: Eine populäre Schöpfungsgeschichte* (Gebhardt und Reiland, 1869).

¹⁵ Charles Darwin, *On the Origins of Species* (London: Murray, 1859).

¹⁶ Luca Muscara, "Understanding Ratzel and the Challenge of Complexity," in *Europe between Political Geography and Geopolitics*, ed. Marco Antonisch (Rome: Memorie della Società Geografica Italiana, 2001), 81.

¹⁷ Mark Bassin, "Friedrich Ratzel 1844-1904," in *Geographers: Bio- Bibliographical Studies*, ed. Thomas Walter Freeman (London: Mansell, 1987).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

He starts his discussion with a lengthy introduction to the main features of ethnography in which he outlines his aims for the discipline of ethnology and his ideas about culture, religion, languages, agriculture, clothing, architecture, family and the state. Ratzel sets out to distinguish peoples by concentrating on differences in their development and circumstances as, according to him, the cultural differences between two peoples are not necessarily related to their skills. As discussed above, he was particularly interested in the way in which environmental factors shaped human society and development and was, as such, following Herder in his ideas on climate (see chapter one). In particular, he points out in the introduction that “the geographical position (considering the outer circumstances) and historical contemplations (consideration of the development) will thus go hand in hand.”¹⁹

Considering the frameworks Ratzel used to deliver his ideas, one notices that he applied the same differentiation between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* as was generally done in Germany at the time. He points out that *Naturvölker* act under the constraint of nature and are more dependent on nature than the *Kulturvölker* are. He admits that the term *Naturvolk* might not be flawless but he sees it as neutral and non-judgemental by comparison with some of the other terms used to describe the same peoples like “Wilde, peuples primitifs [or] lower races.”²⁰

Moreover, Ratzel saw the unity of mankind as not present in the psyche, like Bastian, but in the body. This is the implication of his question: “but have we changed so much as individuals? Compared to our ancestors, are we much superior in strength of body and mind, in virtues and abilities as the Tubu compared to theirs’? One may doubt.”²¹ He saw the task of *Völkerkunde* not in demonstrating the differences between “the components of mankind” but the proof of the transitions and the inner connections, as “mankind is a whole, albeit in manifold formation.”²² He further points out that these differences are not accounted for by characteristics that are “anthropological (that is in the build of a human) but [that are] cultural (that is in the progress of human development).”²³ That these comments are not meant in the Social Darwinistic sense becomes clear when he says that

¹⁹ Friedrich Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Leipzig: Verlag des Bibliographischen Institut, 1885), 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

²¹ Ibid., 4.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 5.

the idea of evolution, that layers the different peoples on top of each other, was not formed through professional considerations but through a mere “general feeling.”²⁴

He goes on to note that “the studies of recent years that compared races only led to decrease the assumed anthropological differences and that they do not feed into the idea that the ‘so-called’ lower races of humankind show the evolution from animal to human.”²⁵ Moreover, he refutes the idea that the *Naturvölker* are without history. While he acknowledges that the main difference between *Kultur-* and *Naturvölker* is the lack of historiography, he concludes that both are part of a general history of mankind.

The main focus of this first Volume then lies in the *Naturvölker* of Africa, separated from the general introduction by the pagination which begins anew. Ratzel gives a general overview of the continent of Africa, concentrating on the physical geography and people. Although he believes that most parts of Africa are made up of one people in only slightly different forms he structures his book into chapters on South Africans, Central Africans and West Africans and distinguished further between the different peoples as they were known in Germany at the time; ie. the part on South Africa includes the *Hottentotten*, *Buschmänner* and *Kaffern*. Each of these subchapters on a people deals with similar parts of their life, like weapons, dwelling, tools, family life, political circumstances, religion and so on.

Of particular interest for this study is his discussion on the arts and skills of the different peoples. In his general introduction, Ratzel already mentions the West African’s “fondness for the depiction of the ugly”²⁶ and the ‘Bushmen’s’ skill in drawing outlines of humans and animals.²⁷ Apart from this early mention of artistic skills, Ratzel mainly uses objects such as baskets, footstools and spoons to discuss their owners and how they are used. These discussions on 800 pages are illustrated with 494 images in the text, 2 maps and 10 coloured plates that are inserted between the pages with text. While the plates depict large collections of various different objects from the same region, the in-text illustrations concentrate on specific people, types of object, flora or fauna.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶ Ibid., 53.

²⁷ Ibid., 69.

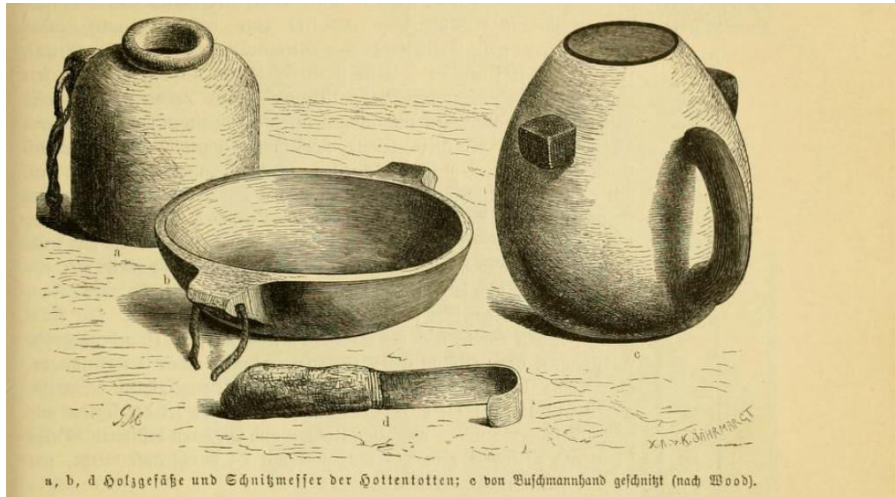


Figure 1 Illustration of "wooden bowls and a carving knife of the hottentots" from Ratzel's *Völkerkunde*, p.93.

and a carving knife of the *Hottentotten* which are shown on a grainy surface which appears to be a table. The image itself is signed K. Jahrmargt and is according to the caption after an image by the illustrator Wood. Another one shows a quiver and arrows from the Akka arranged on a table covered in a white cloth.²⁸ As well as many other representations of 'the exotic Africa' - like groups of people that were positioned in

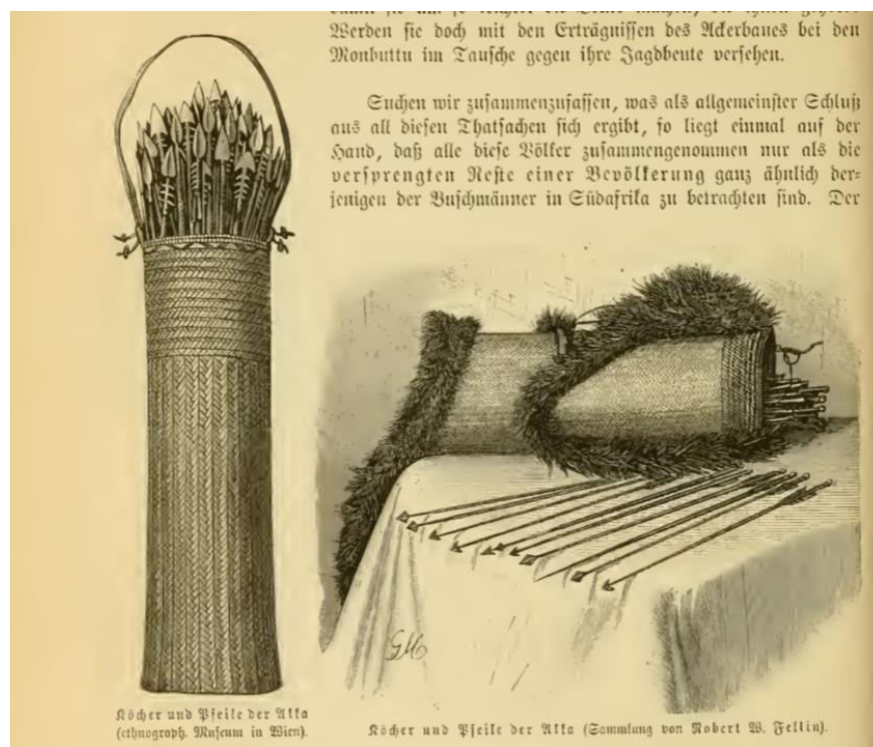


Figure 2 Illustration of "quiver and arrows of the Akka" from Ratzel's *Völkerkunde*, p. 126.

²⁸ Ibid., 126.

Most of the illustrations of the commodities show a small group of objects with a hint of the ground that they are standing on. For example, on page 93 is an illustration of wooden bowls

domestic spaces or many different faces on a single ground - these images are constructed to appeal to the European eye.

In his discussion on the art industry of West Africa he employs a very strong verbal-visual syntagm as

the text often refers to specific objects and the captions of the illustrations refer back to the accompanying text. Thus, it is apparent that the study is first and foremost constructed for readers and that the illustrations are there to support the text. It functions as a suppository of information on the visual characteristics of these objects but if one is not willing to read the text these images lose some of their synecdochic character and become more metaphoric. The way in which the objects are grouped, supports their metaphoric reading for European viewers as they would be more inclined to appreciate the composition of the overall arrangement of objects within the illustration.

While he only mentions the southern and central Africans as carving their wooden belongings intricately and making jewellery he devotes several paragraphs to the “art industry”²⁹ of West Africa. As mentioned above, Ratzel often uses the term ‘art’ and language that is usually associated with art historical writing – e.g. “stylized” or “arabesques”³⁰ – to talk about African material and visual culture. However, he generally prefixes the use of these terms with a negative denominator such as “raw” or the “poor beginnings of art.”³¹ One of his main arguments is that these art objects are ugly. Thus, he points out that “In the Display of the ugly, no people exceeds these West Africans who on top of that love sculpture so much that they cannot get enough of these grotesque faces, which they make in every accessible material.”³² Moreover, he claims that they are not just ugly due to a lack of skill but also because they are made “brutally true to nature” and in order to “exaggerate the ugly.”³³ When talking about “fetish sculptures,” he calls the use of cowrie shells as eyes and mirrored glass for the adornment of the stomach as “such childish events that one could laugh, if it didn’t concern the Gods of these people and if the effects did not turn out to be so barbarically ugly.”³⁴

He goes on to say that “this art is still the most enjoyable when it is naturalistic or stylized,”³⁵ pointing out that the “rawness of the depiction” is hard to behold. When he finally states that “however, there are works in which the art decisively asserts itself” he makes sure to follow this up by saying that “one is arguably entitled [...] to assume European influence.”³⁶ He follows this statement by saying that the ivory works of the

²⁹ Ibid., 590.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 591.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

coasts of Loango and Cameroon “often show not inconsiderable artistry and imagination” and a brass staff from the Yoruba Ogboni cult [in modern-day Nigeria] is an example of the “artistic side” of their metal industry. Thus, by commenting on the European influence of these objects he is able to praise them without detracting from his earlier statements of the rawness of West African art.

As mentioned above, both Bastian and Ratzel were promoting the importance of collections of non-European art and used these collections in their own work. But as has been shown, they used these collections in different ways and for different aims. Bastian followed Herder’s idea of beginning while Ratzel, with his stress on Darwin and diffusionism was more akin to Hegel’s notion of beginning. Moreover, while Bastian was not interested in the objects themselves, but rather in what the general occurrence of the practice could tell him about the maker’s psychic character, Ratzel interpreted single objects as well as the techniques and customs that are related to them as symptoms of the maker’s culture. As the two most influential scholars of this first generation of ethnographers their personal practices give a good indication of the state of German ethnographic writing at the time and emphasise the new avenue in which Grosse took the study of African art.

Chapter 2.2 Ernst Grosse and *Die Anfänge der Kunst*

Before discussing Grosse's *Anfänge der Kunst* in detail we will consider his life and career, as an understanding of his background sheds light on his ideas and attitudes. Ernst Grosse (1862-1927) was born in Stendal and was already acquainted with non-European art as a young boy. In a diary entry written several years after it had happened he writes:

I relished in the real whole artistic joy for the eyes on the day that I first saw Japanese tools in a shop window. I did in fact love Japanese art at first sight: and since I was 15 I have never been unfaithful. They were very modest things I admired then – I could still draw and paint them – a black lacquered box with a golden bamboo branch. Small vases and cups made of so-called Kaga porcelain, tea caddies made of a yellowish faience with chrysanthemum shrubs in bright enamel colours [...] a paper knife with bronze handle which depicted a group of cranes (I have given it to my father for Christmas) [...], it is incredible how sharp and colourful all of it is still in front of my eyes.³⁷

This early interest in Japanese tools, that Grosse reminisces about after he had established himself as a connoisseur of Japanese art, affected his entire life. He received his academic education at the universities in Berlin, Munich and Heidelberg where he attended lectures in German philology, Romance philology, history, art history and literary history.³⁸ While it is not possible to say for certain that he heard Adolf Bastian's lectures on ethnography during his time in Berlin, Pamela Elbs-May speculates that Grosse's contribution to Bastian's *Festschrift*³⁹ for his 70th birthday was potentially due to him being a former student.⁴⁰ Moreover, he was studying at the University of Munich at the same time that Ratzel was teaching there. So, while one cannot reconstruct Grosse's exact university education his early interest in non-European objects and the circumstances of his being at the same universities at the same time as Bastian and Ratzel make it possible to assume that he would have either attended some of their lectures or had at least been aware of their work when he was still studying.

³⁷ Ernst Grosse, 1904/5 quoted in Pamela Elbs-May, "Ernst Grosses Wirken an der freiburger Universität und seine Museumstätigkeit," in *Als Freiburg die Welt entdeckte: 100 Jahre Museum für Völkerkunde* ed. Eva Gerhards and Edgar Dürrenberger (Freiburg: Promo Verlag, 1995), 175.

³⁸ Ibid., 173.

³⁹ Rudolf Virchow, *Festschrift für Adolf Bastian zu seinem 70. Geburtstage 26. Juni 1896* (Berlin: Reimer, 1896).

⁴⁰ Elbs-May, "Ernst Grosses Wirken an der freiburger Universität und seine Museumstätigkeit," 173.

As Wilfried van Damme has already observed,⁴¹ the translator and editor of the English edition of *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, Frederick Starr, stated in his preface to *The Beginnings of Art* that Grosse “studied philosophy and the natural sciences.”⁴² Both Elbs-May and van Damme agree that Grosse should be considered a philosopher by training and his discussions in *Die Anfänge der Kunst* certainly support this description. However, as most ethnographers of Grosse’s generation did not study ethnography as a discipline in its own right, this classification of Grosse should by no means exempt him from being part of ethnographic discussions. Many scholars who contributed to ethnography had their disciplinary origins elsewhere (for example, medicine and geography). His doctoral thesis (1887) discussed *The Study of Literature: its aim and method* with a special emphasis on Herbert Spencer. In this thesis, Grosse pointed out that literature was a product of its time, and thus places himself in a Herderian tradition, while at the same time relating Spencer’s law of development to literary history.

Moreover, he pointed out that in order to understand complicated literary works one must first analyse the simplest, an approach that he came back to in his *Anfänge der Kunst*.⁴³ This idea is not just influenced by Spencer’s notion of Darwinism but, more importantly, by Bastian’s attitude towards the study of *Elementargedanken*, which Bastian hoped to discover by studying the ‘simple’ *Naturvölker*. Grosse does not mention Bastian and only by implication refers to ethnography.⁴⁴ However, as was mentioned previously, it is reasonable to assume that he was taught by Bastian who had already stressed the importance of deciphering simple cultural data for the study of complex societies. Despite Grosse’s tentative engagement with ethnography in his doctoral thesis he seems to have taken a stronger interest in such matters before he completed his habilitation⁴⁵ in 1889.

His trial lecture at Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg, dealt with ‘The Significance of Ethnology for Aesthetics.’ It gives reason to believe that Grosse would have attended some of the lectures on ethology by the philosopher Alois Riehl who taught

⁴¹ Wilfried van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," *Anthropos* 107, no. 2 (2012): 498.

⁴² Ernst Grosse, *The Beginning of Art*, trans. Frederick Starr (New York: Appleton, 1897). From here onwards a reference to *The Beginning of Art* will refer to this translation of Grosse’s book by Starr while a reference to *Die Anfänge der Kunst* means the German original with my own translation.

⁴³ van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 498.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 499.

⁴⁵ Habilitation is a postdoctoral qualification necessary to teach at university level in Germany.

in Freiburg at the same time.⁴⁶ Staying in Freiburg, Grosse became a private lecturer in 1889, was promoted to associate professor in 1901 and finally became a professor of philosophy and ethnology in 1921. During this time he sporadically gave lectures in philosophy but preferred to concentrate on ethnography and art history as his chosen subjects to teach.⁴⁷ Furthermore, in the year 1889 he also became curator of Freiburg's city art collections - including the ethnographic collections. Thus, he held offices which made him familiar with both European and non-European objects.

Throughout his career, Grosse supported the advancement of ethnography and called attention to the need to establish autonomous chairs in ethnography at German universities as well as to improve museum displays for educational purposes. This is reflected in his own work by a strong connection between his university teaching and his role as a curator of the city collections which he often used as demonstration material in lectures.⁴⁸ His plans for the display of the ethnographic collections included large, open rooms with attention to not overcrowding spaces or cabinets, special buildings for large items and an outdoor space for the erection of representative buildings. Furthermore, he supported the notion of exchanging duplicates with other museums and creating dedicated collections for teaching and for exhibiting.⁴⁹ Due to his dependency on the city council, his ideas for the ethnographic collections in the city gallery were not realised and although he called his time at the gallery a "complete failure",⁵⁰ they still give a good indication of his attitude to museum practice and ethnographic studies.

These studies were shaped by his, at times frustrating, work in the museum, his love for Japanese art and culture and his varied university education. Most ethnographers of his generation were trained as medical doctors or geographers and hence came from scientific backgrounds and were trying to establish ethnography as a science as well. Grosse, however, was trained in a humanistic tradition and as such, was more eclectic in his use of the methods and approaches from the natural sciences. He used systematic scientific approaches for humanistic topics, like literature in his Ph.D. thesis and art in

⁴⁶ Elbs-May, "Ernst Grosses Wirken an der freiburger Universität und seine Museumstätigkeit," 174.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ernst Grosse, Diaries in *ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁰ Ernst Grosse, Diaries in *ibid.*

Die Anfänge der Kunst, as a way to rejuvenate the humanities,⁵¹ while other researchers of non-European art used them out of the conviction that their work was scientific.

His teaching at the university in Freiburg is informed by this connection between the humanities and ethnography. He dedicated his first lecture series to the *Kunst der Naturvölker* [Art of the Natural Peoples].⁵² Although he was offered a position at the University of Berlin, Grosse remained in Freiburg until his death in 1927, only interrupted by several trips to Japan which enabled him to continue his research on Japanese art. During one of his visits to Japan he was appointed the surveyor for purchases and donations of the Berlin Museum and thus had a considerable influence on the collections of East Asian Art. His attitude towards collecting material culture and its study can be traced from a letter he wrote to Felix von Luschan, the Keeper of the African Collection in the Berlin *Völkerkundemuseum*, in 1897 in which he exclaims:

It is exasperating, how little we know and how little we will know even in the best case. Everywhere, most of it is lost forever. How complicated is really all that at first seemed so simple and clear. We have to start all over again, unfortunately with the awareness that we will nowhere come to an end.⁵³

This letter, written three years after the publication of *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, gives an idea of the sense of urgency that was felt by German ethnographers, and shared by Grosse, who were afraid that the authentic culture of different peoples would disappear through contact with Europeans. Von Luschan was especially explicit when he pointed out that “ethnographic collections and studies can only be made now, in the 12th hour, or not at all.”⁵⁴

Grosse’s first publication sits right in the middle of the different ways of studying art and the philosophical outlook on aesthetics that were propagated by the supporters of Herder’s and Winckelmann’s ideas. As mentioned above, these ideas can be further differentiated by applying the terms *Ästhetik* [aesthetics] *Kunstgeschichte* [history of art] *Kunstphilosophie* [philosophy of art] and *Kunstwissenschaft* [science of art]. As others, Grosse used *Ästhetik* and *Kunstphilosophie* interchangeably and believed the study of *Ästhetik* to be a prerequisite to research the history and science of art. As can be taken

⁵¹ van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 498.

⁵² Ibid., 499.

⁵³ Grosse letters to von Luschan. 22.3.1897. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan.

⁵⁴ Felix von Luschan, *Die Karl Knorsche Sammlung von Benin-Altartümern im Museum für Länder- und Völkerkunde in Stuttgart* (Museum für Länder- und Völkerkunde Stuttgart, 1901), 4.

from his writings, for Grosse, *Ästhetik* is the study of aesthetic feelings and activities as they appear around the world and as they influence the making of art; ideally this study would be part of the other three disciplines. *Kunstphilosophie* or the ‘philosophy of art’ is directly and most intimately connected to aesthetics and the way aesthetics influences culture and vice versa and might be said to have come out of Herder’s ideas on art and climate. *Kunstgeschichte* or the ‘history of art’ is built on the Winckelmannian tradition of recounting past periods and styles of art in order to point out national and periodical peculiarities of each style. Lastly, *Kunstwissenschaft* or the ‘science of art’ uses scientific comparative method in order to distinguish universally valid characteristics of art.

The essay, *Ethnologie und Ästhetik* [Ethnology and Aesthetic], 1891, dealt with some of the issues that would later lead to the *Anfänge der Kunst*. However, the book and the essay approached the issue from different vantage points. As van Damme observes, the essay takes as its main concern aesthetics while the book is more concerned with art history and the science of art.⁵⁵ While these concepts may not have linear boundaries they give different views of the subject.

Grosse begins his essay by talking about the effects ethnology had on the humanities and laments that there is one discipline “which, with a strange rigidity, still turns away from the new ways.”⁵⁶ This one discipline is, according to Grosse, aesthetics. He goes on to mention some scholars that have done work in the same field, like Taine, Dubois and Herder whose work is more fully considered in his *Anfänge der Kunst*. Moreover, he discusses the influence the natural sciences in general have had on the humanities, including aesthetics. Through this discussion of the use of aesthetics in the natural sciences he asserts that “the aestheticians have to realize that a large part of their tasks can only be solved with the help of ethnology.”⁵⁷

He thus anticipates one of the main points of his later book, believing that in order to understand complex issues one has to first solve the simpler issues on the same topic. The first of three main aims of Grosse’s essay that van Damme has identified, is the attempt to answer “that old question, so often repeated in vain. Whether or not there are generally

⁵⁵ van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 500.

⁵⁶ Ernst Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," *Vierteljahresschrift für wissenschaftl. Philosophie* XV, no. 4 (1891): 392.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 397.

valid, objective conditions for the aesthetic feeling.”⁵⁸ Second, Grosse is trying to illuminate “national differences in taste”⁵⁹ and the preference for a particular art form or genre.⁶⁰ Here, Grosse mentions that this national taste changes over time and “finds itself in a process of constant transformation.”⁶¹ The third question for aesthetics to consider is the developmental history of art in order to find the “beginning of artistic activity.”⁶²

According to Grosse, these three issues of aesthetics - the search for underlying universal values, the national variations of taste and the development of tastes and activities – could only be studied by employing ethnographical methods. He admits that “it is true, the path that we guide aesthetics here is a far and laborious detour - but history teaches us that even in science the straightest path has not always been the nearest.”⁶³ According to his definition, “aesthetics is concerned with the study of aesthetic feelings and aesthetic activities as these occur in the inner and outer worlds of experience.”⁶⁴ Aesthetic activities - making or looking at something that is satisfying in colour and form without regarding its original function - generate aesthetic feelings, the pleasure that is triggered by the process of making or looking. The “aim of [the study of] aesthetics then is to examine the nature, conditions and development of aesthetic feelings and activities.”⁶⁵

In his essay Grosse had already started to outline the ideas that would inform his later book. Not only is the connection between art and culture one of his main points in the book but he also suggests that the study of hunter-gatherer communities can provide an entrance into the study of aesthetics as they form the beginning of art.⁶⁶ While in the essay Grosse only promotes the positive effects that the ethnological method might have on a study of art - especially one that connects art and culture, and one that works on hunter-gatherer communities - he puts these ideas into practice in *Die Anfänge der Kunst* three

⁵⁸ Ibid., 404; translated by van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 504.

⁵⁹ Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," 405.

⁶⁰ van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 504.

⁶¹ Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," 406; translated by van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 505.

⁶² Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," 413.

⁶³ Ibid., 412.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 398; translated by van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 501.

⁶⁵ Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," 398; translated by van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 501.

⁶⁶ Grosse, "Ethnologie und Ästhetik," 416; translated by van Damme, "Ernst Grosse and the Birth of the Anthropology of Aesthetics," 506.

years later. But whereas this essay adopts an ethnological approach to aesthetics, the later book is built around the reverse practice of using aesthetic questions to promote understanding of ethnological objects and practices.

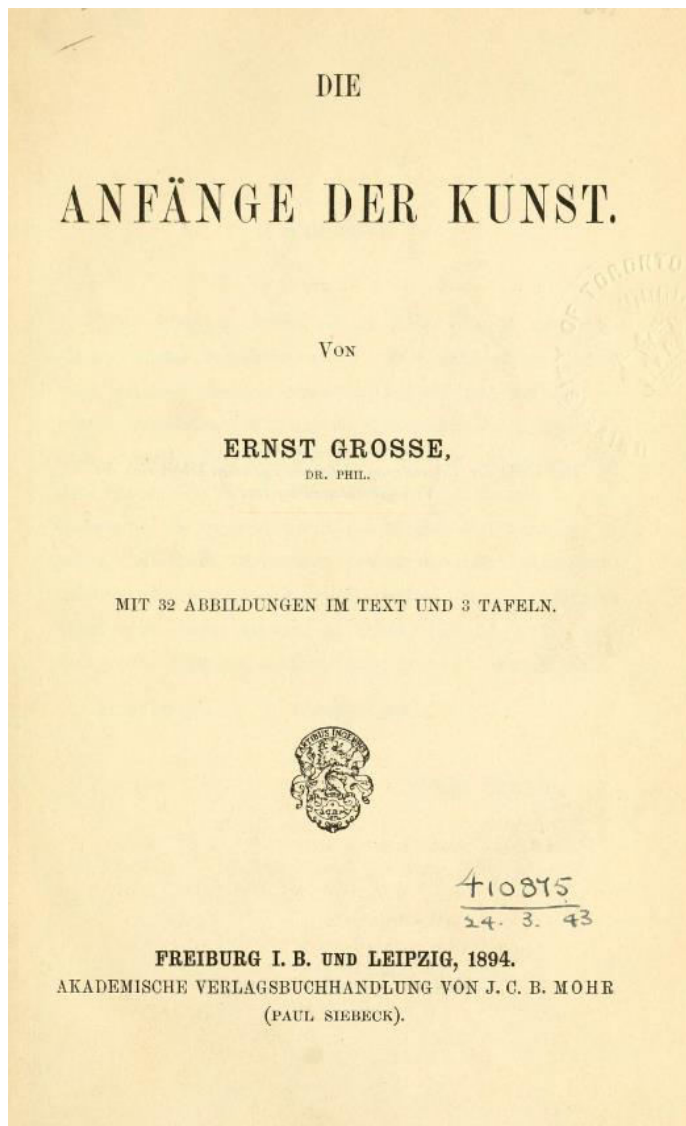


Figure 3 Front page of Ernst Grosse *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 1894.

In 1894 Grosse published the 300-page-long book *Die Anfänge der Kunst* in which he discusses contemporary art practices of so-called hunter-gatherer communities as well as contemporary German ideas on art. Grosse's translation of the objects he considers differs from that of Bastian and Ratzel. On the one hand, he makes the connection between them and German ideas of art by using the term in the title and engaging in questions surrounding art; on the other hand his subject of investigation is the object itself and not its maker's psychic character or culture as was the case for Bastian and Ratzel.

It is possible to separate the book into two main parts: the first concentrates on theoretical questions such as the uses and methods of art historical inquiries, the description of the so-called primitive peoples and a short discussion of what art is, while the second part is a more detailed discussion of different art productions, including chapters on personal decoration, ornamentation, representational art, dance, poetry and music. Due to the limited space available, Grosse only talks about very few examples in detail and often resorts to generalities. The following section will give an overview of Grosse's thinking before taking a closer look at the specific ways in which Grosse translates non-European art.

The book is prefaced with a short statement in which Grosse highlights his own attitude towards his study:

The following work is a pioneer effort, and should be judged as such. Whoever ventures upon a new region where nobody has made earnest explorations cannot expect to find numerous and inestimable facts; but he must be satisfied if he only finds the way there. The value of this book lies less in the answers it gives than in the questions it raises. In any case, I hope that I may have done a service to my readers, especially to those who are not able to share my views, in having given my thoughts the briefest expression at my command.⁶⁷

This preface shows the themes that Grosse wants to attach a special importance to. By stating right at the beginning that his study's value is in the questions it raises and not in the answers it gives, Grosse tries to contain his reader's expectations so as not to disappoint anyone anticipating a survey and strict guidelines about the beginning of art, as the book's title might promise. On the other hand, Grosse also emphasises that he has kept his book 'short' on purpose as a service to the reader. Most readers at the time would have been unfamiliar with his ground-breaking ventures of using aesthetic questions to understand ethnographic objects. However, the inclusion of this statement demonstrates that in Grosse's view 300 pages did not do justice to the breadth of this topic.

He begins his actual analysis with a discussion of the aims and approaches of the science of art. He specifically draws attention to the fruitfulness of art-scientific and aesthetic questions for the study of 'primitive' peoples. Here, Grosse distinguished between the art historic and the art philosophic directions of research on and deliberation of art which, according to him, include all kinds of aesthetic creations.⁶⁸ This division of art research is in accordance with the contemporary ideas of the schools following the work of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (art-historically) and Johann Gottfried Herder (art-philosophically).

Grosse was, like Ratzel and Bastian, influenced by Herder's idea of culture. As discussed above, both of the influential ethnographers interpreted this notion in their own way and so did Grosse. His art-historical investigations are closer to the art-philosophical school and he believed that the study of the art of the 'natural peoples' would open up the possibility to understand more "complex" works of art. Moreover, Grosse quotes Kant

⁶⁷ Grosse, *Die Anfänge Der Kunst*. Preface.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1-5.

who said: "Information without explanations is blind, explanations without information are empty."⁶⁹ Furthermore he explains: "Information is only a medium to knowledge; otherwise facts suffocate thought."⁷⁰ Thus, he points out that a mere recording of facts, such as the collecting of non-European objects, does not equate to gaining knowledge about the world. In order to attain this knowledge, one has to explain what has been recorded; the ongoing collection of objects is not key to new knowledge in ethnography and the philosophy of art, instead it is the identification of the means to decipher them.

These two quotes emphasise Grosse's conviction that only universal laws of art can give a sense of order to art-historical facts, laws that have not been found yet and are not being searched for either. He goes on to point out that "the primary object of the science of art is not the application but the knowledge of the laws that control the life and development of art. This aim, however, for which the science of art must strive, is only an ideal that can never be reached."⁷¹ Here, Grosse emphasises again that in order to get any advancement in knowledge, the science of art must strive towards a goal that he believed ultimately unattainable. This incredibly high aim, of explaining all art and its development, can be seen as a symptom of the time as most theoretical study in Germany, was seeking to establish universal laws.⁷²

Thus, he regrets that history generally does not know "primitive" peoples and remarks that an "advance in culture leads peoples out of servitude under nature to mastery over nature; and it may be presumed that this change finds corresponding expression in the development of art"⁷³ As in the quotes above, Grosse urges the history, philosophy and science of art to consider the study of non-European peoples and to connect this art with its circumstances, e.g. the dependency or independency of nature, that is its context. He believed the peoples he concentrated on were dependent of nature while the 'cultural peoples' have freed themselves of this dependency but rather mastered nature.

This point is an important one to keep in mind when considering Grosse's choice of title and the overall theme of the book. 'The beginning of art' does not just allude to the idea that there must have been a conscious, definitive prehistoric beginning to art practice. It also suggests that the visual culture to which Grosse refers, is the mere beginning of

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2. Grosse does not reveal the exact source of this quote.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 5.

⁷¹ *The Beginning of Art*, 7.

⁷² For example Bastian and his idea of the psychic unity.

⁷³ Grosse, *The Beginning of Art*, 312.

something that in the European consciousness may be called art. As will be shown, Grosse is ambivalent about the philosophical underpinning of this beginning of art. On the one hand Grosse seems to follow a Hegelian idea of 'beginning,' pointing out that the art of the 'primitive' peoples is a kind of precondition of art, only when it leaves this stage and is internalised by the makers, and more importantly their *Geist*, does it become real art. On the other hand, Grosse also makes use of more of a Herderian idea of 'beginning,' as the start of something that is constantly evolving and changing, with all the different forms being equally valuable and needing to be understood in their own terms. Thus he picks up on the two different ways that Ratzel and Bastian interpreted 'beginning' in ethnographic writing.

Furthermore, the so-called hunter-gatherer communities would feature in Social Darwinism at the very bottom of the scale of development, or in other words at the beginning of evolution as they may be compared to prehistoric hunter-gatherer communities.⁷⁴ He even points out that studying 'primitive' people one may find out more about prehistoric peoples and thus alludes to a very common idea of the time. This idea was even advocated by Ratzel and Bastian, who vehemently opposed Social Darwinism (chapter 3). Hence, Grosse's connection between 'primitive' and non-European peoples does not tell us his true attitude towards Social Darwinism. What can be said is that Grosse followed Herder in the idea of a quality of art that can be identified on a general level and that he also mostly kept true to Herder's critique of Winckelmann and the judgment of one people's cultural, political and social mannerisms by the standards of a different people.

At the beginning of the chapter on personal decoration Grosse even mentions Darwin himself as he recounts an incident in which Darwin gave a red cloth to a Fuegian and was surprised when he did not use the cloth to cover himself as clothing but to decorate his body with strips of it. He goes on to state that:

Those writers on the history of culture who devote themselves to the pleasant task of demonstrating in a popular scientific way to cultivated people of all conditions how magnificent our achievements have been, are wont to regard this disproportion of clothing and ornament as a pleasing example of the childish simplicity of savages, which cannot distinguish the superfluous from the necessary.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See chapter 3.3.

⁷⁵ Grosse, *The Beginning of Art*, 53.

This quote already shows Grosse's attitude to popular science and their "pleasant task" and he spends some time rejecting their notion of the "childish simplicity of savages." In the end he comes to the conclusion that if these "savages" had not been able to comprehend the necessary – for example building shelter, keeping warm with clothing and fire and procuring enough food – science dictates that they would have most likely been subject to natural selection and thus extinct. While, the first quote already had a sarcastic edge to it, Grosse becomes more explicit:

Primitive peoples, with all their lack of clothing and excess of decoration, have already maintained themselves on the earth for a whole series of millennia, although the higher peoples have seriously tried to make it not too easy for them. Either the primitive peoples have no right to existence, or have the historians of culture not been able in this case to distinguish the superfluous from the necessary?⁷⁶

According to Grosse's reasoning in this quote, survival of these peoples within natural selection - despite the fact that they spend their time making art instead of hunting and making tools that would aid survival - should elevate the status of this art in the mindset of "civilised nations." It is important to note that, in this case, Grosse speaks about all of the different art forms [personal decoration, ornamentation, representational art, dance, poetry and music] he has been concerned with in his book and that he was convinced that these different art forms had different motivations and effects depending on the time and the people that produced them.

Grosse points out that "the highest social function of primitive art consists of [the] unification" of the different members in a cultural group, whereas "civilized art [...] serves not for unification only, but primarily for the elevation of the spirit."⁷⁷ This mention of the elevation of the spirit then leads him into a discussion of the importance of a balance between science and art for his contemporaries:

As science enriches and elevates our intellectual life, so art enriches and elevates our emotional life. Art and science are the two most powerful means for the education of the human race.⁷⁸

The mention of the importance of both art and science is not just a way to stress the differences between the "primitive" and the "civilised" peoples, as the European educated

⁷⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 314.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

classes praised themselves for being at the height of scientific knowledge. It was also a means to make the connection between the two disciplines and, ever so subtly, to propose that a combination of the two might result in important findings.⁷⁹

This idea is further elaborated when he turns to the sociological form of the science of art. He references the American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois and his idea of the influence of the air on artistic creation and then turns to Herders' idea of climate which has been discussed above. He laments that Herder's investigations "kindled no fire"⁸⁰ among his contemporaries before he turns to the work of the French historian Hippolyte Taine. Grosse criticises Taine's work as he points out that "art, however, owes not its origin, but its character, to the moral temperature [the general condition of mind and its surroundings which according to Taine influences the development of art]"⁸¹ Furthermore, he also critiques Taine's basic principles of the origin of art – the race, the climate and the period – pointing out that they "are extremely questionable fabrications."⁸²

Grosse goes on to take a look at each of these principles and identifies several problems with Taine's notions. He points out that "race character [...] really cannot be discovered," that Taine "does not explain what he means by the term climate" and that "there is no more unity of taste [which is, according to Taine, visible in the period] than unity of race among any people."⁸³ Most energetically, Grosse points out that "above all, however, Taine overlooks the fact that art does not just passively but actively oppose taste."⁸⁴ Emphasizing that "there has [...] always been art that prostituted itself to the public,"⁸⁵ he states that it is not the public taste that has resulted in the development of art, but another component that has yet to be discovered. He concludes that "the grounds on which Taine bases his conclusions are wholly untenable."⁸⁶

Grosse sees art as an important phenomenon of social life which is neither "the simplest" nor the "most comprehensible."⁸⁷ He was certain that the approach has to be changed in order to make progress. This, according to him, is possible by starting the

⁷⁹ For a more detailed analysis of the importance of scientific innovations on Grosse's work see also Reichle, "Charles Darwins Gedanken zur Abstammung des Menschen und die Nützlichkeit von Weltbildern zur Erhaltung der Art."

⁸⁰ Grosse, *The Beginning of Art*, 13.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 14.

⁸³ Ibid., 14/5.

⁸⁴ *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 15.

⁸⁵ *The Beginning of Art*, 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 18.

research with the simplest forms of social phenomena emphasising that “in all other fields of sociology, the lesson has been learned to begin at the beginning.”⁸⁸ While he concedes that “nobody asks the science of art to renounce the study of the highest and most richly developed forms of art,”⁸⁹ Grosse also stresses that the “science of art should extend its researches to all peoples.”⁹⁰

He emphasises that the artistic character of a people is influenced by the method of securing food - which is strongly dependent on geographic and meteorological conditions. For Grosse this notion constitutes also a counterpoint to the ideas of Social Darwinism:

The hunting peoples have remained hunting peoples, as the older ethnologists believed, not because they were condemned by a defective capacity to be stationary from the beginning, but because the character of their homes prevented their advance to a higher form of production.⁹¹

Here, Grosse not only refers to Taine but also to Herder and their work on the relationship between art and climate. However, he does not agree with them that climate has a direct influence on “the spirit of a people and the character of their art.” Instead, he determines that “the influence which we have traced is [...] indirect; climate rules art through production.” According to him, “the construction of the cultural step-ladder of peoples is a problem of ethnology”⁹² and that scholars are not yet able to clearly follow the relations between forms of production and forms of art. Nevertheless, he is certain that hunting life is significant at the beginning of art. So while he believes that climate has a higher influence on art than does racial character, he also thinks that it does not influence art directly but only the media and form of production. Nevertheless, he also points out very explicitly that:

there is no people without art. We have seen that even the rudest and most miserable tribes devote a large part of their time and strength to art – art, which is looked down upon and treated by civilized nations, from the height of their practical and scientific achievements, more and more as idle play. And yet it seems wholly inconceivable, from the point of view of modern science, that a function to which so great a mass of energy is applied should be of no consequence in the maintenance and the development of the social organism; for if the energy which man devotes to aesthetic creation and enjoyments were lost

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 20.

⁹⁰ *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 20.

⁹¹ *The Beginning of Art*, 311.

⁹² Ibid., 34.

in the earnest and essential tasks of life, if art were indeed only idle play, then natural selection should have long ago rejected the peoples which wasted their force in so purposeless a way, in favour of other peoples of practical talents; and art could not possibly have been developed so highly and richly as it has been.⁹³

One of the worries of the time was that the peoples under examination were not “original primitive civilizations” but had degenerated from a higher stage. Grosse objects to these notions by pointing out that the similarities between the same “stock of culture” everywhere is easily explained by a parallel development that only leads in one direction. The possibility of a forward and backward motion of development, however, would skew these similarities as “from the point of view of the hypothesis of degeneration [...] this uniformity is an unsolvable puzzle.”⁹⁴ Although he confirms that the term “primitives” is used as a comparative term, he also concedes that “primitive peoples” are, by no means, the absolute beginning of human progress but have gone through a long development already.⁹⁵

The last of the introductory chapters is a discussion on art and begins with the eternal questions “what is art?”⁹⁶ As was customary at the time, and the contemporary idea of his profession, he did try to give a definitive answer, but also adds that “our definition is nothing more than a scaffold, which can be pulled down after the building.”⁹⁷ According to him, “by an aesthetic or artistic activity we mean one which, in its course or in its direct result possesses an immediate emotional factor – in art it is usually a pleasurable one. Aesthetic activity is therefore not entered upon as a means toward an end outside of itself, but as in itself the end.”⁹⁸ So Grosse saw art not as a medium to serve a higher purpose but as being the object of purpose itself. This means that all ornamentation and decoration that is not necessary for the objects’ function can be deemed an aesthetic or artistic supplement.

He adds that “aesthetic enjoyment is not limited to those who engage in the aesthetic activity, but shared with those who look on or listen.”⁹⁹ Although Grosse has shown here that he is aware of a shared aesthetic enjoyment between artist and beholder/listener and he has earlier pointed out that understandings of an artwork differ depending on whether

⁹³ Ibid., 312.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 49.

or not one is from the same cultural background as the artist, he, unfortunately, does not connect the two in this instance. While he mentions that the meaning of an artwork may get ‘lost in translation’ he does not explicitly take into account the fact that aesthetic ideals, that according to him are shared by the artist and the beholder, are very different between two cultures. So Grosse does not make clear that this aesthetic enjoyment is only shared when the artist and the beholder belong to the same cultural group. Nevertheless, he emphasises that “art appears among all peoples and in all periods as a social manifestation, and we renounce at once the comprehension of its nature and its significance if we regard it simply as an individual phenomenon.”¹⁰⁰

In the chapter on representational art, Grosse concentrates on Australian and South African drawings. He summarizes his overall view, thus:

Primitive representational art is decidedly naturalistic in material and form. With few exceptions, it selects its objects from its usual natural and cultural surroundings, and it seeks to represent this as naturally as it can with its limited means. Its materials are scanty; the perspective, even in its best works, is very deficient. But it, nevertheless, succeeds in giving its rude figures a truthfulness to life which is missed in the carefully elaborated designs of many higher peoples. The chief peculiarity of primitive pictorial art lies just in this union of truth to life and rudeness.¹⁰¹

This quote shows that Grosse believed that ‘primitives’, while having the urge to be naturalistic in their art production, did not have the skill to portray their subjects as close to nature as might have been possible. Their “limited means” restrain them from success in representing their subjects more “naturally.” But at the same time, Grosse refers to “the truthfulness to life” of these “rude figures,” and, thus, acknowledges a sense of credibility, if not the developed skill of the artist or craftsman. This is just one example of what Grosse sees as the ambivalent nature of ‘primitive art,’ being both the precondition of a possibility of art, as it does not present the right skill, and at the same time a different kind of art that needs to be evaluated in its own terms. This ambivalence of different philosophies of ‘beginning’ is also noticeable in other parts of his writing as he refers to scanty materials and deficient perspective but with a sentence later praising its truth to life.

This ambivalence is also seen in the conclusion to the chapter when he points out:

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 193.

In general, the scope of primitive pictorial art is too limited, its means are too rude and meagre, for a more profound social effect to be possible. Hence, admirable as its works are in many respects, the essential characteristics of primitive culture would undoubtedly have been the same without primitive pictorial art.¹⁰²

On the one hand, he points out that they are admirable in many respects but, on the other hand, he claims that its means are too rude and meagre for it to impact the society in which it was made. This also reveals the high esteem in which Grosse held European art, believing that it was not just a product of its time but also playing an active part in producing the circumstances of the time itself. Prohibiting the art of the ‘primitive peoples’ the manifestation of this social aspect of influencing society, which for Grosse is a crucial aspect of art, draws a very distinctive line between European art and ‘primitive art.’ According to him, the first is executed by Europeans while the latter, produced by peoples from South Africa, Alaska and Australia, is only the mere beginning of art in the Hegelian sense.

Moreover, he points out that:

Power of observation and skill with the hand are the qualities demanded for primitive naturalistic pictorial art, and the faculty of observation and handiness of execution are at the same time the two indispensable requisites for the primitive hunter life. *Primitive pictorial art, with its peculiar characteristics, thus appears fully comprehensible to us as an aesthetic exercise of two faculties which the struggle for existence has developed and improved among primitive peoples.*¹⁰³

Grosse’s Herderian experience gives him the background to make the connection between the living circumstances of a people and their societal and cultural production. Additionally, by placing the emphasis on the last sentence he not only ties the circumstances of production to the objects in order to evaluate them with their own standards in mind but he also gives a justification to his German readers how it is possible that ‘primitive peoples’ are able to make something that may be considered art.¹⁰⁴

In consideration of the question, whether one may call the visual and material culture of these peoples art, Grosse invokes contemporary notions of art itself. He

¹⁰² Ibid., 206.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 198. [emphasis does not appear in the translation but is carried over from the original].

¹⁰⁴ One could also connect this idea to Kant’s notion of the development of faculties, however, the scope of this thesis has resulted in the decision not to go into detail on this connection.

references the idea that pictorial art originates as a servant of religion and points out that there is no evidence that the cave paintings in Australia and South Africa bear a religious meaning. This leads him to point out that representational art arises independently of religion and also that a lack of religious meaning does not necessarily result in an aesthetic art form. Moreover, he also considers the possibility that these pictorial works were not made for aesthetic reasons at all but as a pictorial language. He points out that in a certain sense every art work is like a language as it expresses an event or a fact. Here he states that this holds true not just for Australian drawings and South African cave paintings but also for Raphael's frescoes and determines that these drawings, and more noticeably the sculptures, cannot be designated as a strict pictorial language as the hieroglyphs of Egypt are.

He also goes back to discuss his introduction by coming to the conclusion that his earlier definition of artistic efforts as "either through its whole course or by its result, to arouse aesthetic feelings"¹⁰⁵ "does not exactly fit the real conditions" of the artistic creations of the hunting peoples.¹⁰⁶ Instead, he points out that "most of the artistic productions of the primitive peoples [...] have been intended [...] to serve some practical purpose [...] while the aesthetic demand is satisfied but secondarily."¹⁰⁷ Again, Grosse determines that the objects made by the hunting peoples do not warrant being classed as traditions of art as it is known in Europe (note how he uses the term artistic production here, instead of art work which he had used earlier on in the book) as they rarely engage and pursue "exclusively aesthetic interests."¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, he also emphasises that "while artistic effort in the lowest stages of culture hardly ever appears pure, it is still plainly recognisable everywhere – and in essentially the same forms as it is presented in the higher stages of culture."¹⁰⁹ Again, one can see the ambivalence in these two quotes, up to the end Grosse jumps between clearly stating that these objects should not be designated as art, as they are merely the precondition that results in art, and stating that artistic notions are clearly visible and should not be ignored. He even points out that "strange and inartistic as the primitive forms of art sometimes appear at the first sight, as soon as we examine them more closely,

¹⁰⁵ Grosse, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 291.

¹⁰⁶ *The Beginning of Art*, 306.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

we find that they are formed according to the same laws as govern the highest creations of art,”¹¹⁰ and thus emphasises that even the seemingly weirdest and uninteresting objects can and should be considered in a study of art.

Even though Grosse states that the term *Naturvölker*, used by ethnographers like Ratzel and Bastian, is too wide to hold any meaning,¹¹¹ in his translation of non-European art he quite often makes use of the term. Especially when promoting his bottom-up method, he reverts back to the established terms; for example he notes that “if we are ever to attain a scientific knowledge of the art of the *Kulturvölker*, it will be after we have first investigated the nature and conditions of the art of *Naturvölker*.”¹¹²

However, in general Grosse refers to these communities by following the English tradition of the time in using the term ‘primitive.’ This use of terms might go back to his work on Spencer and Taine in his doctoral thesis and hints towards his Darwinian attitude. Moreover he adds that “we, of course, use the word ‘primitive’ here not in the absolute but the relative sense.”¹¹³ This shows that Grosse, very deliberately chose to use the term ‘primitive’ in order to emphasise the title of the beginnings of art and also to draw on the relation to non-primitive European art. As had become common in German ethnographic circles at the time he always used quotation marks when using the term ‘savages.’ Moreover, Grosse makes clear that physical and social characteristics of a people are not connected by stating that “races and peoples are very different things.”¹¹⁴

Despite both praising the truthfulness to life, as well as crediting their aesthetic skill to their ‘primitive’ hunting life instead of an autonomous emergence, Grosse keeps true to his main aim and most often translates the material and visual culture he studies as ‘art.’ As can be seen in the quote above, he also uses language associated with art history and philosophy. By doing so, Grosse promotes the objects he refers to. They become linguistically elevated from ‘fetishes’ or ethnographica to art objects. As he does not strictly include these objects into a European art canon but merely places them as a sort of non-historic beginning of the canon as it was then known, this elevation remains a linguistic one. Nevertheless, the frequent description of these works as art can be

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 307.

¹¹¹ *Die Anfänge Der Kunst*, 31/2.

¹¹² Ibid., 20.

¹¹³ *The Beginning of Art*, 43.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 34. By this date races and peoples were commonly separated. Nevertheless, Grosse’s explicit mention of this fact shows his particular commitment to it.

assumed to have affected his readers, if nothing else, on a subconscious level. This choice of language does not just allude to his education in art history but also emphasises Grosse's aim to promote the study of these objects by art historians.

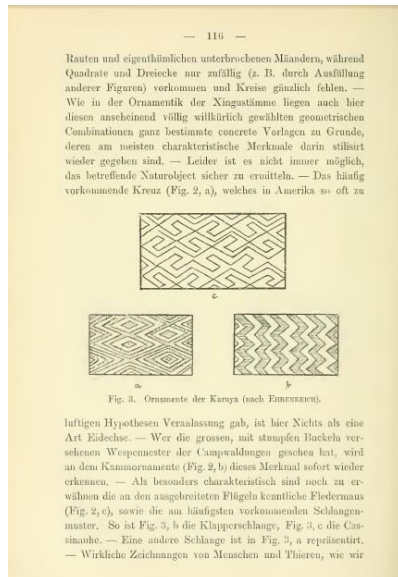


Figure 4 Illustrations of "ornaments of the Karaya" from Ernst Grosse's *Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 116.

the ornaments of the Karaya, as the caption reveals, and on the other hand, as the way snake skin looks. The reader is immediately able to make the connection between snake and non-European pattern and can indexicalise the ornamental patterns as adaptations of

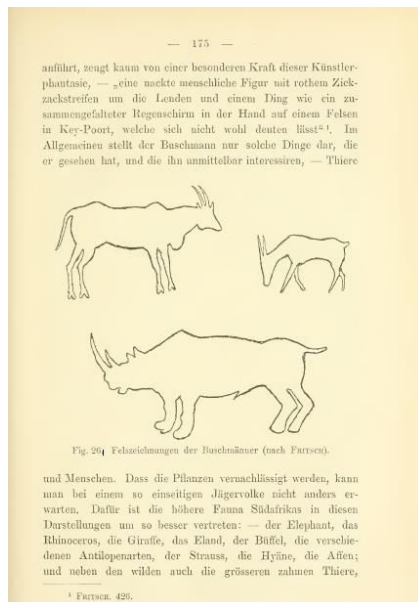


Figure 5 Illustration of "petroglyphs from the Bushmen" from Ernst Grosse's *Anfänge der Kunst*, p. 175.

In his description of the different forms of art, Grosse makes use of several images, 32 in-text illustrations as well as 2 black and white plates at the end of the book, in order to illustrate his account. In most cases the text on the same page refers to the image, resulting in a strong verbal-visual syntagm. This is particularly visible in the discussion of natural ornamentation when the text is directly referring to the images that are embedded within the text. For example, he informs his reader about "the most frequently occurring snake patterns (as Fig 3, b, the rattlesnake, and Fig 3, c, the *cassinauhe*.)"¹¹⁵ It is this strong connection between text and image that categorises these patterns (figure 1), on the one hand as

the ornaments of the Karaya, as the caption reveals, and on the other hand, as the way snake skin looks. The reader is immediately able to make the connection between snake and non-European pattern and can indexicalise the ornamental patterns as adaptations of snake skin. As Grosse uses the snake patterns as an example for this type of ornament, they are working as a synecdoche that stand for all patterned non-European objects. With this translation, Grosse suggests that for all these patterned non-European objects the beholder is able to identify corresponding patterns that have been copied from nature.

Grosse uses a different approach in the chapter on pictorial works when he includes the outlines of petroglyphs from South Africa. The text, accompanying the image does not directly refer to the petroglyphs in the illustration but it informs the reader that the people who made these, the 'Bushmen,' depict

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 120.

only those things that they have seen and interest them directly. Grosse points out that the depicted things are animals and humans and that it is to be expected that hunting peoples, like the 'Bushmen,' neglect plants. Moreover, he lists the different animals that can be seen in the non-European depictions which also include the animals seen here. So while the text does not refer directly to the image it does make a connection through the mentioning of animals. Here, Grosse translates the depicted outlines of the three animals as synecdoches for the representation of animals on rock walls and the beholder is told that any of the depicted animals he sees here are from the direct vicinity of the peoples that made them. In both of these examples, the illustrations stand for the greater whole of African art, forming an index of it, and equip Grosse's readers with some ideas of how to approach it. In this way, he both promotes his ideas on the search for universal laws of art and the study of non-European art by scholars of art and aesthetics, whilst also giving information on these foreign artworks themselves.

These instructions on how to approach the objects chime with Grosse's emphasis on the importance of looking at objects not just as ethnographic messengers but also as the key to the unravelling of artistic laws that include European art. In the process of doing so, in Venuti's terms Grosse both 'domesticates' and 'foreignizes' the objects under discussion. For example, when talking about the social aspect of non-European dance he points out that "the primitive dance is the most immediate, most perfect, and most efficient expression of the primitive aesthetic feeling."¹¹⁶ However, he also says that this social aspect of "primitive dance" is still not comparable with the pictorial art of "higher cultures" as it does not support the intellectual development of society but rather plays a part of community building in social life. In this way, Grosse foreignizes non-European art in two ways. On the one hand, he points out that in contrast to Europe, it is dance and not painting that has the most social impact and also that this social aspect is still not as profound as it is for the "higher cultures" as it does not stimulate intellectual development, a point that was seen as very important in late 19th-century Germany.

Grosse also notes that it is not just dance but also objects that are important for non-European culture as "it is self-evident that these beginnings of representational art have to the primitive peoples [...] a value that should not be too lightly estimated."¹¹⁷ To do so he brings to mind Greek and Italian palladiums and sculpture and painting from Antiquity

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 207.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 204/5.

and the Renaissance, emphasizing that “in cultures of the higher grades pictorial representation has more than once appeared as the aesthetically and practically most efficient art.”¹¹⁸ According to him, “there is no point on which the supposition can be based that pictorial art had a meaning to the primitive tribes even approximately like that which it possess for the highly civilized societies.”¹¹⁹ So, here he foreignizes representational art in the same manner that he does dance, by showing its difference from European art.

Nevertheless, Grosse uses comparisons with European art and customs not just to show the differences between them, but also to make the objects in his book more comprehensible to his reader. For example, he begins his chapter on the science of art by looking at the writing on some of the most famous practitioners in the arts throughout history, including Rembrandt van Rijn, William Shakespeare and Matthias Grünewald.¹²⁰ In all these cases, he points out how little is actually known about the person behind the artworks and how much can only be interpreted through studying the artwork itself and the time in which it was made. For him, the same applies to non-European art, where one knows little about the actual maker but might be able to learn much from studying the work itself. By making the connection between the knowledge of famous Europeans and unknown objects from Africa and other parts of the world, Grosse seeks to promote the validity of his theoretical notions with his readers and, thus, brings the foreign objects closer to European ones.

Elsewhere, Grosse compares the “wasp-waists and cramped feet of our ladies” to “decorative scars of the primitive hunters” and points out that both are equally “problematical embellishments.”¹²¹ Moreover, he also believes that all European necklaces and bracelets have their origin in the personal decoration of the “primitive peoples” and that the fashion of wearing earrings, is “no less barbaric.”¹²² When discussing the lack of clothing among hunting people, Grosse points out that “the dogma that the necessity of concealing his person is innate in every man seems to us no more

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 205.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 9-11.

¹²¹ *The Beginning of Art*, 77.

¹²² Ibid., 108.

just than the assertion would be that the necessity of wearing a cylinder hat is innate in every Englishman.”¹²³

These domestications are, however, not just asserted in regard to personal decoration but also the decoration of objects. When looking at the custom of decorating clay pots with the patterns of woven baskets, Grosse points out that this is a sign that woven baskets were in use before clay pots and that decorating one to look like the other was done as the maker is “so accustomed to [the look] that he cannot easily think of a vessel without it.”¹²⁴ In Grosse’s opinion this can be compared to “the country people in some districts of our own civilized German fatherland who always want the same paintings repeated on their dishes or on the dial-plates of their clocks, simply because the coarse roses on the dial-plates and the ugly white lines on the dishes “ought to be on them.”¹²⁵ This comparison of clay pots decorated with the pattern of a woven baskets with the dishes with “ugly white lines” domesticates the foreign tradition by pointing out the similarities to German traditions that also stay the same over generations. While the actual techniques of these different types of ornamentation have very little in common the connection made by Grosse, makes it more easily comprehensible for his native German readers.

In his final chapter, Grosse makes another comparison, not between non-European and European arts and crafts but between himself and an explorer:

We have rambled through the domain of primitive art like an explorer through a newly discovered country. We could find no plain, levelled road, but had to strike out a path for ourselves. We have encountered obstacles at every step. At more than one place, the actual conditions presented themselves to us as intricate as one of those Australian thickets which cannot be passed through, but must be gone around; in others we had to cross yawning chasms upon tottering, temporary bridges; on the whole of some wide domains we have not been able to cast a glance, because they lay concealed in impenetrable fog; and frequently enough the mountain peaks which we thought we could see on the horizon were nothing but deceptive cloud-forms. The map one brings back from such an expedition displays more blanks than inscribed spots, and we must content ourselves with the hope that what little knowledge we have gained may really be knowledge.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid., 97.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 144.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 305.

This simile, comparing the study of 'primitive' art to an exploratory journey through a new country, connects his own work on the material and visual culture he studies, completed at university in Germany, to the work that has made this material accessible to him in the first place. The numerous expeditions by travellers, ethnographers and traders from Germany and other European countries, brought back both many objects and accounts of these foreign parts of the world. Grosse uses these to explain the objects but, as can be seen in this quote, also his own theories. Moreover, by comparing himself with these travellers he actively adds an air of adventure to his exploration of art historical method. When he says that there are no plain, levelled, roads with obstacles at every step, he alludes to his opening up of a new field of study and how he has had to find a way of making his approach to the foreign objects work.

Most interesting is the last sentence, in which he states that the little knowledge one has been able to gather on this new path may not really be knowledge but instead false promises. Here, one can see two distinct fears that bothered Grosse in his quest to connect the science of art and ethnography. On the one hand it shows his caution not to anger scholars in any one of these fields by stating that they should learn from each other. As has been shown above, ethnographers were actively trying to establish their discipline as a colonial science and, as such, a branch of the *Naturwissenschaften* [natural sciences], free from hypothetical theories and grounded in pure fact. Art history, on the other hand, was clearly part of the *Geisteswissenschaften* [humanities]. Even the science of art, searching for overarching laws of art was historically grounded as well as highly speculative and thereby closer to the humanities than the natural sciences. As this chapter has shown, bringing the two fields together in one study proved to be hard on its own; but telling these distinguished contemporary scholars to learn from, and maybe even work with, their colleagues in the other field would certainly have been a challenging endeavor.

On the other hand, Grosse has tried to find definitive answers throughout his book but in the end he had to come to the conclusion that his study was merely able to raise questions and answer only very few of them. Pointing out that some of these answers might not be the right ones must have both disheartened him as he contemplated the risk that he had put his whole endeavor into question - hence, perhaps the simile of the exploratory journey through a newly discovered country. Here, his letter to von Luschan comes to mind. He exclaims that everything is more complicated than it seemed and that

research has to start all over again while knowing that it will never come to an end.¹²⁷ It becomes clear that Grosse, three years after the publication, still lamented the shortcomings of his monograph while also pointing out that these shortcomings can be extended to the whole field.

One can recapitulate that Grosse translated the artistic creations of the hunting people as a form of art, even a form of art that differs immensely from the art of European peoples. But one can also add that he translated this form of art, as his title reveals, simply as the beginning of what was seen as art at his time. Within this interpretation of African art as the beginning of European art he varies between using a Hegelian model and a Herderian notion of beginning, resulting in a variable translation of the objects in question. While he introduced his book by claiming that a more detailed analysis of 'primitive' art has an important value for art scientists, as they are the key to finding universal laws of artistic creation, he has to admit in the end that he was not able to find these universal laws himself.

But even if Grosse was not able to achieve what he set out to achieve, his translation had an important role in the reception of non-European art in general and African art in particular. By calling these artistic productions the beginning of art, Grosse began to put them into the context of European art history. By alternately, domesticating and foreignizing the non-European objects he discusses, he generates a translation that alludes to the differences between non-European and European art while, at the same time, making the foreign objects more accessible for his German readership. The comparisons to German traditions generate a kinship that is emphasised by his constant reminders that all peoples make art and that every peoples' art should be considered by art history. Looking back at his preface, it is notable that he certainly mapped out a route into this new region. His daring to take at least the first step into the direction of a universal analysis of art was also noticed by his reviewers.

¹²⁷ See p. 77. Grosse letters to von Luschan. 22.3.1897. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan.

Chapter 2.4 The reception

The reception of Grosse's book is hard to reconstruct. A simple library search shows, however, that it has been translated into several languages, including English (1897)¹²⁸, French (1899), Russian (1899), Japanese (1925) and Spanish (1944). Moreover, both the original German, and the various translations, circulated in international institutions, including many university libraries and museum collections. Hence, this short section on the reception of Grosse's book will revolve around the reviews of two scholars from different fields; Konrad Lange's review in the *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* published in 1895¹²⁹ and Leo Frobenius's extensive comments on the book in his 'Die Kunst der Naturvölker' of 1897.¹³⁰

Konrad Lange (1855-1921), a German art historian, teaching at the University of Tübingen, begins his review by pointing out that Ernst Grosse "is neither an art historian nor an aesthete by formation but a philosopher and sociologist."¹³¹ He goes on to state that this "is the very reason" that he was able to obtain the results that are "of a high importance for art history and aesthetics."¹³² While Lange here praises Grosse's work for its important findings he also prepares his readers for what to expect from Grosse's book; philosophy, not art history or aesthetics.

In the next paragraph, Lange identifies two different aspects from which one can "tackle the problem of art."¹³³ According to him, one could either study the facts of the history of art as an interaction between cultural factors and the creativity of single artists, or one could establish the character of art through a focus on its psychological meaning. As mentioned above, Grosse lamented that art historians would often only collect facts and did not strive to explain individual occurrences by searching for universally valid laws of art. However Lange, even if he does agree with Grosse that neither of the two aspects are always practiced in a scholarly manner, still comes to his fellow art historians defence by pointing out that scholars like "Schnaase, Burckhardt and Springer a. s. o. [...] were content with the mere collection of facts and did not strive for universal laws of the

¹²⁸ The English translation titled *The Beginnings of Art* went into five more editions in 1898, 1899, 1900, 1914 and 1928. Reichle, "Vom Ursprung der Bilder und den Anfängen der Kunst," 139.

¹²⁹ Konrad von Lange, "Grosse, Ernst: Die Anfänge der Kunst," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*. 18 (1895).

¹³⁰ Leo Frobenius, "Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner," *Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien. XXVII Band* (1897).

¹³¹ Lange, "Grosse, Ernst: Die Anfänge der Kunst," 121.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

development of art. At most, one can question whether they expressed these laws correctly, and above all, whether they have always based these on appropriate data.”¹³⁴

He takes this point further by highlighting that “it was not necessary to invent a new science of art for the purpose of this book.”¹³⁵ According to Lange, it would have been sufficient for Grosse to emphasise the scientific analysis of ethnographic data and its significance for art history and aesthetics which “he was the first to consult in a strictly scientific manner.”¹³⁶ These first few paragraphs really set the tone for the whole review in which Lange congratulates Grosse for his work with ethnographic objects but vehemently opposes his critique of art history and its methods. However, he does agree with Grosse in the matter of the influence of the racial character and the climate on art. According to him, connections of principle between the character of a race and time and its people’s art did not exist in most cases and that “the facts refute them as often as they confirm them.”¹³⁷ Thus, he states that a major merit of Grosse’s work is the idea of “verifying the eligibility of these principles by looking at the *Naturvölker*.”¹³⁸

In saying this, Lange disputes the details of Grosse’s argument; the idea of the climate’s indirect influence on art production by influencing the method of securing food. While it is true that the eye for detail and the steady hand might be influenced by hunting he does not agree that the interest in animals as subject is only due to their status as food. Lange compares the art of the *Naturvölker* with a child’s drawings, which also often depict animals, and notes that humans are so interested in animals because they are the creatures that are closest to humans. He comes to the conclusion that the study of ‘primitive art’ adds “precious little” to the methods of art history, and that art historians will keep on searching for single verifiable connections between specific art works, artists or times and not for universal laws.¹³⁹

Lange sees the real merit of Grosse’s book in its value for aesthetics. While he claims that “we already knew [...] that the primitive peoples have a [...] differentiated art,”¹⁴⁰ he also adds that “the author emphasised rightly that the character of this art is, despite

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

all of its differences, consistent with that of civilised peoples.”¹⁴¹ In reference to the external purpose of art – the impact on society, use for religion as well as the conveying of knowledge and messages – Lange exposes Grosse’s apparently contradictory statements, as he points out that Grosse claimed that most artistic productions of the ‘primitive’ were not made for artistic pleasure but for a different purpose. Moreover, he states that “here, the author does not adhere to his own principle of careful and conservative phrasing,”¹⁴² and that his arguments for this external purpose are “everything but decisive.”¹⁴³

Moreover, Lange disagrees with Grosse’s claim that an ornament’s use as symbol or marker predated the aesthetic pleasure of looking at it; but he goes on to praise Grosse’s emphasis on the social character of art, the aesthetic rationale of artistic practice – like symmetry, contrast and harmony – and the evidence that the origin of art is not religion. Nevertheless, Lange is not certain that a philosopher, like Grosse, is able to make claims about art practices and their meanings amongst a people that he has never met just by looking at their visual culture and he insists that assertions, like the importance of music and the meaning of tattoos, remained to be verified. Yet, instead of suggesting that Grosse makes further inquiries, or an art historian evaluates the objects, Lange points out that travellers will have to verify the given information. This emphasises Lange’s affiliation to his time, as it is travellers, not ethnographers that may shed light on the matter. He may have assumed that an ethnographer was able to collect objects from a community and make meaningful connections between them and those of other peoples. However, ethnographers were not seen to be the ones to know most about a peoples’ living conditions and traditions and were certainly not the ones to travel to distant places themselves in order to talk to the makers of the objects in their keeping.

Lange goes on to state that despite the rawness of their culture, ‘primitive’ peoples are able to produce representations, especially of animals, that are outstandingly close to nature. This leads him to point out that future scholars will have to take a closer look at the “exceedingly important question”¹⁴⁴ of whether the close reproduction of nature or the stylisation of the same were intended by the native craftsmen. He comes to the

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 125.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 129.

conclusion that Grosse has “despite its revolutionary introduction”¹⁴⁵ reached his self-set goal of encouraging art scientists to be interested in non-European art.

And while we cannot agree with all of his results and share his assumption ‘that the future science of art will replace many of his explanations with better and more thorough ones,’ we will not refuse him the credentials that he was the first to enter this exceedingly important field of the science of art and was therefore the one to open it up to research.¹⁴⁶

In summary, one can see that Lange may have agreed with some of Grosse’s ideas and was certainly affected by the possibilities for new research in art history and aesthetics that Grosse had opened up by studying ‘primitive’ art. However, it also becomes clear that he is rather inclined to see its merits as in the domain of the discipline of aesthetics, especially with regard to a methodological change and the search for universally valid laws of art, rather than as his own discipline of art history. He not only reveals himself as a child of his own time by suggesting travellers must prove Grosse’s assertions but also by comparing ‘primitive’ peoples to children. In this way he ranks their mental and spiritual capabilities on a much lower level than that of European peoples. This comparison was very common at the time, especially in travel writing, and was interestingly avoided by Grosse who would rather compare specific ‘primitive’ traits to specific European customs, like the wearing of jewellery.

One of the most notable people to take an interest in Grosse’s work in the first years after its publication was Leo Frobenius (1873-1938). While a more detailed analysis of Frobenius and his early studies will be presented in the next chapter, his review of Grosse is worth noting now. In his article on the *Bildende Kunst der Afrikaner* [Fine Art of Africans] (1897), it becomes clear that Frobenius has studied Grosse’s book in detail and points out the main arguments he takes from it for his own work. Africa, Frobenius notes, “provides examples of all levels of civilization up to the ‘Greek turning point’, [and] also a unified whole.”¹⁴⁷ This idea of the ‘Greek turning point’ is taken partly from Winckelmann’s discourses on art and his emphasis on Greek sculpture, but as will be shown, has very different connotations in Frobenius’s work.

Like Lange, Frobenius sees the burden of proof of any connections made by ethnographers in Europe, who he calls his colleagues, as lying with the travellers who are

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 130.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Frobenius, “Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner,” 1.

able to speak to the natives in person, or at least through a translator. Frobenius also notes that, though von Luschan has not been able to decipher the ornaments of Australian throwing sticks, he “will certainly once he gets to see another couple of dozens of these pieces.”¹⁴⁸ For him, this deciphering of ornaments just by consulting the material and without the help of living native voices is instrumental. Like many others, he believed that the living native voice will soon be a privilege of the past, as European influence compromises the original living conditions of the native people thus changing the people themselves, leaving scholars no other choice than to work with the material alone. He goes on to emphasise that it is because of this loss of the living native voice that the search for valid laws will have to be conducted thoroughly. These include not just stylistic processes but also the development, evolution and connections of different art forms.

It is at this point that Frobenius integrates his critique of Grosse’s book. He confines his review of the book to the influence it might have on aesthetics, and thus leaves out the first few chapters which were the ones Lange also disagreed with the most. Frobenius points out that “the author has solved this task [of integrating primitive art into the study of aesthetics and thus changing the methods and aims of aesthetics] in an excellent manner.”¹⁴⁹ He does not agree with Grosse’s classification of Australian peoples, who have lived confined on their continent with the least influence from the outside, as the most ‘primitive.’ Instead, he notes that evidence in terms of their world-view, culture and mythology shows Malayan influences.

Frobenius goes on to look at the relations between art and a people’s form of subsistence. He applies Grosse’s idea to the whole of Africa and indicates that the art of the ‘Bushmen’ developed from the figurative to the abstract through the unlearning or forgetting of hunting techniques. However, for Frobenius this is not enough of an explanation to account for the withering of sculptures in agricultural communities as “if the hunter felt pleasure [in making art] the agriculturalist should have inherited it.”¹⁵⁰ This shows the influence of Social Darwinian ideas on Frobenius’s work that would position hunter-gatherer communities as the living ancestors of agricultural peoples.

Moreover, Frobenius also criticises the very small number of examples Grosse gives in his chapter on ornamentation and the fact that he fails to note that some of the peoples

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

he uses as examples in other chapters have different forms of art as well: Frobenius names the San, classed as belonging to the 'Bushmen,' in particular, that are portrayed as only producing paintings and drawings.¹⁵¹ He goes on to point out that the most primitive peoples are a group of the past that are no longer existent and can thus only be studied by archaeological findings of their skeletons and tools. In general, Frobenius pictures a threefold division of culture; the peoples ruled by instinct, the peoples of fluctuation and the peoples of the dominant thought. While the peoples ruled by instinct only follow their instinct in all decisions the peoples of the dominant thought evaluate their decisions before making them; the peoples of fluctuation are in between these two poles, still acting according to their instinct but also reasoning about some of their decisions. Thus, Frobenius splits the different peoples in a grid reminiscent of Social Darwinist ideology, but this classification, by cultural and intellectual life, according to Frobenius, is not tied to physical attributes and the boundaries are blurred.

He further argues that language, which is common to all living peoples, is a sign that there are no living people ruled by instinct anymore. However, their direct heirs who are consequently classified in the category of the peoples of fluctuation, are the ones to produce the "outstanding natural art" of which he speaks.¹⁵² The appeal of this "tender, virgin, graceful and natural art"¹⁵³ dwindled once it was no longer nature that served as the model, but one artist started to imitate the other. As stated by Frobenius, the first period of art, before the Greeks, struggled for form and spirit [*Geist*] while art after the Greeks was controlled by form and spirit [*Geist*]. Here, his preference for "natural art," that is true to nature and authentic, is already revealed. For him, the 'Greek turning point' is not the climax of art, as believed by Winckelmann, but the beginning of the demise of a true art experience.

As these two examples of Grosse's critics show, many of his groundbreaking ideas, especially for the field of aesthetics, were generally well received. While both Lange and Frobenius felt that the study was too limited in length and restricted in scope, they also recognised his efforts for opening up the field. Moreover, they also agreed that many of the notions Grosse expressed, particularly with regard to connections between certain forms of art and the development of specific ornaments and their use, remained to be

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

proven - proven not necessarily by ethnographers or art historians, but by travellers. While this shows the shortcomings of a discipline of ethnography that did not yet involve field study, it also shows that these two scholars valued native voices and ultimately assigned to them a primary role in conveying knowledge of their customs and history.

Conclusion

Whether or not Grosse had formal training in ethnography his *Die Anfänge der Kunst* clearly had a strong connection to ethnographic research while at the same time addressing art historians in his quest to include the beginning of art into the European art scientific inquiries. However, it becomes apparent that Grosse alternated between Hegel's and Herder's notions of 'beginning.' This ambivalence is evident throughout his book and was also picked up by his contemporary reviewers. Nevertheless, this first book to look at non-European art aesthetically, and not just as an ethnographic tool, is an important step towards a further development of the art historical analysis of these objects. Most ethnographers, as exemplified here by Bastian and Ratzel, had very different questions in mind when approaching the objects in their collections and used different methods to do so.

As has been demonstrated, Bastian never looked at single objects in detail and only saw the totality of a people's production; he included visual and material culture as well as literary, historical and religious customs in order to find the underlying *Völkergedanken* of the people in question. He was not interested in specific traditions or ideas but only in these *Völkergedanken* that, he hoped, would lead him to the *Elementargedanken* in order to unravel culture in general. Ratzel on the other hand, was already more interested in single peoples and not the totality of humankind. As can be seen from the example above, Ratzel did refer to specific items, and even illustrated these, but he was not interested in the specific piece in its own right but rather used it as a synecdoche for the entire production of the people in question. He did not analyse a people's ideas and notions about art and visual culture but used the collections in order to intuit more about the people's customs and traditions. While in general, Bastian used the objects to learn about their *Völkergedanken*, for Ratzel, the different objects were a means through which to analyse a people's traditions in order to learn about that culture.

Neither was interested in their aesthetics or meanings unless these gave evidence germane to their particular ethnographic aims.

Grosse's work on the consideration of the aesthetic questioning of these objects was, therefore, a pioneering work whose aesthetic considerations opened the field for scholars like Leo Frobenius to include aesthetics in his ethnographic writings. Also, the challenging of art historical methods and the established ideal of beauty that followed the Greek canon opened up seminal discussions. But most of all, his call to researchers of art history and art science to include non-European art in their research opened up a range of possibilities for future study that will be discussed further in the following chapters of this thesis. The most immediate successor was Karl Woermann's survey text on all art. This publication and other important studies that included non-European art into the larger discussions of different notions and ideologies will be discussed in the next chapter.

Framing African Art

**Integrating African art into existing
European structures and Karl Woermann's
survey of all art**

After the intensified research of ethnographers, which has been discussed in Chapter one, the years following 1894 saw a shift in the reception of non-European art in Germany. While ethnographers like Leo Frobenius ventured further into the discussion about the art of the *Naturvölker*, art historians - most of all Karl Woermann (1844-1933) - started to investigate the possibilities of integrating this discussion into art historical discourse. At the same time, people like Ernst Haeckel (1824-1919) and Houston Stewart Chamberlain (1855-1927) spread their ideas on Social Darwinism while *Völkerschauen* [people's shows or human zoos] popularised ethnographic scholarship by making non-European peoples accessible to the German public. These ventures saw scholars integrating African visual culture into different overarching frameworks, like the history of all art, the popular overview of peoples and Social Darwinism.

It is worth mentioning at the beginning of this chapter that it was not Woermann himself who had the idea to include the art of the 'Primal and Natural Peoples as well as the Half Cultural Peoples and the Cultural Peoples of the Far East'¹⁵⁴ into his survey text of *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* [The History of Art of all Times and Peoples]. According to Woermann's autobiography, it was his publisher Hans Meyer of the Bibliographisches Institut who approached him about the venture. The Bibliographische Institut is one of the most famous publishing houses of the time, best known for its encyclopaedias *Meyers Conversations-Lexicon* [Meyers Encyclopaedia] (1839), other surveys like *Brehms Tierleben* [Brehm's Life of Animals] (1863) and the *Duden* (1880) which became the foundation for a standardised German orthography. Founded in 1826 by Carl Joseph Meyer (1796-1856), Hans Meyer (1858-1929) and his brother Arndt (1859-1920) took over the family business in the third generation in 1884. While Arndt Meyer took over the management of the technical and retailing side of the business Hans Meyer was in charge of the academic content.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Karl Woermann, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Bibliogr. Inst., 1924), 204.

¹⁵⁵ For a more detailed account the history of the Bibliographische Institut and Hans Meyer's role in the publishing house see Gisela Blesse, "Hans Meyer, das Bibliographische Institut und Leipzig - Spuren seines Wirkens," in *Meyers Universum*, ed. Heinz Peter Brogiato (Leipzig: Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde, 2008), 11-18.

Hans Meyer was not just the co-owner of the Bibliographische Institut but he was also an explorer, geographer, colonial scholar as well as a colonial politician and was one of the most famous people of public life.¹⁵⁶ He is particularly known for being the first European, together with Ludwig Purtscheller, to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in 1889. The two published a popular book, called *Der Kilima-Ndscharo* about their experiences during this venture in 1900.¹⁵⁷ Meyer was an adamant supporter of reforming the unstructured colonial politics that were in place at the end of the 19th century. His efforts brought him honorary memberships of

Figure 6 Certificate of Hans Meyer's honorary membership of the *Nachtigal-Society for African Studies*, 1890. IfLA, Mappe 21/4.

many colonial societies and as well as a seat on the colonial council when it was founded in 1901.¹⁵⁸

However, Woermann noted himself that Meyer's recommendation to include non-European art into his survey "was grist to [his] mill. [As] the semi-faded memories of [his] early travels in India and the Far East, that had only given [him] a slight sense of the art world of these areas, took shape once more."¹⁵⁹ Woermann's delighted acceptance of Meyer's idea, suggests that Woermann was interested in non-European materials before and that he would have readily been able to do the research.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁷ Hans Meyer, *Der Kilimandjaro* (Berlin: D. Reimer, 1900). For a discussion on the popular fascination with travel writing about the German colonies and the idea of Heimat see Jens Jaeger, "Colony as Heimat? The Formation of Colonial Identity in Germany around 1900," *German History* 27, no. 4 (2009).

¹⁵⁸ For more information on Meyers involvement in German colonial politics see Blesse, "Hans Meyer, das Bibliographische Institut und Leipzig - Spuren seines Wirkens," 18-23.

¹⁵⁹ Woermann, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*, 204.

Firstly, this chapter will take a closer look at research projects that included African visual culture into different existing frameworks. Leo Frobenius and his early work will be further investigated and his critique of Grosse's book will be embedded in Frobenius's personal context. He did not just publish his first more scientific works in the interim between Grosse's and Woermann's book but, as he refers to Grosse and Woermann in turn refers to Frobenius. Thus, he can be seen as one of several linking points between the two scholars. Moreover, the attitude towards Social Darwinism in Germany and the popularity of 'human zoos' will be considered. Both are symptoms of including visual culture into social and political enquiries. It was the 'human zoo,' above all, that brought the exotic to Germany. While ethnographic museums were popular, the temporary 'human zoos' fed into the status of the above mentioned *Volksfest*. At the same time, Ernst Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* [Natural History of Creation], first published in 1868 and reworked and republished several times before 1900, was still widely read and his ideas were commonly discussed, especially amongst scientists. Both of these topics were ongoing issues that not only influenced Woermann's work. However, their schematic treatment of visual culture warrants their inclusion this chapter. This will then lead to a short discussion of Karl Woermann, the chapters on African art in *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* and the impact of the book at the time.

Chapter 3.1 Frobenius

As has been discussed in the last chapter, Frobenius was born in 1873 and did not complete his Abitur leaving him unable to attend university. Instead, he developed a thirst for ethnographical knowledge by reading travel journals and articles of ‘popular ethnography’ published in one of the many middle class journals that were available in Germany at the time. As his interests became more focussed, he began internships and voluntary work in ethnographic museums, including the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, led by Adolf Bastian. He also started to read more scholarly work and his interests in ethnographic research became more defined. Heavily influenced by Friedrich Ratzel, especially his book *Anthropogeographie* [Human Geography] (1882/91) in which he discusses the connection between the *Lebensraum* [living space] of a people and their cultural and societal development, Frobenius began to form the ideas which would define the rest of his career.

Two publications exemplify Frobenius’ emerging thinking, ‘Die Kunst der Naturvölker’¹⁶⁰ [The Art of the Natural Peoples] in 1895/96 and ‘Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner’¹⁶¹ [The Arts of Africans] in 1897. The first part of ‘Die Kunst der Naturvölker’ concentrates on ornaments and the second part considers sculpture. It is one of Frobenius’ first publications with scholarly intentions despite the fact that it was published in two parts in the middle class journal *Westermanns Monatshefte*. *Westermanns Monatshefte* particularly addressed the common notion of the importance of self-edification, as discussed in chapter one, alongside articles included purely for pleasure. It was advertised as an “illustrated monthly magazine for the entire intellectual life of the present,”¹⁶² and, as such, fits into German scholarly and popular scientific circles that aimed to study the general laws of phenomena before turning to specific events of most subjects, in both the humanities and in the natural sciences (see chapter one).

Frobenius begins his account with the claim that the ethnographic discoveries in the preceding years demanded a widening of the art historical sciences, a claim that is also the main point of Ernst Grosse’s *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, discussed in the last chapter. This strengthens the connection between art history and ethnography and supports the argument for including ethnographic objects in the history of art. Frobenius already

¹⁶⁰ Leo Frobenius, "Die Kunst der Naturvölker," *Westermanns Monatshefte* (1895/96).

¹⁶¹ "Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner."

¹⁶² Westermann’s Monatshefte cover

conjured this idea in his title 'Die Kunst der Naturvölker' which combines the European idea of 'art' with the ethnographic ideas of non-European or 'primitive' peoples.

Frobenius believed that it was especially ornamental art and primitive sculpture that reveal the character of 'the beginnings of art.' Here, he not only uses the phrase of Grosse's book title but also points towards very similar themes. For example, Frobenius describes an ornament as a figure which is applied to an object without thought of practical use. Grosse's ideas about the practical uses of visual culture were not just contested by his critics (see Lange in chapter two), he has also been contradictory about it himself. Frobenius generally keeps to the idea of decoration without practical use which is further described as being dependent on the object it adorns. So, according to Frobenius, a human figure is not painted on a shield in order to decorate it but rather as a deterrence or because of some mythological connection. Despite the fact that this same type of ornament remains attached to the meaning and use of the larger object, and is thus "unfree" as proposed by Herder before (see chapter 1.3.), its eventual form can change: the ornament is "alive" and can change and develop.¹⁶³ Frobenius studies the development of visual culture while at the same time making a connection between aesthetic character - which, according to Grosse, is visible in any object - and an intended use. These non-European objects thus have aesthetic qualities.

For Frobenius, meaning or intent are the most important aspects of the study of ornamental art. This differentiates his work from that of Grosse who did not refer directly to the "customs and myths" of the people whose art he analysed. Frobenius even apologises to his artistically interested readers for the fact that he comments only briefly on aesthetic practice. This impression is further confirmed in the second part of his study concerning sculpture. Thus, Frobenius points out that the *Naturvölker's* aim is not to copy the forms of nature but rather to give an expression of their realm of imagination. In this regard, he tries to make a clear distinction between the art of 'natural peoples' and 'cultural peoples.' According to Frobenius, Greek art of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. stand as an exemplar of the art of 'cultural peoples,' in which the movements of humans was captured in its homogeneity. Here, Frobenius follows Winckelmann in his ideals of beauty. Moreover, he points out - capturing a consensus endorsed by Grosse and other

¹⁶³ Leo Frobenius, "Die Kunst der Naturvölker: Die Plastik," *Westermanns Monatshefte* (1895): 330.

researchers at the time - that art before the Greeks shows parallels with contemporary 'primitive races.'

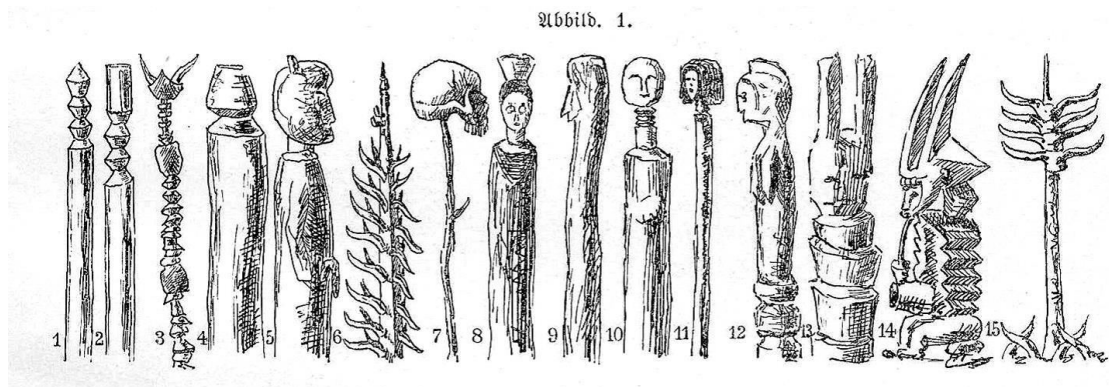


Figure 7 Illustration of "ancestral poles and figures" from Leo Frobenius', *Die Kunst der Naturvölker*, 1896, p. 598.

Frobenius uses the development of ancestral figures to exemplify his ideas about the possible line of change in the art of 'natural peoples.' Before turning to his argument it is worth noting that while he generally refers to the 43 in-text illustrations he uses in the two parts of his article, he does not explicitly refer to all of the depicted objects in this illustration of ancestral poles. This suggests that he reused the illustration from a different publication as was often the case at the time. According to him, poles 3, 13 and 14, shown in figure 6, demonstrate a developmental change:

At the beginning, horns of oxen and antelopes may have crowned the sticks. Then they were modelled from nature and made into wood. Finally, when the figure of the human is completed, they remain as ears.¹⁶⁴

In this way, Frobenius tried to widen the beginnings of art, as Grosse called them, from a stagnant entity to a developing, "living" tradition. He goes on to note that the 'natural peoples' were not primarily interested in the portrayal of the human form and, as such, their sculptures cannot be regarded as abysmal or incomplete human figures, as many contemporary voices asserted.

An indication of his attitude towards the question of the evolution of art and the means used to substantiate these claims can be seen in the illustration of the ancestral figures. Most of the figures shown are not discussed in detail or even described resulting in a very weak verbal-visual syntagm. The reader is provided with no information about any of these figures, apart from figures 3, 13 and 14, and as such is unable to make any

¹⁶⁴ "Die Kunst der Naturvölker: Die Ornamentik," *Westermanns Monatshefte* (1896): 598.

connections between them and the unknown culture in which they were produced. Instead, they become a synecdoche for the art of 'natural peoples' as a whole.

Moreover, from today's standpoint it becomes clear that the different ancestral figures are depicted as reduced or increased in scale in order to show them as a uniform and comparable row.¹⁶⁵ Despite Frobenius's claim to work scientifically, this decision is a way to emphasise his argument about the evolutionary changes between figures 3, 13 and 14. The scaling of objects in ethnographic articles was very common at the time. Rows of objects in particular were often adjusted in relation to one another in order to simplify printing, support the text-image ratio and to compose object displays. Nevertheless, these manipulations of the image helped the author to emphasise evolutionary developments, leaving the reader uncertain over the size and, in this case, also the origin of the objects.

While Frobenius thus challenged the common belief that the art of 'natural peoples' was of an unfinished quality, he also drew a clear distinction between this art and the art of European 'cultural peoples.' According to him, the latter portrays and copies nature for purposes of pleasure and abides by certain guidelines. By contrast, the art of 'natural peoples' is about the depiction of an inner vision. He goes on to point out that due to the maker's lack of ambition to perfect the representation of the form of the work, the key to the understanding of the art of 'natural peoples' is the study of the development of ideas. Thus, he places emphasis on the importance of his own research, and research like it, that connects the ideas and customs of the 'natural peoples' with their visual culture.

Both separately published parts of the article, on ornaments and sculpture, that deal with this connection between visual culture and ideas are headed by an ornament on the front page. This practice was common for *Westermanns Monatshefte* which used these ornaments to distinguish the different articles visually and to separate the journal into distinct, recurring, categories. While some subject areas were headed by unspecific decorations like lion's heads, winged horses or floral arrangements, many were also headed by allegorical ornaments that visually connected to the content of the text. For

¹⁶⁵ The practice of adjusting the relative scales of different images to be more comparable has also been discussed in the cases of Thomas Henry Huxley's essay *Evidence as to Man's Place in Nature* (1863): Reichle, "Charles Darwins Gedanken zur Abstammung des Menschen und die Nützlichkeit von Weltbildern zur Erhaltung der Art." And most recently in a special issue of *Art History* on scale in the case of Ernst Haeckel's book *Anthropogenie* (1874): Joan Kee and Emanuela Lugli, "Scale to Size: An Introduction," *Art History* 38, no. 2 (2015).



Figure 8 Header used for the novellas in *Westermann's Monatshefte*.

example, the header placed on top of novellas, present in every issue depicts, the allegorical personification of Drama. On either side of the woman, dressed in Greek robes and wearing a laurel wreath is a putto with a mask, one smiling and one crying, embodying comedy and tragedy.

Of particular interest for this study is the ornament used for articles on art and art history, which depict the allegorical instruments of the fine arts: architecture, sculpture and painting. Interestingly, this ornament is also used for the decoration of the title page of the article by Frobenius: t-square and right angle (as a sign of architecture); palette, brushes and mahlstick (as a sign for painting); and callipers, mallet and chisel (as a sign for sculpture). The inclusion of an article on non-European cultures is not surprising as interest in this subject at the time led to the publication of many such articles. However, the editorial decision to head Frobenius's article with the same ornament reserved for reports on art and artists is worth emphasizing.

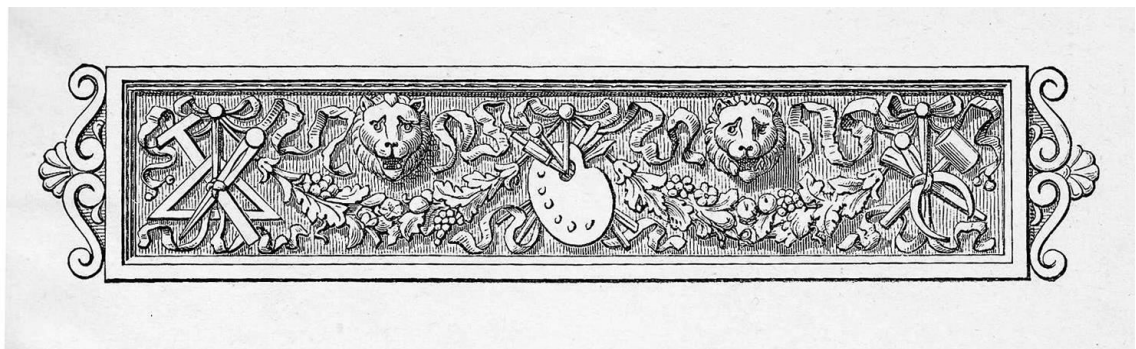


Figure 9 Header of Leo Frobenius' *Die Kunst der Naturvölker*, 1895/6.

Even though Frobenius was adamant about the difference between European and non-European art, by heading his contribution with the allegory of the European fine arts, the non-European objects in the article are implicitly classified as art works similar to European art, or to least works relevant to European art. None of the tools found in the ornament were used to produce the objects presented in the article and yet they are emblazoned above the description of objects of exotic origin. The exact circumstances of the decision to use this header cannot be reconstructed, but it seems the ornament emphasises the ambiguity of the article, which on the one hand strengthens the importance of the discussed objects and on the other hand stresses the difference between European and non-European 'art.'

In his article on the 'Bildende Kunst der Afrikaner' [Fine Art of Africans], published in 1897, Frobenius intensifies his research into the idea of the depiction of 'visions' and their influence on the development of form. Africa, according to Frobenius, "provides examples of all levels of civilization up to the 'Greek turning point', [and] also a unified whole."¹⁶⁶ Here, Frobenius refers to Friedrich Ratzel, who has pointed out in an "excellent manner, that all foreign influence gets lost, because Africans africanise all matter."¹⁶⁷ Thus, it is possible for him to collectively describe the development of certain ornaments throughout Africa while simultaneously assigning them to different stages of culture.

Furthermore, Frobenius looks at the importance of heads and faces which he notes are significant to humankind everywhere but seem to have a special importance for "Negro art," as heads are often depicted disproportionately large. He merely mentions this fact and refers to Julius Lange's work on the frontal line, before he concludes that only the study of the skull cult might shed light on this preference. This leads Frobenius into a lengthy discussion about the use of foes' skulls after battle and human sacrifices in worship, before referring to Ratzel, who, according to Frobenius, has shown the relationship between skulls and ancestral figures.¹⁶⁸ With regard to ancestral figures he notes that "African sculpture often offers very well executed human depictions"¹⁶⁹ and that "in technical and artistic respects the sculpture of Negroes achieve more than those of most other primitive peoples."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Frobenius, "Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner," 1.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3; Ratzel, *Völkerkunde*, 1, 45.

¹⁶⁹ Frobenius, "Die bildende Kunst der Afrikaner," 5/6.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.

Frobenius includes a detailed critique on Grosse's *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (see chapter 2.4), in which it becomes apparent that he followed Grosse's notion of the influence of the form of subsistence on a people's art and, thus, turned towards an evolutionary explanation of the development of art. Moreover, this also shows how Frobenius yet again underlined the differences between European and African art, here represented in terms of differences in skill. He criticises Grosse for not including more examples to substantiate his claims and for failing to mention that some people produce more than one form of art. This lamentation of the short-comings of Grosse's book leads Frobenius to consider "Negro art" which has, unlike other African art, a "confusing number of developmental lines" that, according to Frobenius, almost force the beholder to draw connections that are not there.¹⁷¹

In order to avoid making these false connections himself, Frobenius names two different kinds of developmental lines. On the one hand the "declining natural art" – for example ornaments that begin as sensual motives (directly recognisable) and develop to mental motives (not directly recognisable) – and, on the other hand, the "inclining cultural art" – for example the development from a simple ancestral stick to the more complex ancestral figure. His notion of the 'Greek turning point' - that the first period of art, before the Greeks, struggled for form and spirit [*Geist*] while art after the Greeks was controlled by form and spirit [*Geist*] - must be understood within this framework. Both, the "declining natural art" and "the inclining cultural art," change at this turning point as they are copied from a different work rather than nature and thus become unrecognisable and overly complex respectively.

By consciously trying to connect the art of the *Naturvölker* with European art, Frobenius does not just raise ethnographic questions but also addresses issues of art history and aesthetics. By predicting the impending end of the art of 'natural peoples' he demands that art historians should engage with the matter when he exclaims; "[c]ertainly, these first chapters of art history will be interesting."¹⁷² As will be shown, Woermann provided these first chapters of art history and thus answered Frobenius' call. In this way, it is evident that Frobenius, who was not academically taught as an ethnographer, contrived to effect a relationship between ethnography and art history, as becomes clear from the fact that his articles, being the first ones of their kind based on scientific sources,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷² "Die Kunst der Naturvölker: Die Ornamentik," 606.

were published in middle class journals. Through the subtle mediation between aesthetic characteristics and contextual information, Frobenius was able to sustain a wide readership and his approach rendered these objects of great interest to ethnographers, as well as to colleagues in several other disciplines.

Chapter 3.2 *Völkerschau*

In 1896, Germany held a commercial exhibition in Berlin, including a large colonial element. The Berlin show was by no means the only such exhibition held in Germany; in fact there were countless others all over the country. But the 1896 exhibition in Treptow Park was the largest and also the most controversial. It included one of the very popular 'human zoos,' during which mock villages were erected and non-European peoples - in this case people from Togo, Cameroon and New-Guinea - were displayed for the enjoyment and education of German visitors. These 'human zoos' were an important part of the reception of non-Europeans in Germany as, for most people - including ethnographers - these shows were a convenient way to learn about foreign peoples and, more significantly, to see them in the flesh. Thus, the many visitors would have been given a specific framework in which to remember the different peoples; their entertainment factor for European crowds, their part in an overall context of non-Europeans (as these 'human zoos' often included peoples from other continents) and in the case of the Berlin trade show (and other international exhibitions) their role in the world as belonging to and being dependent on European nations.

While it is not possible to reconstruct whether Woermann had visited a show like this, or the show in Berlin in 1896 in particular, he would have certainly been indirectly influenced by the 'human zoos.' As will be discussed in this section, exhibitions of colonial subjects were held throughout the country and were widely discussed in easily accessible media such as books, journals and newspapers. A scholar preparing an art historical survey that includes the art of non-European peoples would have certainly come across information and discussion about such exhibits at some point during his research.

The exhibition of 'exotic' people had been part of German popular culture long before the colonial exhibition in 1896 and it stayed in practice until the Second World War. The first such exhibitions were embedded into the successful 'freak shows' that toured Europe, especially between 1830 and 1860. Several panopticons around Germany soon saw the opportunity and included people as exhibits in their large scale, 360° displays. The biggest ones, like Castan's Panoptikum or the Passagen-Panoptikum in Berlin, also included anatomical museums and a 'cabinet of curiosities' in order to generate an audience.¹⁷³ Most of these shows were sensationalist, had very little care for accuracy and

¹⁷³ Raymond Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," 1993, 354.

played into existing stereotypes of 'primitive' life. In the words of Robert Bogdan, "'wild men' or 'savages' might grunt or pace the stage, snarling, growling and letting off warrior screams. Dress might simply be a loincloth and a string of bones around the neck, and, in a few cases, the scene was embellished with chains, which were allegedly there to protect the public from the attacks of the 'beast' who paced the stage before them."¹⁷⁴

The people that were presented came from a variety of different countries and continents with the main intent to make them look interesting and presentable, playing on their so-called 'savageness.' The varied methods through which they were recruited were as diverse as the origins of the people exhibited. Everything between a closed contract, force and even abduction were possible and it depended on the individual ethics of the organiser whether the people in his show were paid, treated well or subjected to mistreatment, disease and abuse.¹⁷⁵

One of the most famous exhibitors of humans in Germany is Carl Hagenbeck, today more often known through Hagenbeck Zoo in Hamburg. When the trade in wild animals declined substantially, he revived his business by exhibiting people alongside animals



Figure 10 South Sami or Laplanders at Hagenbecks Zoo, 1926. Hagenbeck Archive, Hamburg.

¹⁷⁴ Bogdan, "When the Exotic Becomes a Show," 81.

¹⁷⁵ Hilke Thode-Arora, "Völkerschauen in Berlin," in *Kolonialmetropole Berlin. Eine Spurensuche. Buch zur Kolonialgeschichte Berlins*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Quintessenz Verlag, 2002), 153.

from the same region with his first show of Sami or Laplanders and their reindeer opening in 1875. However, even though the animal trade recovered in the mid 1880s he kept the ethnographic shows, which he called *Anthropologisch-Zoologische Ausstellung* [anthropological-zoological exhibitions],¹⁷⁶ running as a side-line to his usual business.

Although Hagenbeck always had contracts with the people he exhibited, he was seeking to employ people with the same characteristics - adhering to presupposed stereotypes - as any other organisers would. According to Thode-Arora, he wanted his groups to be strange in some way, but not too strange and to display a special beauty and grace to European eyes.¹⁷⁷ For fear of revolt or conflict, Hagenbeck preferred that his exhibits were unable to speak any European languages and he also emphasised that he did not want to have any “drunkards or quarrellers”¹⁷⁸ in the group. To show the “primitive’s family life” it was important that the group was balanced with regard to sex and age.¹⁷⁹

By 1895 he refined his own idea of an ‘exotic’ show and integrated dances and acrobatic acts into a fictive story of “a peaceful opening scene, a dramatic incident and climax (for example, an abduction or an attack on the village), which allowed a fight to be staged, followed by a happy ending (for example, a peace treaty or a marriage ceremony) which provided the opportunity for singing, dancing and [an] animal procession.”¹⁸⁰ Moreover, the human shows were fully integrated into his zoo business and Hagenbeck advertised his spectacle by saying that one could travel the world for 50 Pfennig. Another advertisement read that “if you want to see Africa, don’t set out on a long trip, but come to see the one hundred Somalis in Hagenbeck’s zoo.”¹⁸¹

The human shows in Hagenbeck’s zoo and the different Panoptikums were two ways of seeing non-Europeans peoples in Germany. Another was the mock village in temporary exhibitions. Best known through world fairs, the people in these mock villages would often tour Europe from one exhibition to another. Representatives from different countries were already present at the first world fair – the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace – in 1851. But it was only in Paris in 1867 that the people became part of the show

¹⁷⁶ Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," 354.

¹⁷⁷ Thode-Arora, "Hagenbeck's European Tours: The Development of the Human Zoo," 167/8.

¹⁷⁸ Carl Hagenbeck quoted by *ibid.*, 169.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

when craftsmen from different countries helped build pavilions and worked in bazaars, barber shops and cafes.¹⁸²

The first mock village - in which 'primitives' were exhibited without having a role (such as serving foods or drinks) other than showing their 'daily lives' - was in the Paris World's Fair in 1889.¹⁸³ Between 1889 and 1914 world's fairs turned more and more into human showcases and the mock villages became an integral part of every world's fair, transforming human beings into objects.¹⁸⁴ 'Native huts' that were supposed to look like they came from the different regions, but were often designed by European architects, were built with material imported from the same regions as the people. Often ropes, or other barriers, were put up in order to separate the living exhibits from the audience. Moreover they had to be in 'native dress' and were supposed only to speak their native language during exhibition hours.¹⁸⁵

Germany's involvement in world's fairs was complicated: pavilions were built in other world's fairs and German products were shown but Germany had not hosted a world's fair itself. The opinions as to whether Germany should host such a show were varied and the debate was polemical. Ultimately, however, it was the Emperor's decision that prevented such an exposition for decades. In 1892 the Emperor wrote to the Chancellor, Graf von Caprivi, that he was "absolutely against" hosting a world's fair in Berlin and that it was "completely wrong" to believe that Berlin needs such an exhibition because of it being a "large city and maybe even a world-class city." He goes on to point out that the only reason Paris was so attractive, even without the exhibitions, is that it is the "great whorehouse of the world."¹⁸⁶

Nevertheless, in the coming years, the plans to hold a great exhibition in Berlin were intensified with the scope of this exhibition constantly changing from international to national, from national to local, from universal to industrial.¹⁸⁷ Finally, the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung* [Berlin industrial exhibition] opened its gates on May 1st 1896 and, because of its long planning and constantly changing scope, it became known as the

¹⁸² Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939*, 85.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 85/6.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸⁵ Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," 344.

¹⁸⁶ Private letter emperor Wilhelm II to Chancellor Graf von Caprivi, 20. July 1892 quoted Alexander C.T. Geppert, "Weltstadt für einen Sommer: Die Berliner Gewerbeausstellung 1896 Im Europäischen Kontext," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für die Geschichte Berlins* 103, no. 1 (2007): 8.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 10.

international exhibition that did not happen - playing on the fact that it was initially designed as an international exhibition but was finally not classed as one. The show boasted one of the largest telescopes in the world, the first public demonstration of Röntgen's X-rays and was designed to demonstrate Germany's - as well as Berlin's - industrial might.¹⁸⁸ Although, in terms of attendance, the show was not a success (only an average of 41,000 visitors came every day instead of the expected 55,000 visitors) the press was constantly writing about it. Already one week after the opening, the *Vossische Zeitung* wrote accusingly: "one has to have been to the exhibition: for those who have not visited do not have the right to exist."¹⁸⁹

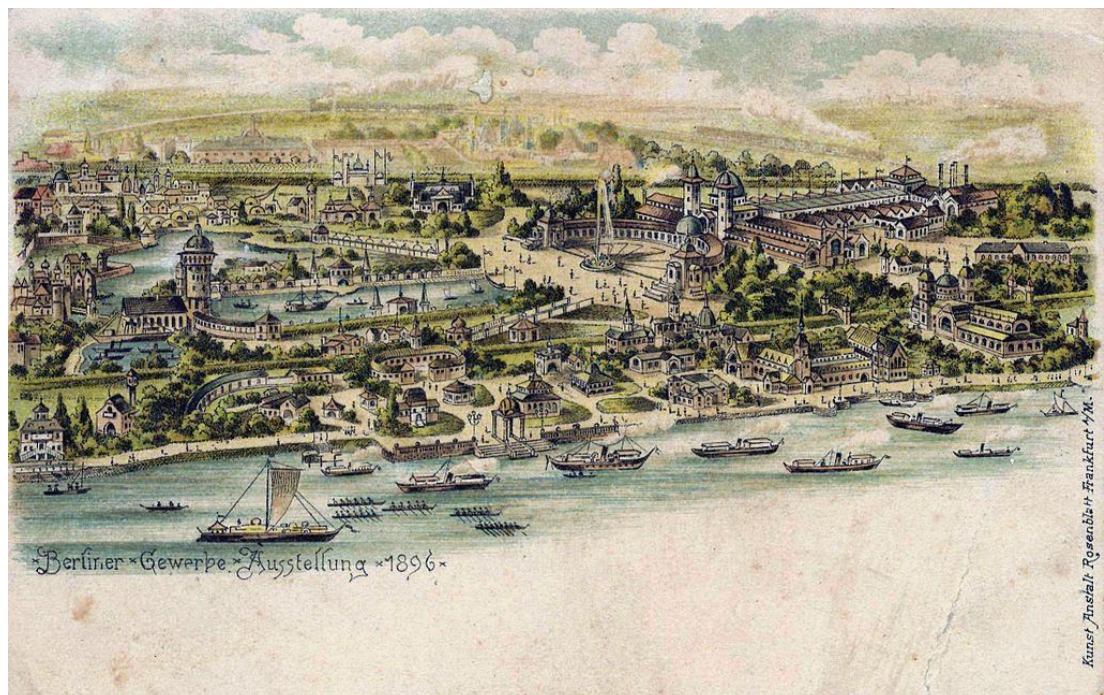


Figure 11 picture postcard of the *Berliner Gewerbeausstellung* in Treptow, 1896.

Moreover, more than one hundred performers were brought to Germany to live in mock villages, engaging in their 'normal' daily activities, craft making, and performing in shows.¹⁹⁰ This mock village was not part of the actual industrial exhibition but was included in the colonial exhibition, separated from the main site by a street. The *Pracht-Album der Berliner Gewerbeausstellung 1896* reads:

If one looks over the carp pond, one sees [...] to the right some curious huts that have been built next to the pond. They are made of birch trees and palm leaves, their garishly painted gables are 'decorated' with horns and faded animal

¹⁸⁸ Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany*, 51.

¹⁸⁹ *Vossische Zeitung*, 7 May 1896, quoted in Geppert, "Weltstadt für Einen Sommer: Die Berliner Gewerbeausstellung 1896 Im Europäischen Kontext," 13.

¹⁹⁰ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and Antihumanism in Imperial Germany*, 24.

and human skulls. In front of them, close to a hideous fetish, cavort dark, half naked figures [...]. Fellow countrymen they are, these strange companions with their thick, greased hair, their tattoos on their face and chest, their muscular physique, people from New Guinea.¹⁹¹

This quote is taken from an official publication and, as such, it can be assumed that the writing was prompted by very strong agendas and it is questionable whether any visitor would have looked at the staged villages and thought of the ‘savages’ on display as fellow countrymen - especially as nothing about the described staging of these people, nor the way this excerpt is written, attempts to emphasise any commonalities. Together with the illustrations used in the *Pracht-Album* it generates a clear picture of the agenda of the display.

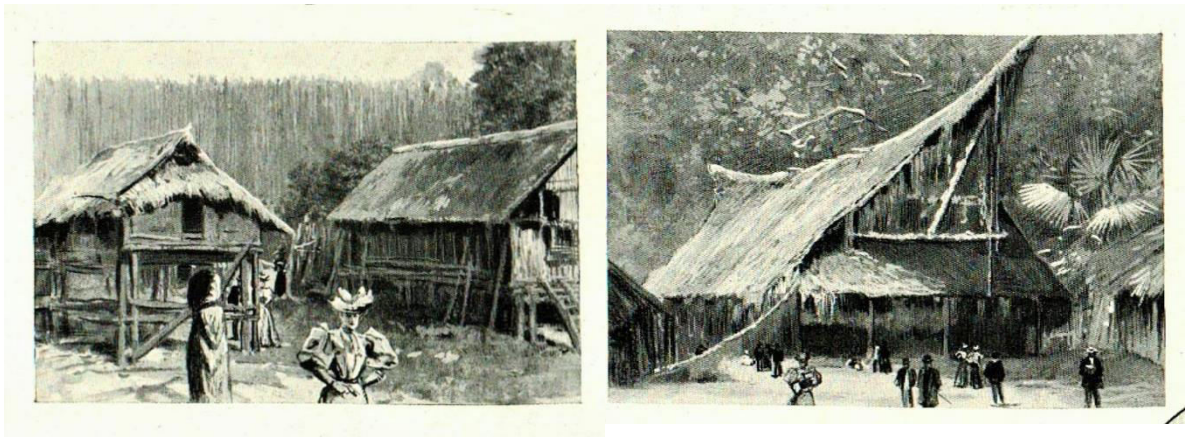


Figure 12 Illustrations of the "New-Guinea-Huts" at the colonial exhibition in Treptow, *Pracht-Album*, 1896, p. 40.

The juxtaposition of the ‘New-Guinea-Huts’ and the German women and men, dressed in high fashion, is striking. In connection to the text, the comment on the “fellow countrymen” becomes satirical and the emphasis on differences becomes even clearer. It is not a togetherness that is promoted but the superiority of the coloniser and spectator over these “dark, half naked figures.” According to the official reports, the colonial exhibition aroused “the most interest with the majority of the visitors [...] as the ‘primitive’ has never been so tangibly close to them before.”¹⁹²

These exhibitions were not just viewed and discussed by the general public and the popular press, but also by ethnographers. In general they not only participated in these *Völkerschauen* as experts for colonial display but they also took the opportunity to gather

¹⁹¹ Paul Lindenberg, *Pracht-Album photographischer Aufnahmen der Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung 1896: Und der Sehenswürdigkeiten Berlins und des Treptower Parks* (Berlin: Werner, 1896), 52.

¹⁹² Quoted in Geppert, "Weltstadt für einen Sommer: Die Berliner Gewerbeausstellung 1896 Im Europäischen Kontext," 17.

first-hand knowledge without having to leave the country, fieldwork being as yet not common. In the context of the industrial exhibition in Berlin, one can see von Luschan's attitude towards these shows by looking at a report he had hoped to publish with the publishing house Reimer but never did. In the second part, which deals with ethnography, von Luschan describes the people from Cameroon that were exhibited:

They were all people from the coast, mainly of the worst kind, typical trouser-nigger [*Hosen-nigger*], but this is why they are extraordinarily informative, as one could very clearly see where a certain treatment of the Negro must lead. Especially in contrast to the Southwest Africans - that have been visited by missionaries for decades and hence appear flawless and like noble people - the Massai - from every culture unsoiled, amicably naïve - and the first people from New Britain, these insolent, from alcohol degenerated Dualla-society with their idiotic 'prince' were rightly there and should surely not have been missed.¹⁹³

Here, von Luschan shows his attitude towards the different people on show and it becomes clear that, while he favoured noble behaviour and childlike naivety he had a very strong aversion to what he calls "trouser-nigger." While he mentions that these people have become like this due to a certain treatment, most probably by the white man, it does not become clear in this text what kind of treatment this is. Consideration of a handwritten annotation of von Luschan's in the margins of Diedrich Westermann's review¹⁹⁴ of his work on the Benin Bronzes (1919) clarifies his aversion. He notes that it "just lacks syphilis. Then one can generally say about the influence of Europeans on Africans: five European S's ruined it: slavery [*Sklaverei*], clear spirit [*Schnaps*], waste products [*Schundwaren*], the creation of a proletariat [*Schaffung eines Proletariats*] and syphilis [*Syphilis*]." ¹⁹⁵ Nevertheless, von Luschan's next sentence reveals that his dislike was heightened by the fact that the exhibited people were not willing to give him the ethnographic information he was after. He laments that "not even indistinct plaster casts of their curious scarification marks were attainable."¹⁹⁶

As this example shows, German ethnographers saw the *Völkerschauen* as an opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge without having to leave the country. Generally

¹⁹³ Felix von Luschan Kolonial Ausstellung in Treptow, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan, Kasten 8, 161.

¹⁹⁴ Diedrich Westermann, Literarisches Zentralblatt 21. August 1920.

¹⁹⁵ Felix von Luschan Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan, Kasten 17.

¹⁹⁶ Felix von Luschan Kolonial Ausstellung in Treptow, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan, Kasten 8, 162.

speaking, the organisers of these shows and the ethnographers had a mutually beneficial business relationship. Ethnographers gave legitimacy to the shows by writing texts, giving speeches or just accrediting their authenticity, as the popularity of these shows also attracted many frauds that would paint their assistants with shoe polish and make them act 'savage.'¹⁹⁷

At the same time, the ethnographers had access to the people they were studying and, in the case of trade and industrial exhibitions, benefitted by acquiring new objects for their museums that were often given to them at the end of the show.¹⁹⁸ When von Luschan visited the Paris World's Fair in 1900, he seized the opportunity to take several photographs of the exhibited Benin Bronzes and even to buy a bronze head for the collection in Berlin.¹⁹⁹ This connection between the 'human zoos,' especially at international exhibitions and trade shows, and ethnographers is an important one to keep in mind as it is also the link between popular and scientific ethnography, two differing yet overlapping frameworks that shaped the reception of non-European art.

¹⁹⁷ Klaus-Dieter Kürschner, *Von der Menagerie zum größten Circus Europas: Krone. Ein dokumentarischer Bericht* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1998), 25/6.

¹⁹⁸ Corbey, "Ethnographic Showcases, 1870-1930," 357.

¹⁹⁹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Von Luschan, Bericht über die Exposition Universelle in 1900, 125.

Chapter 3.3 Haeckel and Social Darwinism

As we saw in chapter two, Adolf Bastian's distinction between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* was very common in Germany and many ethnographers were certain of the idea of the psychic unity of mankind.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, while Woermann did read a lot of Bastian's work and gained a lot of ethnographic knowledge from him and Ratzel he did not base his notion of the integration of non-European art into a European canon on the ideas of these scholars. Instead, he was more influenced by the developmental studies of Social Darwinism which will be considered – including the origins, circulation and discussion in ethnography – in the following section. As a symptom of the developmental stage of the people that made it, non-European visual culture was included into the framework of the evolution of mankind and its discernibility in contemporary cultures.

Ideas of the Social Darwinian evolution of society entered into the discourse of a variety of disciplines in Germany. The much debated phrase 'Social Darwinism' is widely used to define how evolutionary theory and other biological concepts were applied to social questions and issues of human groups in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁰¹ Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, is seen as the base of Social Darwinism and it was indeed the emerging discourse on evolution and the notion of the 'survival of the fittest' that prepared the way for the idea of social evolution. In essence, Darwin's theory consisted of four elements that support natural selection:

(i) biological laws governed the whole of organic nature, including humans; (ii) the pressure of population growth on resources generated a struggle for existence among organisms; (iii) physical and mental traits conferring an advantage on their possessor in this struggle (or in sexual competition), could, through inheritance, spread through the populations; (iv) the cumulative effects of selection and inheritance over time accounted for the emergence of new species and the elimination of others.²⁰²

In order for this model to fit with the idea of Social Darwinism there is a fifth, essential, element, "namely that this determinism extends not just to the physical properties of humans but also to their social existence and to those psychological attributes that play a

²⁰⁰ Johannes Ranke, "Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht des Generalsekretärs," *Correspondenzblatt der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, no. 9 (1896): 90.

²⁰¹ Viv Golding, *Learning at the Museums Frontiers: Identity, Race and Power* (London: Ashgate, 2009), 25.

²⁰² Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat*, 31.

fundamental role in social life, e.g. reason, religion and morality.”²⁰³ The crucial part of Social Darwinism or social evolution is that even culture - religion, ethics or art - can be explained by applying the first four elements to their development. According to this, human nature, as well as human physical characteristics, evolved throughout history.²⁰⁴

In Darwin’s theory of evolution, natural selection, does not promote this linear progress from simple to complex; it should rather be seen as working on random variations. But by taking modern man and his society as the measure of all things, Social Darwinists believed that sophisticated European religious ideas, monogamous families and, above all, scientific discoveries had evolved from their antithesis: a primitive, illogical, magic-worshipping society.²⁰⁵ In Germany, this discourse on Darwinism and its implications for society, was first and foremost supported by the work of Ernst Haeckel.²⁰⁶

While in *The Origins of Species* Darwin only considered the evolution of animals, Haeckel had already applied the theory to human beings before Darwin published his *Descent of Man* in 1871.²⁰⁷ Moreover, he also pointed out that “in civil and social relationships again the same principle is at work – the struggle for existence and natural selection; this drives peoples irresistibly forward and progressively to higher levels of culture.”²⁰⁸

Haeckel’s most famous and influential book, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* [Natural History of Creation], was first published in 1868 and went through 12 editions and 24 translations by 1920.²⁰⁹ This book was not just popular with German scientists and the public but also with Darwin himself, to whom Haeckel had given a copy as a gift.²¹⁰

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society* (Oxford: Routledge, 1988), 5.

²⁰⁶ In the past 40 years, many studies have been published that deal with different problems of Haeckel’s theory and publications, including its alleged link to Nazi politics. For examples see, Zmarzlik, "Social Darwinism in Germany, Seen as a Historical Problem." Weikart, "The Origins of Social Darwinism in Germany, 1859-1895."; "Darwinism and Death: Devaluing Human Life in Germany 1859-1920," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 2 (2002); Dombrowski, "Ernst Haeckel's Controversial Visual Rhetoric."

²⁰⁷ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: J. Murray, 1871).

²⁰⁸ Ernst Haeckel, "Über die Entwicklungstheorien Darwins," in *Amtlicher Bericht Der 38. Versammlung Deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte in Stettin* (Stettin: Hessenland’s Buchdruckerei, 1864), 28. Cited and translated in Robert J. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought* (Chicago, Ill. and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 97. The first edition of *The Origins of Species* does not include ideas of progressive evolution. However, Richards has identified possibilities that support Haeckel’s claim that these ideas stem from Darwin himself. See *ibid.*, 98/9.

²⁰⁹ Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 2.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

In his *The Descent of Man* Darwin clearly stated his belief that Haeckel's theories were very close to his own, as he wrote that "beside his great work, *Generelle Morphologie* (1866), [Haeckel] has recently (1868, with a second edit. in 1870), published his *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, in which he fully discusses the genealogy of man. If this work had appeared before my essay had been written, I should probably never have completed it. Almost all the conclusions at which I have arrived I find confirmed by this naturalist, whose knowledge on many points is much fuller than mine."²¹¹

It was in the *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* that Haeckel's phrase 'missing link'²¹² - to refer to the prehistoric man-ape that links human evolution to apes - was first used. This phrase later gained popularity when it was misused in connection with 'human zoos,' most famously in the case of Ota Benga, a Pygmy sharing a cage with a chimpanzee in the Bronx Zoo in New York.²¹³ Haeckel did mention "the extraordinary resemblance, which is still preserved between the lower *Wollhaarigen Menschen* [woolly haired peoples] and the highest apes." But he also added that "it requires only a little imagination to picture a connecting intermediate form between the two."²¹⁴ According to Haeckel, this intermediate form, the ape-man without speech, is an extinct, prehistoric hominid, whose remains could be found in the area of Borneo, Sumatra, and Java.²¹⁵

Another major point Haeckel took from his *Generelle Morphologie* into his *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, is biogenetic law, the idea that ontogeny follows phylogeny. This biogenetic law states that the foetal development of an organism passes through the same stages as the historic evolution of its species.²¹⁶ Haeckel points out that "in this deep connection between ontogeny and phylogeny, I perceive one of the most important and irrefutable proofs of the theory of descent."²¹⁷ Most important for this study, however,

²¹¹ Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, 4; quoted in Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 263.

²¹² *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 3.

²¹³ Harvey Blume, "Ota Benga and the Barnum Complex," in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999); Phillips Verner Bradford and Harvey Blume, *Ota Benga: The Pygmy in the Zoo* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1993).

²¹⁴ Ernst Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 4 ed. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1973), 620.

²¹⁵ Eugène Dubois found evidence for the accuracy of Haeckel's theory when he located remains, of what became known as *Homo Erectus*, in Java in 1890/1. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 4.

²¹⁶ The illustrations accompanying this theory were and still are one of the main points of critique against the *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, see Dombrowski, "Ernst Haeckel's Controversial Visual Rhetoric."; Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 234-44.

²¹⁷ Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 276.

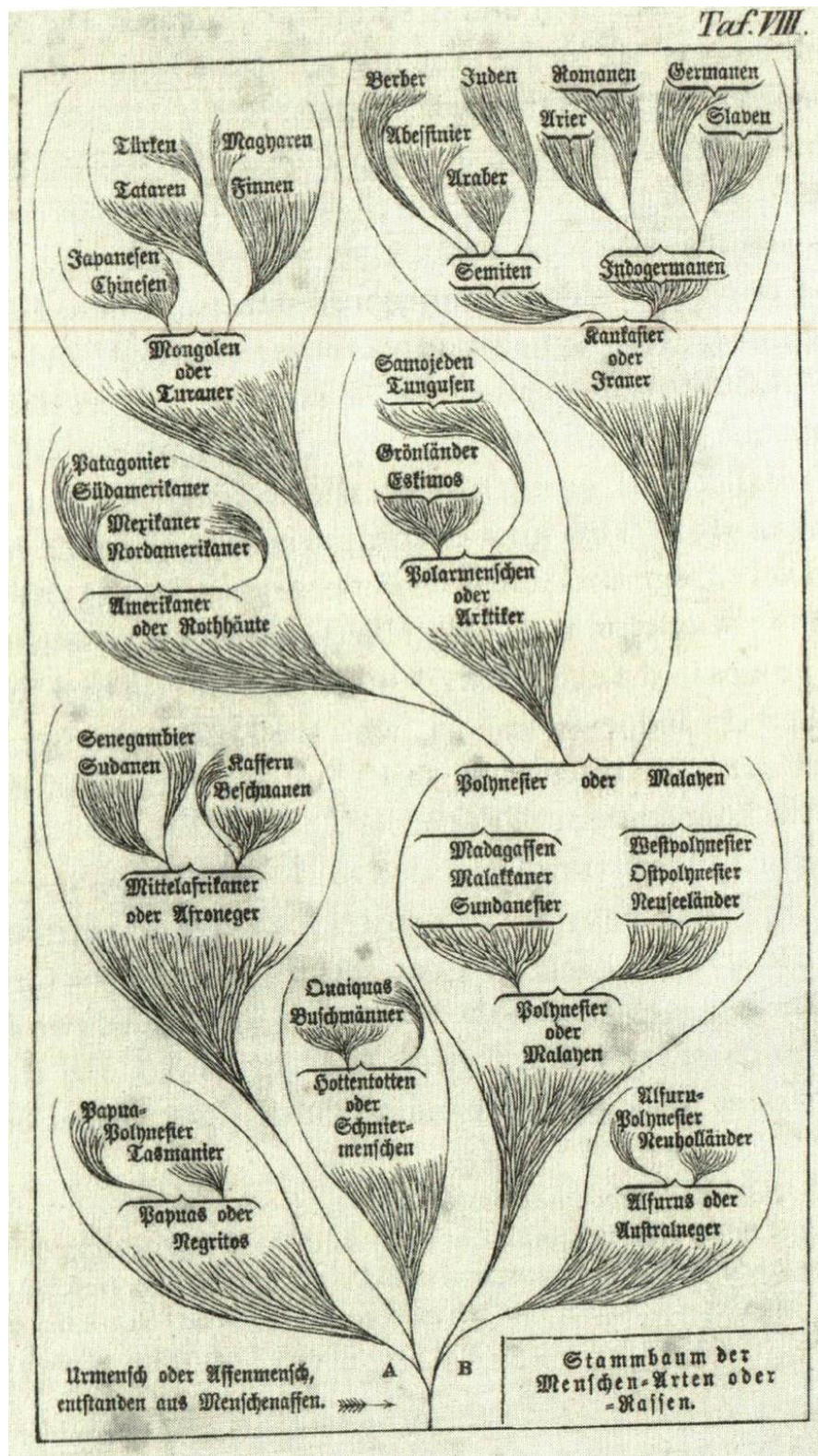


Figure 13 Illustration of “Stemtree of the human species or races” from Haeckel’s *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 1st ed., 1868.

are Haeckel’s *Stammbäume* [genealogical trees] of the human species.²¹⁸ These stem trees warrant to be considered in detail as the order within them affected Woermann’s arrangement and characterisation of different peoples.

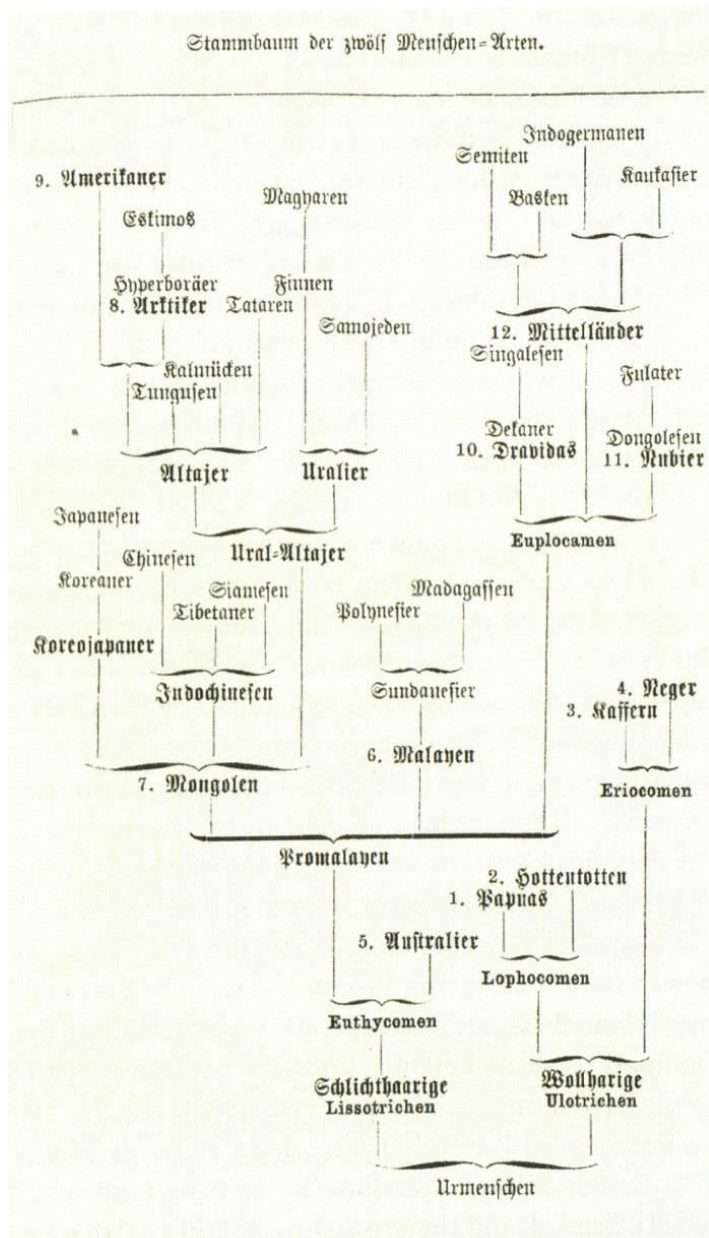


Figure 14 Illustration of “the twelve human spieces” from Haeckel’s *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 2nd to 7th ed., 1870-79.

Haeckel kept revising his book until his death, and the *Stammbäume* were no exception. Between 1868 and 1920 he used three different variations, with the original one only used in the first edition. After this first edition, Haeckel extended the nine species he had identified to twelve, changed the design and some of the terms, and reorganised the hierarchy of classifications.²¹⁹ All of the *Stammbäume* put the *Urmensch* oder *Affenmensch* [primal-man or ape-man] at the first stage and the middle Europeans at the pinnacle.

The later editions take the division into two main branches, termed the *Wollhaarige Menschen* [woolly haired peoples] and *Schlichthaarige Menschen* [plain haired peoples]. As Richards pointed out, Haeckel changed the position and name of Native Americans, from *Amerikaner oder Rothäute* [Americans or Redskins] to simply *Amerikaner* [Americans] and positioned them only just below that of the Semites.

²¹⁸ Haeckel was most likely influenced to organise the human species in stem trees by Charles Darwin who had used this form of diagram to illustrate the connection of the different animal classes in his *On the Origin of Species*. For a consideration of this diagram see Reichle, "Charles Darwins Gedanken zur Abstammung des Menschen und die Nützlichkeit von Weltbildern zur Erhaltung der Art," 324.

²¹⁹ In his book, Richards dedicates a section to these changes in the editions between 1868 and 1920. Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 244-55.

According to Richards, who points out that there are no surviving notes that tell us why Haeckel made these alterations, this change might be due to the popularity of the Buffalo Bill shows that toured Germany at the time.²²⁰

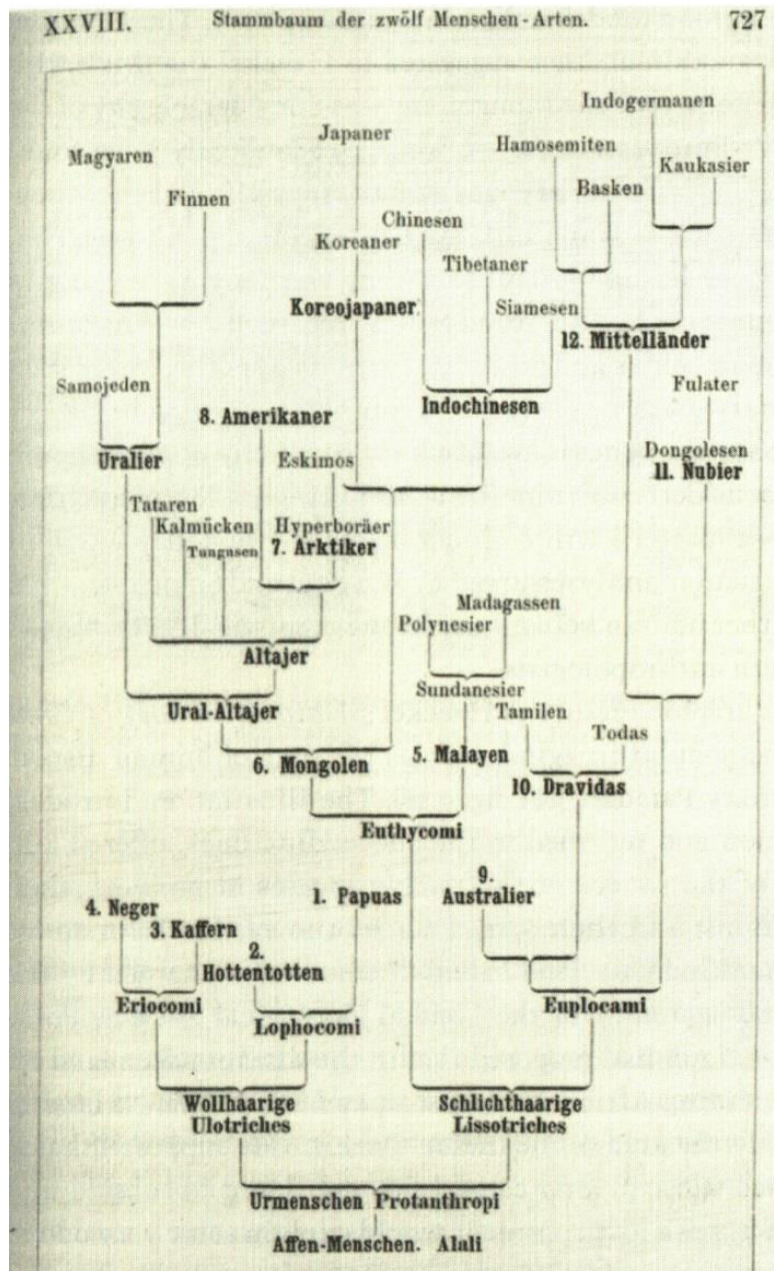


Figure 15 Illustration of “the twelve human species” from Haeckel’s *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 8th to 12th ed., 1889-1920.

Menschen, especially the African peoples. These include the *Hottentotten*, in the very south of Africa, the *Kaffern*, in the south to central Africa, and the *Neger*, from the Niger area in West Africa to Somalia in the east. As can be seen in the images, *Neger* and *Kaffern* were degraded from being as high up as the *Malayen* and *Indochinesen* to be on

Between the second and the third edition of the *Stammbäume*, Native Americans fell a bit further down the scale and, in their place, the Japanese were promoted to hold the place just beneath the Semites. According to Richards, this might be due to the modernisation efforts that took place in Japan in the ten-year interim between the seventh and eighth editions of the *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* and possibly the first Japanese translations that were published of Haeckel’s books.

Most important for this study, however, is the replacement of the strand of the *Wollhaarigen*

²²⁰ Ibid., 248.

a par with the *Australier* and *Papuas*, who, according to Haeckel's second version, are "the peoples closest to the primal form of the *Wollhaarigen Menschen*."²²¹ As with the other changes analysed by Richards, Haeckel did not document the reason for this degradation. However, one cause might be the acquisition of the German African colonies in 1884/85 with all of these colonies in areas with *Neger* or *Kaffern* population. Classifying the peoples living in their own colonies as very low on the evolutionary scale certainly would have been welcomed by German colonial officials.

Despite the popularity of Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, German ethnographers openly rejected the notion of evolution and the idea of the ape-man that linked humans to primates, even more vehemently than they opposed the 'Aryan myth' and anti-Semitism. Benoit Massin even describes German physical anthropology between 1860 and 1890 as "anti-racist."²²² Furthermore, he points out that Arthur de Gobineau's book *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* [An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races] (1853),²²³ which had only a few dozen copies in circulation before his death in 1880, was met with more criticism in Germany than in all other Euro-American countries.²²⁴ Massin quotes the ethnographer Hermann Schaffhausen, who opposed Gobineau's argument for the permanent inferiority of black people. Schaffhausen wrote that "[J]ust as Christianity teaches the equality of all men, science must recognize that in spite of the diversity of levels of civilisation, all human stocks have the same natural base and each race has the right to live and the ability to develop."²²⁵

In a book review in 1915, Johannes Ranke rejected the race theories that were "recently growing up in an alarming manner," and stressed that the works of Chamberlain and Gobineau "contradicted the real scientific facts."²²⁶ Especially for the first generation of German anthropologists and ethnographers, like Ranke, the most important fact was the unity of the human species and the equality of feeling and mental life of all humanity.²²⁷ Adolf Bastian pointed out that the "physical unity of the species man [has already] been

²²¹ Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 606.

²²² Massin, "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," 80.

²²³ Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur L'inégalité des Races Humaines* (Paris: P. Belfond, 1853).

²²⁴ Massin, "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," 80.

²²⁵ In *ibid.*, 81.

²²⁶ Archiv für Anthropologie 1917: 73, in *ibid.*, 91.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

anthropologically established.”²²⁸ The task of ethnography was therefore to study social cohabitation in different groups and cultures to establish the ‘psychic unity of mankind.’

As has been discussed above, Bastian divided humanity into the *Naturvölker* [natural peoples] and the *Kulturvölker* [cultural peoples] and believed that there were “essentially next to no peoples left on earth who were without historical influences.”²²⁹ This distinction was favoured amongst German anthropologists and ethnographers. When recapitulating the festivities for Adolf Bastian’s 70th birthday, Ranke praised his work as “the founder and main pillar of German scientific ethnology.”²³⁰ Moreover, he compliments Bastian’s “30 year war, as he called his efforts himself, to fight for the complete human dignity for all peoples, including the most despised and neglected ‘savages’, who it was thought acceptable to consider as half-animals.”²³¹ While they did generally take an implicit hierarchy of the races as a given, and surely saw the European scientist as more civilised than African ‘Negroes,’ they did not display these assumptions in any fixed schemes as Haeckel did.²³² Bastian rather saw the European, including the European scientist, “as at one with the entirety of humankind, including the poor *Ur*-children, for whom papal decrees were once needed in order to grant them the rights of true people.”²³³

The general view of social evolution in practice at the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin can be seen in von Luschan’s book²³⁴ *People, Races, Languages*, published in 1922: “[t]he whole of humankind is composed of only one species: *Homo sapiens*. There are no ‘savage’ people, there are only people with a culture that differs from ours. The

²²⁸ Bastian, A. *Ethnologische Erörterungen*, 1877 in Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 22.

²²⁹ Bastian, A. in *ibid.*, 23.

²³⁰ Ranke, "Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht des Generalsekretärs," 91. Translated by and quoted in Massin, "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," 96.

²³¹ *Ibid.* My translation updated from Massin, 96.

²³² "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," 98/9.

²³³ Ranke, "Wissenschaftlicher Jahresbericht des Generalsekretärs," 91.

²³⁴ In fact, John David Smith argues that later in his career, von Luschan himself reverted to Social Darwinistic theories. For a more critical reading of his theories with regard to his work on African American people see: John David Smith, "W.E.B. Bois, Felix Von Luschan, and Racial Reform at the Fin De Siècle," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 47, no. 1 (2002).

distinguishing qualities of the so-called 'races' essentially originated due to climatological, social and environmental factors."²³⁵

In opposition to Haeckel, German ethnographers saw evolutionary theory as working with a 'subjective' historical narrative that is fundamentally different to the 'objective' observations of people and their material culture carried out by the newly established scientific discipline of ethnography.²³⁶ Rudolf Virchow, the founder of the *Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* (Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory), was one of the strongest opponents of this kind of evolutionary thought and repeatedly assaulted Haeckel's Darwinism. The conference of the fiftieth meeting of the *Gesellschaft deutscher Naturforscher und Ärzte* [the Society of German Natural Scientists and Physicians] presents a good example of this publicly fought *Darwinismusstreit* [dispute over Darwinism]. Both Haeckel and Virchow gave papers at this conference of 17th to 22nd September; Haeckel on 18th September and Virchow on 22nd September 1877.²³⁷

In his paper, Haeckel stated that evolutionary theory is a historical science, existing in a conceptual space between the natural sciences and humanities,²³⁸ as mentioned in chapter one these categories – the natural sciences and humanities – were highly debated in Germany at the time.²³⁹ He gave a recapitulation of his publications, pointing out that humans had to be part of Darwin's evolutionary theory as well as animals, and including the development of the mind. Lastly, Haeckel tried to support the strengthening of evolutionary theory in the syllabus of German schools and universities.²⁴⁰ While Haeckel had to leave soon after giving his paper, Virchow did not arrive until shortly before he gave his. As a result the two scientists with the opposing opinions never met each other at this event.

Nevertheless, Virchow had the chance to read a printed version of Haeckel's paper and could adjust his own accordingly. He attacked evolutionary theory and in particular

²³⁵ Von Luschan printed in Gisela Völger, "Curator, Trader, Benin Scholar: Felix Von Luschan – an Austrian in Royal-Prussian Museum Service," in *Benin: Kings and Ritual: Court Arts from Nigeria*, ed. Barbara Plankensteiner (Snoeck Publishers, 2007), 216.

²³⁶ Perry Myers, "Monistic Visions and Colonial Consciousness: Ernst Haeckel's Indische Reisebriefe," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 44, no. 2 (2008): 192.

²³⁷ Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 312, 18.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.

²³⁹ Uljana Feest, *Historical Perspectives on Erklären and Verstehen* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2010).

²⁴⁰ Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 313-5.

Haeckel's theory of the descent of man by connecting it to socialist ideas, which at this time were seen as politically threatening.²⁴¹ Furthermore, Virchow pointed out that "we cannot maintain as a discovery of science that man had descended from apes or any other animals"²⁴² as no so-called 'ape-man' had been found. He particularly rebuked Haeckel's call for the teaching of evolutionary theory when he closed by saying: "[g]entlemen, we would misuse our power, we would endanger our power, if we, in teaching, did not draw back to the perfectly justified, the perfectly secure, the impregnable zone [of verified science]."²⁴³ Indeed, in 1878, evolutionary theories were banned from being taught at Prussian schools, after a pupil felt it offended his religious beliefs, and the subject of biology followed this fate soon after.²⁴⁴

This embracing of the unity of humanity could also be seen in the language used by anthropologists. While, as Massin pointed out, the word 'savage' was still used as an adjective, it was put into inverted commas, or preceded by 'so-called' when used as a substantive.²⁴⁵ Moreover the words 'race' and 'type' were seriously questioned, for example von Luschan told his class on general physical anthropology in Berlin that the word 'race' had "no clear concept" and its erasure from scientific vocabulary was discussed.²⁴⁶ But while the common characteristics of different peoples began to be emphasised and assessed, the newer generation of anthropologists and ethnographers also started to re-evaluate the doctrines behind the theory of evolution. Despite early rejections, the find of skeletal remains of the *Pithecanthropus* by Eugene Dubois provided the proof that there was indeed an evolutionary link between apes and man. Yet in the eleven year interim between Dubois' find and Virchow's death in 1902, Virchow continued to openly voice his strong objections to evolutionary theory. However, increasing numbers of anthropologists began to see the merit of this doctrine.²⁴⁷

Both, Virchow's and von Luschan's generation felt ambiguous about German colonial ambitions. They both advocated the good treatment of colonial subjects in the German protectorates but were also enticed by the opportunities for their scientific work that the

²⁴¹ Myers, "Monistic Visions and Colonial Consciousness: Ernst Haeckel's Indische Reisebriefe," 196; Richards, *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 320/1.

²⁴² Virchow in *The Tragic Sense of Life: Ernst Haeckel and the Struggle over Evolutionary Thought*, 323. Richards' translation.

²⁴³ Virchow in *ibid.*, 324. Richards' translation.

²⁴⁴ Myers, "Monistic Visions and Colonial Consciousness: Ernst Haeckel's Indische Reisebriefe," 196.

²⁴⁵ Massin, "From Virchow to Vischer: Physical Anthropology and 'Modern Race Theories' in Wilhelmine Germany," 97.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 114-7.

German Empire could open up. While Virchow opposed Bismarck's colonial endeavours, the newer generation of anthropologists that came to the forefront in the last decade of the 19th century only opposed the colonial system as it stood at the time and not colonialism in general.²⁴⁸ In 1911, von Luschan attended and spoke at the First Universal Races Congress in London, where he aligned himself with evolutionary thought by arguing that human adaption to their surroundings generated different types. He pointed out that none of these types were 'necessarily inferior' and that the only 'savages' in Africa were "certain white men with *Tropenkoller* [tropical madness]."²⁴⁹

Even though Social Darwinism did find followers in Germany, the most influential and best known being Haeckel, its theories were never accepted by most ethnographers. However, as will become apparent in the section on Woermann's book, Social Darwinism still had an important impact on the reception of African art in particular, and non-European art in general, once it was introduced into a European canon.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 102.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 104. His translation.

Chapter 3.4 Karl Woermann and *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*

Karl Woermann was born in 1844, and was the eldest son of a wealthy merchant, who owned an international shipping company that had established a long-lasting trading relationship with the West African coast. It is plausible to assume that throughout his formative years Woermann would have come into contact with material culture from all over the world. At the age of sixteen, Woermann went on his first journey around the world, including Java, Sumatra, Singapore, and Egypt. Over 60 years later, in his *Lebenserinnerungen* [Memoirs], he would describe the journey as the “beautiful dream of a long night.”²⁵⁰ It was “in the depth of this dream that the art historical threads, that were destined to entwine [him], were spun.”²⁵¹

After a brief career in law during which he never lost his enthusiasm for art and literature, he decided at the age of 26 to switch to the humanities and work towards an assistant professorship in archaeology and art history.²⁵² While his father did not understand why his son would want to pursue an academic career instead of taking over the family business, he continued to support him financially. Nevertheless, in his memoirs Woermann says himself that “I had to learn, what I have never done before, to make ends meet,”²⁵³ Abandoning his father’s financial support. Despite his father’s initial reservations, he had stated that if Woermann “could become the director of the Gemäldegalerie”²⁵⁴ in Dresden he would approve of his new career. He did not live to see his son’s appointment as the director of the Gemäldegalerie, in 1882, but it was the beginning of great change for the Dresden museum. Woermann was the first director that was not a practicing artist but an art historian. His main focus was the scholarly processing of the collection which resulted in the publication of many specialist books. Moreover, this processing also resulted in adopting structured acquisition policies.²⁵⁵

In 1894, the same year that Ernst Grosse published his *Die Anfänge der Kunst* [The beginnings of Art] (see chapter 2), Karl Woermann published his views on art historical

²⁵⁰ Woermann, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*, 99.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid., 213.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Peter Betthausen, Peter H. Feist, and Christiane Fork, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon: Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus Vier Jahrhunderten* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1999), 488.

research in *Was uns die Kunstgeschichte lehrt* [What Art History Teaches us].²⁵⁶ The book itself presents Woermann's attitude towards the situation of art history. Due to this book the publishers of the Bibliographische Institut became interested in his work. According to Woermann's autobiography, he did not accept the offer to write a history of all art without hesitation as this would mean he had to put his other projects on hold.²⁵⁷

Once he had accepted to work on the project however, Hans Meyer, one of the owners of the Bibliographische Institut and himself a scholar of geography and ethnography, suggested the inclusion of the "Primal and Natural Peoples as well as the Half Cultural Peoples and the Cultural Peoples of the Far East." But according to Woermann "the suggestion was grist to [his] mill. The semi-faded memories of [his] early travels in India and the Far East, that had only given [him] a slight sense of the art world of these areas, took shape once more."²⁵⁸

As director of the *Gemäldegalerie*, Woermann mainly studied paintings of the Italian Renaissance and Baroque, but he also became interested in contemporary paintings and sculptures, making many acquisitions for the *Galerie Neue Meister*.²⁵⁹ Furthermore, he authored the scientific catalogue in which he put his connoisseurship to use in reattributing many paintings in the collection, including Giorgione's *Venus*.²⁶⁰ *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* [The History of Art of all Times and Peoples], exceeded his own area of research but also the limitations of his own discipline, as he consulted ethnographic papers intensively. In his introduction, Woermann praised Grosse's *Die Anfänge der Kunst* as a "special book" which led art history "to be an apprentice to ethnography and prehistory; only [through Grosse] does art history have the right to say that it covers the art of humankind."²⁶¹ This apprenticeship is visible throughout the whole book as Woermann refers to the work of various scholars of ethnography, zoology and prehistory such as; Ludwig Buechner (1824-1899), a German natural scientist and philosopher, Vitus Graber (1844-1892), an Austrian zoologist, the German ethnographers Johannes Ranke, Rudolf Virchow and Friedrich Ratzel, the British

²⁵⁶ Karl Woermann, *Was uns die Kunstgeschichte Lehrt: Einige Bemerkungen über Alte, Neue und Neueste Malerei* (Dresden: L. Ehlermann, 1894).

²⁵⁷ *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*. Vol. 2 p. 204.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁵⁹ Gaetgens, "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," 548.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 547.

²⁶¹ Karl Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker* (1900), 1.

collector Henry Christy (1810-1865) and the German-American ethnographer Franz Boas (1858-1942).



Figure 16 Front page of Karl Woermann *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*, 1900.

In the mid-1890s Woermann started to work on this extensive study²⁶² which consisted of three volumes: dealing with ‘the art of the pre- and non-Christian peoples’ (vol. 1); ‘the art of the Christian peoples to the end of the 15th century’ (vol. 2); and ‘the art of the Christian peoples from the 16th to the end of the 19th century’ (vol. 3). Woermann did not follow a universal theoretical idea of an overarching concept of art, but was certain that there were artists working in every time and in every culture.²⁶³ In the foreword to the first volume he states that “this work; in contrast to the recently emerging, various, but different demands, does not put itself in the service of a particular religious or secular, economic or aesthetic theory, but, as it treats art for art’s sake, it also

wants to treat art history on its own.”²⁶⁴ He wanted to trace “the development of the artistic *Geist* and the artistic vocabulary of form of mankind.”²⁶⁵ He followed Grosse in believing that the art of prehistoric and non-Christian peoples should be integrated into art historical research to fully understand the development of the art of humanity.²⁶⁶

While Gaehtgens has given a very useful overview of all three volumes,²⁶⁷ it is the first volume, dealing with the art of natural and non-Christian peoples, which is of particular importance for this study. In this volume, Woermann provides a survey of the art of the primal, natural and half-cultural peoples, as well as the art of Greek antiquity and of

²⁶² Gaehtgens, "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," 547.

²⁶³ Ibid., 543.

²⁶⁴ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*. Foreword.

²⁶⁵ Woermann, *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*, 205; also quoted in Gaehtgens, "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," 543.

²⁶⁶ "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," 551.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Indian, East Asian and other non-Christian peoples. Gaehtgens suggested that Woermann's structure of titles might have been influenced by Franz Kugler's *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, published in 1842.²⁶⁸ While this might be the case for the second and third volume, I believe that Woermann found inspiration outside of aesthetic considerations for the organisation of his first volume.

Most of the cited sources came from German specialists, mostly ethnographers and anthropologists, which makes it peculiar that Woermann did not follow the referenced scientists in their opposition to evolutionary theory, as has been discussed above. In fact, Woermann was greatly influenced by evolutionary theory, Social Darwinism and especially Haeckel's Social Darwinistic scale of human evolution that he visualized in the *Stammbäume*. Instead of following Kugler's division of chapters - none of which addressed African art in any case – it seems that Woermann was following Haeckel in his division of non-European peoples. As will be discussed below, it is in particular, the *Stammbaum* used in the 8th to 12th editions, between 1889 and 1920 (see p. 134, which has a very high resemblance to the structure Woermann used for the art of the primal, natural and half-cultural peoples.

Before identifying the resemblance of the two structures it is necessary to give a short overview of this part of the book. It only takes up 88 of the 660 pages of the volume and contains 88 of the 615 illustrations and 6 of the 50 plates. In this section, Woermann distinguishes between two groups of peoples to whom he dedicates half of the section each; on the one hand, primal peoples and on the other hand, the natural and half cultural peoples. In Social Darwinian fashion he subdivides both of these two parts according to the three age system of Stone, Bronze and Iron Age, first used by the Danish antiquarian Christian Jürgensen Thomson (1788-1865) at the beginning of the 19th century. He begins by discussing prehistoric art, using chapter titles such as 'Early Stone Age' or 'Middle Bronze Age.' In the second part, he uses the same terms to refer to the different styles of non-European art. By structuring both parts to fit the same titles he strengthens the Social Darwinistic perspective.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 544.

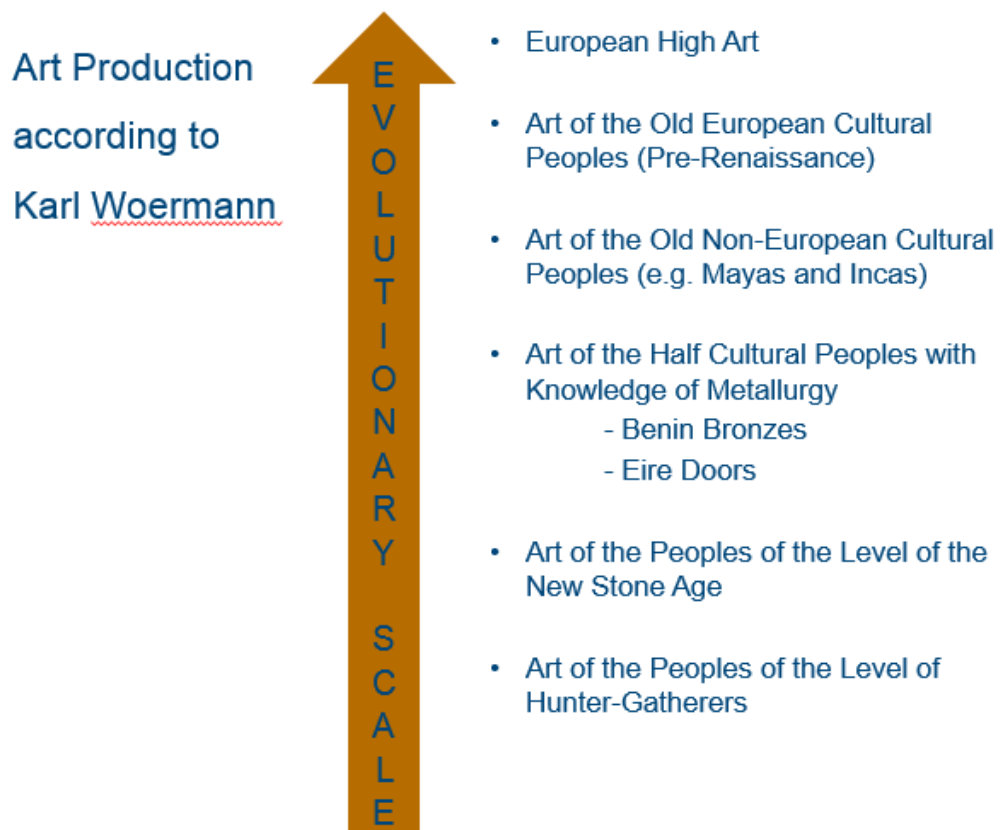


Diagram of the Art Production according to Karl Woermann

In this fashion, Woermann categorised the art of the different peoples considered into prehistoric classes. He speaks of the art of the peoples of the levels of Hunter-Gatherers, the New Stone Age and the early Metal Age. Comparing Haeckel's *Stammbaum* – of the editions between 1889 and 1920 - and Woermann's own theory of the evolution of art, the similarities are striking.

As examples of 'natural peoples of the level of Hunter-Gatherers,' Woermann identifies Indigenous Australians, the 'Bushmen' of South Africa and the 'Eskimos.' According to him, these peoples are, like the Hunter-Gatherers of the "diluvial antiquity, [sic]" despite their lack of culture, very skilled in drawing. "The eye that is sharpened for the observation of wildlife and the hand that is trained for striking animals, combine, already at the level of the beginning of culture, to produce artistic animal drawings that are true to nature."²⁶⁹ But he also puts his notion into further alignment with evolutionary theory by saying that "in spite of the uniformity of the art drive [*Kunsttrieb*], there are differences conditioned by the climate, geography, and folklore that can already be seen

²⁶⁹ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 41/2.

at this level.”²⁷⁰ These connections show a resemblance to Grosse who gave examples that showed the connection between the climate and art production which had also been commented on in reviews of his work. According to Grosse, this connection was only indirect, through a people’s form of subsistence. Woermann, however, went back to the original roots of the notion of developmental changes due to climatic and geographic differences which have been part of the doctrine of evolution theory since Darwin’s *Descent of Man*.

Comparing this ‘level of Hunter-Gatherers’ with Haeckel’s classification of peoples of 1889 it is apparent that Woermann followed Haeckel’s classification of Australians and South Africans,²⁷¹ but that Haeckel put the ‘Eskimos’ significantly higher up his scale of human evolution. However, Woermann does so by looking at the way Haeckel describes the “Homo Arcticus,” living in either the southern or northern Polar Regions, very negatively. He states that “due to the adaption to the polar climate these hominids are so peculiarly remodelled that you have to consider them as a separate species.”²⁷² The most significant point for Woermann, however, is the fact that the visual culture of the ‘Eskimos’ is most often found in the form of carvings and drawings using the media of “furs, stones, bones, reindeer antlers, and walrus teeth.”²⁷³ According to him, this makes them comparable with ‘deluvial’ prehistoric peoples of whom we also have examples of this kind of material.

At the level of the New Stone Age, Woermann places peoples from Melanesia, Polynesia, and the Indian tribes of South and North America. With this distinction he largely follows Friedrich Ratzel’s classification of ethnic groups in his anthropogeographic study.²⁷⁴ In the 1898 edition, Haeckel names the peoples from the Americas, which he does not differentiate into specific regions. Also, in the map showing the dissemination of the human species, he notes the people from Melanesia and in his stem-tree he records people from Polynesia. According to Haeckel’s map, Melanesia is seen to be part of the group of Papuans. Polynesians, on the other hand, were classified

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 42.

²⁷¹ Here Woermann and Haeckel use different terminologies, speaking of either ‘Bushmen’ or Hottentots, but both of these terms describe peoples living in the very south of Africa, including today’s South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and the south of Mozambique.

²⁷² Ernst Haeckel, *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 9 ed. (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1898), 747.

²⁷³ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 46.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 49. See also Ratzel, *Anthropogeographie*, 1.

as a sub-group of the Malays, and were therefore put higher on the evolutionary scale, with the Americans showing the highest level of civilisation of these three peoples.

While Woermann diverges from Haeckel's template in grouping these peoples into one chapter, he does follow the general guideline as, within the chapter, he starts with the art of the peoples from Melanesia, whose ancestral figures "made of chalkstone" show "a certain capability" on the part of the sculptor but also that "body proportions are unrecognised, the legs are too short, the round or even cubic heads are too big."²⁷⁵ According to Woermann, the art of the peoples of Polynesia is especially noteworthy as their idols show "next to honest attempts, to render the human figure, [...] deliberate deformations, which arise out of religious beliefs."²⁷⁶ True to the chronological structure, "the Indian tribes, of North and South America,"²⁷⁷ stand as the peoples with the most developed art on the level of the New Stone Age. Woermann divides them by region and gives a short overview of the artistic production of every tribe, especially pointing out that the "house-, crest-, or totem-poles, [...] that are] viewed separately, belong [...] to the most fantastic expressions of art history."²⁷⁸

Most important for this study is the section about 'the art of the natural and half-cultural peoples with knowledge of metallurgy.' In the introduction to this chapter, he says that:

the boundaries between natural and cultural peoples are debatable. There is little to object to in only counting the 'savages' on the level of Hunter-Gatherers as natural peoples and calling the peoples on the prehistoric level of the New Stone Age and the Early Metal Age as 'half cultural peoples.' For us, it does not depend on the name but the level of evolution.²⁷⁹

He classes the Malays and the Negroes of Africa into this section. In accordance with Haeckel, Woermann considers the peoples living in the regions from the Niger area in West Africa to Somalia in the east to be a part of this.

He might have been introduced to Haeckel's evolutionary theory through his friend Adolph Bernhard Meyers (1840-1911), the founder and director of the zoological and

²⁷⁵ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 51.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 57.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 61.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 67.

ethnographic museum in Dresden.²⁸⁰ Meyers had translated works by Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace and was one of the few ethnographers in Germany who supported evolutionary theory and even advocated its doctrine. Moreover, one has to consider the connection between Hans Meyer, the publisher of Woermann's book (and the pioneer in taking the art of 'natural peoples' into account), and Ernst Haeckel. In 1891 Meyer, married Haeckel's oldest daughter Elizabeth. As private letters between the two men show, their relationship went above a superficial son- and father-in-law connection as Meyer often calls Haeckel either "papa" or "papa II." During the wedding preparations, where costs were not just borne by the couple but also the bride's parents, Haeckel and Meyer were exchanging jokes and complained about their partners' way of preparing the wedding.²⁸¹ Meyer would certainly have known about his father-in-law's very popular work and might well have suggested the evolutionary scale as a way to structure Woermann's ideas.

This structural connection to Social Darwinism is also evident in the introduction to the part about 'the art of the natural and half cultural peoples,' in which Woermann points out:

When examining the beginnings of art, a thousand years become one day. The present natural peoples are the closest heirs to the past prehistoric peoples. Ethnographic research enlightens many parts of prehistory. The teachings of both define and confirm, but also complement each other.²⁸²

Like Grosse, Woermann hoped that the study of non-European art would shed light on prehistoric European art production. This statement calls to mind the work and collection of Henry Christy, a British banker and ethnographer, whom Woermann mentions with regard to his work on the prehistoric sights of La Madeleine and Laugerie Basse.²⁸³ Christy promoted the idea that by collecting and studying ethnographic material it is possible to gain deeper knowledge of European prehistory.²⁸⁴ However, while Christy had a big influence on British ethnography (the Christy collection of ethnographic and

²⁸⁰ *Lebenserinnerungen eines Achtzigjährigen*, 39.

²⁸¹ Letters between Haeckel and Meyer, Haeckel Haus, 6.7.1891 (35760) - 6.12.1891 (35767).

²⁸² Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 40/1.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸⁴ John Mack, "The Context of an Expanding Museum," in A.W. Franks: *Nineteenth-Century Collecting and the British Museum*, ed. Marjorie Caygill and John F. Cherry (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 42.

prehistoric objects became part of the collection of the British Museum in 1865),²⁸⁵ German ethnographers were not aiming to widen their understanding of prehistoric art. They were more interested in finding universal laws of social, commercial and artistic developments that, even though they might be used to learn about prehistoric peoples, were meant to shed light on humanity in general.

Woermann, opposing the German ethnographers, exemplifies his view by stating that:

while, for example, we can only assume that the stone and bronze art of the prehistoric peoples was complemented by rich wood carvings, we have actual examples of the wood carvings of the ‘savages’ in front of us; and while for example from the remains of red colourings, that were preserved at sites of the diluvial antiquity, we can only assume that these prehistoric peoples used this colour to decorate themselves, we encounter the body paintings of the natural peoples in physical form as a dominant aspect of the beginnings or art.²⁸⁶

Besides the exemplification of the connection between non-European and prehistoric art, here Woermann also points out that he sees these different forms of art and aesthetic expressions as the beginning of art. In this evaluation he, again, agrees with Grosse’s publication on *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, which was not just titled the beginning of art but also included a chapter on body decoration.

As most African peoples, discussed by Woermann, were classed as ‘natural’ and ‘half-cultural peoples,’ the following paragraphs will concentrate on a discussion of the chapter on ‘the art of the natural and half-cultural peoples with knowledge of metallurgy.’ Unlike Grosse and Frobenius, who took the social characteristics and traditions of a people into account in their studies of visual culture, Woermann was only interested in objects themselves and how they could be integrated into a universal history of art. As he said at the beginning of the chapter, quoted above, Woermann believed the visual culture of non-Europeans to be the evidence that these peoples are the closest heirs to pre-historic peoples.²⁸⁷ The development from one style to the next plays an important part in this universal history, which leads Woermann to take a special interest in the reasons for this change.

²⁸⁵ E. Miller, *That Noble Cabinet: A History of the British Museum* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), 313/4.

²⁸⁶ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 41.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 40/1.

For example, he goes on to compare the use of metals for making tools and in art in European prehistory with its use in Africa. Here, he mentions Richard Andree (1835-1912), a German geographer working in Leipzig, who believes “the Negro to be capable of discovering the extraction of iron himself.”²⁸⁸ However, Woermann adds that “the bronze and brass had been given to him as a gift from foreign lands. But sure enough bronze and brass are the mediums of the best metal works of the Negroes, which attract our attention to their artistic works.”²⁸⁹ At this point, it was not known that many trade routes existed that brought bronze and brass to Sub-Saharan Africa resulting in the eventual recognition that many of the art traditions in metal, including the ones in bronze and brass, were already carried out before the advent of the Europeans. Hence, Woermann implies that only the peoples that were at least in trading contact with Europeans “attract our attention to their artistic work.”

He states that the “biggest part of the black continent forms, in relation to the outer and inner characteristics, the thinking and feeling, the knowledge and skill of its indigenous population, a quite homogenous whole.”²⁹⁰ Here, he already contradicts his own distinction of peoples where he positions the *Hottentotten* in South Africa on a different level to the rest of Africa. However, this statement alludes to a very similar sentiment of Frobenius’ in his ‘Die Bildende Kunst der Afrikaner.’ This connection to Frobenius becomes clearer when Woermann quotes him by saying that “the African Africanised every matter.”²⁹¹ As has been mentioned above, Frobenius himself refers his reader at this point to Friedrich Ratzel, whom Woermann also quotes repeatedly. It can be assumed that Woermann must have known that the quote came originally from Ratzel but still he ascribes it to Frobenius showing that Frobenius’s interpretation of africanisation, a process creating a common tradition for all African peoples, was closer to Woermann’s ideas.

As with all of his chapters, Woermann includes a very brief summary of the religion of the peoples he discusses. While this seems at first to be a way of giving context to the art work he will later discuss, it becomes clear that the six sentences he spends on the topic are not meant to enlighten the reader about religion, as he does not even refer to other publications for further information, but it is rather a way to emphasise the

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 67.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 68.

evolutionary level of peoples. Thus, he notes that “the religion of the African Negro stands on a lower level than the religions of the Pacific-American circles,”²⁹² without providing any discussion on the matter or naming a reason for his evaluation. Furthermore, his note that fetish rituals are not conducted in temples, but around fetish sites, brings him to the topic of architecture which he, in the part of non-European peoples, calls housing. Again, he talks about levels of development and ascribes the Zulus to the simplest level of development while the peoples in the Niger-Benue-area are at “the northern border of Negro art.”²⁹³

The praise of the artistic superiority of the peoples in this area, which is especially shown in housing, leads Woermann to give a short account of Benin. He writes:

South of Bida [...] in the old capital city of Benin, which was captured by the British in 1897, a world of art was rediscovered. This art, which has already been attested to by European reports from the 16th century, and is as such actually half historical, seemed further developed in the area of the *Baukunst* [art of building or architecture] than anywhere else in Africa. The pillars of the veranda and the beams of the low ceiling of the king’s palace, topped with tower pyramids, were lined with bronze plaques in a rich relief.²⁹⁴

Here, Woermann not only refers to the incident that provided the grounds for his knowledge of Benin, the capture of Benin City in 1897, but also reveals his attitude to a number of other topics.²⁹⁵ Firstly, he points out that 16th century European descriptions of the art of Benin make the Benin works half historical. It shows that, in his mind, and in the minds of most Europeans writing about these works, only a European account of their existence is valid to prove a historic or at least a half historic tradition of the art. In this way, African people are recognised as the makers of their own art but not the exclusive holder of the history of it. History is only made when written in Europe or though the involvement of Europeans witnessing it.

Secondly, Woermann decided to use the word *Baukunst* [art of building] instead of *Wohnbau* [housing] which he used to describe the buildings of the simplest level of development. This difference in language is a clear value judgement that distinguishes between the simple and the rich, the primitive and the artistic. Thirdly, the mention of the lining of the pillars and beams of the King’s palace with bronze and brass plaques sheds

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 69.

²⁹⁵ See chapter four for more information on Benin.

light on the relevant aspects for his classification. Apparently Woermann saw decorated houses and palaces as more developed than non-decorated ones.²⁹⁶

Next, Woermann turns to sculpture and painting and points out that they are “the main art of Negroes, for which almost all of them have a certain talent.”²⁹⁷ Works in wood are, according to Woermann, most common while, in the west of the continent, ivory carvings and bronze castings are especially important. It is interesting to note here that whenever Woermann praises the artistic merits of African peoples, he adds a defining sentence as he does at this point by saying that “the bronze art of the coast of Guinea is one the most informative accomplishments of all of ethnographic art.”²⁹⁸ In this way, he acknowledges the importance of these art works for art history but also, and more directly, ethnography, while also making a clear distinction between European art and ethnographic art. The translation he offers of these objects does identify artistic components and importance but it does not fully declare them as art objects. Instead Woermann suggests that they are a particular type of ethnographic objects.

As part of his art historic interpretations he resorts to comparing different cultures when he says that “the Negro-sculpture is generally different to the ones of the Pacific and American peoples [who are lower on the evolutionary scale]. It is more sober and realistic. The imagination of the Negroes does not wallow in wonderful connections between animal and human figures but puts them [...] in preferably simple and natural relations to one another.”²⁹⁹ While he notes here that “Negro-sculpture” is in general naturalistic, as did both Grosse and Frobenius, he adds that the proportions of the human body are not according to nature. Instead, the legs are almost always shortened and, while the head is not too large, the torso seems to be elongated.

After these stylistic observations, Woermann deviates from his art historical comments by remarking that “the phantasy of the risible Negro is mainly turned towards the grotesque, comical, strange; accordingly, their sculpture tends towards caricature, the

²⁹⁶ Research on the Benin Bronzes has still not been able to say without a doubt where they were originally placed. When Benin City was taken in 1897, the bronze plaques were found in a storage chamber in the King’s Compound. The only two sources that give evidence of their original position is a bronze plaque in the British Museum (Af1898,0115.46) which shows relief figures around the entrance and Olfert Dapper’s account in his *Description of Africa* (1668) in which he describes wooden pillars that are covered in cast copper.

²⁹⁷ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 69.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

emphasis of the ugly, the bizarre, the obscene; and where entirely bold human images are unearthed, the aim to shock and frighten is undoubtedly intended.”³⁰⁰ Some of the aspects of this statement are in line with the comments of other ethnographers and art historians of the time: accounts of the grotesque and caricatured qualities of these works had been given before and in similar terms, as in the case of Ratzel who regarded most naturalistic objects as raw (see chapter 1.1). However, the use of terms and phrases like “obscene” and “the risible Negro” recall early travel writing or sensationalist accounts in the popular press and seem to ridicule the objects he discusses. This is not a common characteristic of Woermann’s book, and one can only guess as to why he has included such a defamation; but it does add a negative association to his entire work and adds a layer of exoticism to his visual translations that were meant to reach a broad audience.



Figure 17 illustration of a "female ancestral figure of the Bongo-Negroes" from Karl Woermann's *Die Geschichte der Kunst*, p. 70.

He goes on to consider the depiction of the human form and points out that it is especially informative to “follow the development from simply suggested half geometrical designs to full natural forms and their exaggeration, even if in single cases this path may have been regressive.”³⁰¹ In this context, he refers to Frobenius again and mentions that he had proven the development from a pole with a skull to a full ancestral figure a few years ago (see above). Woermann adds to Frobenius’s findings that the elongated torso he has previously mentioned, and also depicted an example of, might be the remains of the pole. In this way, he incorporates Frobenius’ earlier considerations into his own translations and thus reveals the depth of his research.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 70.



Figure 18 Illustration of "Door Panels from the palace in Eire" from Karl Woermann's *Die Geschichte der Kunst*, 1900, p. 71.

Part of this discussion of the human form is this image of door panels, reproduced in Woermann's book. The door panels came to the collection of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin in 1880. They are from a northern Yoruba village called Eire that is located close to Benin City, in what is today southern Nigeria. These carved wood door panels show animals, humans and plants in high relief. They are divided in different bands, with each band depicting a different story, which seem to be unrelated to one another.

Woermann, in his description, calls the depicted figures "stocky, plump and crude"³⁰² and points out that the animals are "remarkably poorly characterised."³⁰³ Further on, he indicates that

at least the content of these depictions [...] is informative for the evaluation of Negro-art. The first panel on the first wing depicts a monkey that climbed on a tree after being chased by a leopard. On the last panel of the second wing we can see the conciliation of a man who is about to murder the seducer of his wife. That the level of art of these reliefs has nothing in common with the 'primal' level of the Hunter-Gatherers is obvious. However, it is still consistent with a 'prehistoric' level of art.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Ibid., 71.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. His quotation marks.

It becomes apparent that Woermann translates the use of high relief as a sign for a higher evolutionary stage than inscribed carvings on bone and teeth, as seen on the level of hunter-gatherer communities. But the “stocky, plump and crude” style distinguishes these works from a sophisticated art of the ‘cultural peoples.’ Hence, according to Woermann, the art of the Yoruba carvers of these doors is of a higher developmental stage than the art of the Australians or ‘Bushmen,’ which places them on a higher stage of the evolutionary scale as was proposed by Haeckel. This disparity of classifications is even more striking in the case of the Benin Bronzes that only came to Europe in 1897.

Three years after the ‘rediscovery’ of the Benin Bronzes, Woermann states that Benin’s “bronze art, dating from the 16th and 17th century, has caused the biggest stir in Europe for several years” and that “of all the works of artistic castings amongst Negroes, Benin stands at the top.”³⁰⁵ He goes on by referring to the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin and the British Museum in London, the former of which “obtained the lion’s share”³⁰⁶ of the loot that had reached Europe, and which still has the biggest collections of Benin



Figure 19 Illustration of a "Bronze plaque from Benin" from Karl Woermann's *Die Geschichte der Kunst*, p. 73.

Bronzes today. It is interesting to note here, that the pieces Woermann is referring to are actually made of brass and not the purer metal bronze. Their translation as being made of the more ‘noble’ metal bronze already suggests a more elevated status than brass objects.

Part of Woermann’s discussion of the Benin Bronzes is the reproduction of a photograph of a bronze plaque from the collection of the book’s publisher, Hans Meyer. The plaque is shown on a neutral background; all of the images, whether non-European, classic or European are in front of a white or a black background, with a single piece being chosen to represent the whole group of

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 72.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

objects. While this particular plaque may well have been chosen because it was in the collection of the publisher, the non-European objects are presented in the same way as the European ones, and not in groups. This suggests that they were regarded as of equal importance in the study of art and gives the visual translation of these bronzes a distinct artistic character by association.

The caption reads: “bronze plaque from Benin. After photography. Accompanying text, p. 72”³⁰⁷, while the text refers back to the image by adding the page number in brackets. Moreover, he describes the subject of the different plaques (of which about 300 reached Europe in 1897) and relates his general account to their reproduction: “the humans, short legged and long bodied [...] depict partly Europeans [...] partly negroes, these most fully clothed and armoured, as the pictured piece [...] shows.”³⁰⁸ The verbal-visual syntagm is very strong and the descriptive tone of the text itself emphasises the scientific interest of the author. Although, the text might indexicalise the bronzes as part of the history of art, he makes sure not to use terms like *Kunstwerk* [artwork] but chose to apply the less value-laden term of *Bildwerk* [pictorial work] to refer to all non-European objects. This shows, that while ethnographers used art historical language as a kind of lingua franca to make their work accessible, the first art historian to analyse the same objects was very careful to avoid using the same terms he did for European art.

Mentioning the publications by Read and Dalton from Britain, and von Luschan from Germany, he goes on to relate their work on Benin commemorative heads: “[t]he best of them, especially the best one in the Museum in Berlin, show a striking truth to nature in the creation and reproduction of the Negro type and the Negro individual, and at the same time an excellence of casting that only the mature art of the cultural peoples can produce something of a similar kind.”³⁰⁹ The translation he offers here is, thus, elevating the artistic quality of the bronzes to a very high level of evolution, only short of the ‘cultural peoples,’ while at the same time being able to imply that art from Benin is immature in contrast to mature art that is produced by the ‘cultural peoples.’

He had previously stated that “in the case of doubt, it is not about the contemporary character [*Gesittung*] of the natural peoples, but the state in which the Europeans discovered them at their first meeting”³¹⁰ However, he makes the Benin Bronzes the

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 73.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 72.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

exception to this rule. This could be attributable to the great contemporary public interest that is apparent from the many newspaper articles of the time.³¹¹ He even indicates that it is not implausible that the bronze art came to Benin through the Portuguese in the 16th century, “[...] but every glance at their produce shows that the Negroes appropriated and Africanised this art. Read and Dalton agree with von Luschan that none of the remaining bronzes were crafted by hands other than those of Negroes. This bronze and brass casting technique then seems to have spread from Benin to the whole of Guinea, where it is still thriving, though, in a modified form.”³¹²

As can already be seen in this quote, Woermann does not view the Benin Bronzes as different to other art by ‘natural peoples,’ or as having been made in a different register than historic time, as Johannes Fabian has described.³¹³ Woermann differentiates them from other art on the level of ‘the natural and half-cultural peoples with knowledge of metallurgy’ by making clear that the doors and the bronzes were made in two different parts of West Africa and even hints towards an historical development. Here, he quotes von Luschan who indicated that “the old art of Benin has its last offshoots in the contemporary works of the Asante and Dahomey; neither are we missing connecting pieces, thus we have to assume a continuous tradition through several centuries.”³¹⁴

There are several possible reasons why the Benin Bronzes form an exception to the general rule of considering the art practice of non-European peoples as being timeless and only differentiated through space. But Woermann has already stated the most important reason why he attaches a historical tradition to the bronzes, which is that, according to him and most scholars at the time, this tradition is a continuation of a European tradition. Considering the statement by Frobenius, Woermann has repeated that it can be seen as an “africanised”³¹⁵ continuation of a European tradition. This africanisation of the European bronze casting practice can also be seen as the justification for Woermann’s consideration of this as art at all, given that it was seen to have been introduced by Europeans, and hence

³¹¹ Husemann, "Golf in the City of Blood: The Translation of the Benin Bronzes in 19th Century Britain and Germany."

³¹² Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 73.

³¹³ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York; Guildford: Columbia University Press, 1983).

³¹⁴ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der Vor- und Ausserchristlichen Völker*, 73.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

could not have been the unaided product of “the state in which the Europeans [...] had discovered”³¹⁶ the people of Benin.

After this very enlightening discussion of the Benin Bronzes, Woermann also includes a short abstract about the ivories that were found in Benin at the same time as the bronze works. He claims that one cannot compare them with the bronzes in skill and scope but that “their (subject) thought-content [*Gedankeninhalt*] stands on the same ground.”³¹⁷ The story-telling bands of images that spiral around the big tusks lead Woermann to go on to discuss ornaments. He begins by stating that “at first sight the linear ornaments of Negroes do not look as if they demand a special analysis.”³¹⁸ It is evident that Woermann distinguishes strictly between the bronzes and the ivories; considering the bronzes in detail while pointing out that the visual signifiers carved in ivory are not important or interesting enough to warrant a translation. This value judgement suggests to the reader that the bronze works - already closer to important European sculpture in material - are more important for research in the science and history of art.

Nonetheless, he gives a very short description of the different ornamental styles and shapes before discussing a possible way of construing their development. He mentions the swastika on Ashanti weights and tattoos from Borneo which lead him to point out the occurrence of the swastika in India, Europe, America, and Africa. He comes to a conclusion that he shares with von Luschan, who believed in the “possibility of completely autonomous and independent development of these signs by different peoples and in different times.”³¹⁹

Nevertheless, it is due to the bronzes that Woermann also ranks the art production of the people from Benin much higher on the evolutionary scale than Haeckel had ranked the same peoples. In Woermann’s book they are categorised as having reached the same developmental level as the Malays, and both of them are placed just short of ‘the art of the old American cultural peoples.’ These old American cultural peoples, “that we can hardly describe as half cultural peoples,” to a certain extent, possessed accomplishments, like “a regulated political system, a thoroughly developed religion, a finished literary language, and the precondition for the higher character, of which the ripest fruits are the

³¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

³¹⁷ Ibid., 74.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

sciences, of which the finest fruits are the arts.”³²⁰ He points out that had these peoples not stopped “in the midst of their development [...] they might have, but only might have, led to full cultural elevation.”³²¹

This short survey of Woermann’s section on ‘the art of the primal, natural and half-cultural peoples’ shows on the one hand how Woermann included several other studies from various different disciplines in order to compile his *history of all art*. On the other hand, it shows how the Benin Bronzes, a media sensation at the turn of the 20th century, were accorded a unique place in Woermann’s book. So when he describes the door panels, which were made in a village very close to Benin City, he does not mention when they were made, or even when they were brought over to Europe. The only important thing to Woermann is that the “stocky, plump and crude” figures support his argument that these door panels are comparable with a ‘prehistoric’ level of art. In contrast, the Benin Bronzes, which were thought to be an ‘africanised’ version of a European art form, were put into a temporal context. Woermann gives an estimate that they were made around the 16th or 17th centuries, mentions when they came to Europe and even briefly speaks about the technique’s spread and development until the present day.

The translation Woermann offers of these bronzes, is very different to the works he ranks lower on his evolutionary scale of art development. Generally his classifications strongly suggest influences from Haeckel’s *Stammbäume* but it also becomes clear that he combined these with art historical questions of aesthetics. While Woermann ranks most peoples at a similar level to that of Haeckel before him, formal interpretations and the media used in the production of art is an element in how highly he ranks different peoples. Accordingly, Woermann sees the need to classify peoples working primarily in bone and teeth lower on the evolutionary scale, and peoples casting bronze higher on the evolutionary scale, than Haeckel had done before.

This translation suggests to the reader that the material used has direct influence on the importance of the produced art and insinuates that peoples with an established art tradition, that is comparable to European traditions, are higher on the evolutionary scale than those without. Thus, Woermann’s inclusion of non-European visual culture into the

³²⁰ Ibid., 81.

³²¹ Ibid.

canon of art was supported by a Social Darwinistic approach that served as a framework for the evaluation and importance of a people's visual culture.

Chapter 3.5 The reception

Woermann's different approach to an art survey text - including non-European art - was a bold first move which was both supported, or even spurred on, by his publisher and seems to have been received well by the public. The first volume was sold out and had to be reprinted by 1904, before the second volume came on the market in 1905. While the reviews varied between the different volumes, the works must have been reasonably successful as they were re-commissioned for a second, revised, edition that was extended to six books, published between 1915 and 1922 and reprinted in 1924.

The *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, which had also published a detailed review of Ernst Grosse's book, gave a lengthy description of the chapters in the first volume, as well as a review. Woldemar von Seidlitz begins his review by pointing out that "writing world history is really a difficult form of art."³²² So, von Seidlitz opens his review by pointing out that Woermann's aim to write world history is a difficult one to achieve. Moreover, he takes it out of the realm of pure history by calling it a form of art which, as such, removes it from a purely objective undertaking - as history writing was thought of then - making it a subjective one, shaped by the author as an artist would shape his artwork. After agreeing with Woermann that it was good not to have put his work into the service of any given system "as systems only lead to one-sidedness,"³²³ he lists the different problems one might encounter. Finally, he congratulates Woermann who "in the recently published, first of three volumes of his universal history of art, [has] completed this task well, so that the work will presumably stay fundamental for decades."³²⁴

Of special interest for this study is Seidlitz's favourable mention of the inclusion of non-European peoples. He writes: "it is to be appreciated as a welcomed innovation that here, for the first time, the art of the prehistoric and natural peoples is included in an account of art history and is put in front of it."³²⁵ His praise of this successful integration is accompanied by a note on the importance of the study of these objects. He states that in the early chapters of Woermann's survey, the consideration of the art of non-European

³²² Woldemar von Seidlitz, "[Review] Woermann, Karl: Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft*, no. 6 (1900): 457.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid., 458.

³²⁵ Ibid.

peoples can be seen as a “preparation for the development in historic time.”³²⁶ Here, von Seidlitz is implying that ‘natural peoples’ have no history, thus, he feeds into current beliefs. He goes on to point out that, in order to give a meaningful account, one has to group different peoples together and that they have to be arranged according to the time of their activity. While he names some cases that he would have given a different place - for example he points out that the ‘old American cultural peoples’ would have fitted better behind the East Asian peoples instead of at the end of the chapter on half cultural peoples - he generally agrees with Woermann’s classification, in particular in the case of the African peoples.³²⁷ Furthermore, he gives a short summary of the different chapters in which he also points to the fact that the ‘natural peoples’ are, “according to the development, appropriately paralleled with the different prehistoric periods.”³²⁸ Seidlitz also claims that one can see the trained eye of the hunter and fishermen in all their artistic productions and, hence, not only agrees with Woermann but also indirectly refers back to Grosse.

In his summary of the chapter on ‘natural peoples with knowledge of metallurgy,’ the author notes that one has to be aware that these works are often made under the influence of Europeans. In the case of the “Negroes,” he talks about their highly developed wood craft and ornamentation and emphasises that the highly finished art of bronze casting was brought to Benin from Portugal in the 16th century. In this way Seidlitz omits integral parts of Woermann’s argument, about the possible indigenous metal extraction before the advent of the Portuguese, and the distinctively African style of the bronzes, and thus implies that these art works are in fact European creations by proxy.

In the end, Seidlitz repeats his praise of Woermann by concluding that “he who, as teacher or student, is involved with art history, will find an inexhaustible- because it is all encompassing- repository in this work.”³²⁹ As can be seen from this short summary, the review of Woermann’s book was in general very positive. However, Seidlitz has failed to point out Woermann’s reasoning for the inclusion of the art of non-European peoples in his text and only mentions that they are at the beginning of the development of the art of European peoples. So, while this review seems to be praising Woermann’s efforts, it diminishes its importance for the study of non-European peoples. Even though he did fall

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 459.

³²⁸ Ibid., 462.

³²⁹ Ibid., 467.

back on social Darwinistic classifications, Woermann applied art historical methods of studying style and context to the analysis of these 'ethnographic' objects.

The second volume, on the other hand, was received much more critically. A review laments for example "that the book is missing the right balance between the productive and the receptive, between what has been experienced and what has been read, that as a whole the listing of the details overwhelms the existence of the great facts."³³⁰ From today's point of view, the endeavour of one man to write a universal history of art does seem rather bizarre and potentially detrimental. Thomas Gaehtgens points out that "a *History of Art of all Times and Peoples* by only one author was already proving to be hardly realisable in 1900. Even with intensive efforts to maintain contact with specialised scholars, ultimately, such an attempt cannot satisfy any scientific standard."³³¹ Nevertheless, Woermann's book was very popular and, as Seidlitz's review exemplifies, his integration of non-European peoples into the canon of art history was well generally received.

Conclusion

The years preceding the turn of the 20th century were years of great change in German ethnography and art history. These changes were underlined by the urge to indexicalise the different aspects of study into overarching frameworks. Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, long supported and publicised by Ernst Haeckel, found more and more followers. The eighth revised edition of Haeckel's *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* was published in 1889 and featured a newly reorganised *Stammbaum*, in which Haeckel, yet again, changed the hierarchy in order to reflect the latest scientific research and political doctrine.

Even the reluctant physical anthropologists had to finally admit that the *Descent of Man* had scientific merit after the first skeletal remains of a prehistoric anthropoid, intermediate between the stages of the ape-man and the human, were found in 1891. This re-evaluation of evolutionary doctrine coincided with - and in some ways resulted out of - the lessening influence of Rudolf Virchow on the field, as younger scholars, like Felix von Luschan, made a name in the scientific community. The scientific community was,

³³⁰ Georg Swayenski, *Monatshefte der Kunstwissenschaftlichen Literatur*, april-Heft, 1906, p. 69, in Gaehtgens, "Weltkunstgeschichte als Kunst der Menschheitsgeschichte," 557.

³³¹ Ibid., 558.

as it had been, strongly connected to public funding bodies and a more popular side of ethnography, becoming especially apparent in the 'human zoos' that indexicalised the different peoples on show within a framework of colonial exploits.

The liberal attitude of both generations of German ethnographers received a renewed upsurge when the Benin Bronzes reached Europe. They were sure that the existence of African art work of this quality was to have political and moral implications. The quality of the art work from Benin certainly had implications in its positioning in Karl Woermann's *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*. Because of this, he significantly deviated from Haeckel's *Stammbaum* that had served him as a guide for most of the hierarchy of the development of the art of prehistoric peoples that was moulded onto 'natural peoples.' It was this book that first introduced the art of African peoples into the discussion of German art history - a discussion that was driven by Social Darwinistic considerations and resulted in an assemblage of scientific research and aesthetic considerations. Once this book had made the introduction, the approach of African art turned towards new avenues of stylistic appraisal which will be discussed in the next part.

Part 2

The Psychology of Style

The engagement with objects in European collections and Wilhelm Worringer's ideas of abstraction

This chapter considers the influence of collections and the research surrounding different collections on the approach to and reception of African art, including the acquisition policies of ethnographic museums, the case study of the Benin Bronzes, Rigel's notion of the *Kunstwollen* and Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. Once Karl Woermann had taken the first step and included African art in a survey of all art, several other scholars followed suit and explored the different ways in which the study of these objects could aid their work. The study of the development of art and the search for universal laws of art production and use had been advocated by Grosse in 1894. This part of the thesis now considers the works that have been directed by these studies into researching the psychology of style itself. Hence, in the years between 1900 and 1908 several articles and books of varying lengths were published that dealt with some form of non-European art.

This was a period when the collections of ethnographic museums in Germany grew rapidly. The accumulation of more and more ethnographica was only possible through the growing public interest in the matter. This interest secured the museums a steady flow of donations of both collections and funds. This growing interest, as shown by the success of the first volume of Woermann's survey, can be noted in many avenues of scholarly and popular culture. The general politics of making collections, the incredible public interest in the so-called Benin Bronzes and the upcoming theoretical ideas that tried to identify the underlying causes of a global art production are only three examples of an ongoing public interest in other cultures and their products, that will be discussed in this section and that could be detected in all parts of German society.

This ongoing interest is also visible in Wilhelm Worringer's (1881-1965) doctoral thesis *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* which is mainly concerned with Roman and Greek ancient art. Nevertheless, Worringer repeatedly mentions the art of 'natural peoples' and uses it to support his ideas on the psychology of style. So while he does not work on African art himself he did add important theoretical ideas to the general study of non-European art. The reasons for choosing this book as the main focus for this chapter will be considered in the section on its contents. Here, it is important to emphasise that it stood in stark contrast to earlier studies, added new ideas to the field, and was incredibly popular in certain circles.

This chapter will explore the approach to African visual culture through collections that were available in Germany and the different nuances of style that could be found

within them. To do so, this chapter will concentrate on a few significant aspects that were integral to these collections; the making of collections, contemporary ethnographic writings and art historical theories. Moreover, Felix von Luschan's work at the Völkerkundemuseum in Berlin will be explored and a short survey of collection and exhibition methods will be given. This will also contain a discussion of some of von Luschan's publications in order to analyse the way ethnographers conveyed African objects to their audience once the question of their artistic value was raised. Secondly, a survey of Alois Riegl's *Stilfragen* will be given, considering that his notions were heavily influenced by his appointment at a museum and his close work with collections. Moreover, a short analysis of the way his ideas were seen in Germany and influenced German scholars will follow.

The bulk of this chapter, however, will focus on Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, his attitude towards art in general and African art in particular, and a detailed discussion of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. It will analyse the way Worringer presented his few examples of African art and how he has utilised them in order to convey his ideas on art. As with the other chapters, the last section considers the contemporary reception of the book in order to assess its impact.

Chapter 4.1 Making Collections

The collection politics of German museums were important for determining the collections that would eventually be shown and published in books and journals. As will be shown, through the museum and its publications it is these collecting decisions that shape the research and reception of a peoples', a country's and even a continent's visual culture. The museums' collection policies may only have an indirect influence on the public reception but the decisions made in their offices, 'in the field' and in the auction houses determined the objects scholars like Worringer were able to study.

Most of the objects in the different German collections, acquired before ethnographers went into the field themselves, were donated by travellers or were, with the support of wealthy enthusiasts, bought through different merchants. One of the most famous dealers in non-European objects was William Downing Webster (1868-1913), the British "Collector of Ethnological Specimens, European and Eastern Arms and Armour."¹ The transactions with Webster were established either by him sending lists of available objects that would often have little drawings of the different specimens attached, or by him sending a crate full of objects that would be forwarded to another museum once the first museum had bought the objects they required.²

Figure 20 Close up of drawings on a letter from Webster to von Luschan. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin.

German colonial rule in Africa changed the way German nationals could negotiate different colonial protectorates, Germany's interests in the area made travellers that were crossing borders and taking objects appear more suspicious. Colonial officers, both

¹ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 77.

² See for example the records in the Berlin Museum for Ethnology, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, letter Webster to von Luschan 22.04.98, E 682/98.

foreign and German, had to sanction any collection efforts that were made in their territories and introduced rules and regulations that had to be followed.³ The German groups going on African expeditions, who formerly had been regarded as members of an international scientific community, were now first and foremost regarded as German nationals and their collection efforts were hampered by taxes being exacted and other regulations. The early generation of ethnographers still held on to the international community of scholars and only slowly got used to these changes. The younger generations that were taught within these structures, however, saw themselves as scholars that were supporting the sciences in their respective countries.⁴

These changes 'in the field' were also noticeable in the museums in Germany. The younger generation of ethnographers were advocating the introduction of so-called *Schausammlungen*; reducing the amount of exhibited objects with a clear agenda to convey knowledge about a specific topic. However, Bastian did not lay as much importance on the education of the public and was against reducing the amount of exhibited objects in order to convey a message. He did however, favour open collections, in which objects were arranged in cabinets made of glass and steel, flooded by natural light from large windows and glass ceilings, and positioned in such a way that a well-informed visitor could move easily through the geographically organised displays, gain an overview of the objects from entire regions, and make mental connections between the material cultures of peoples living in different times and places. He saw the collections as a repository to assist ethnographers in their work and not to instruct or entertain the greater public.⁵

Bastian adapted his early interest in collecting curiosities which were especially rare or aesthetically interesting, to accommodate systematic collecting.⁶ Unimposing items were acquired in order to promote his goal of completing his collection of specimens from all over the world.⁷ The acknowledgements in the guidebook of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin show the importance of the colonial ventures for the growing collection of the museum. It says that

³ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁷ Gerd Koch, "Abteilung Südsee," in *100 Jahre Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin*, ed. Kurt Krieger and Gerd Koch (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1973).

the [...] museum is obliged to specifically thank the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office and the Governors [*Herr Gouverneure*] as well as many officials and officers in the protected areas through whose untiring cooperation it has become possible to bring the collections from Africa and Oceania to the highest standard, and maintain this standard, which is not excelled or even reached by any other museum.⁸

While this is a courtesy to the authorities, it still shows a connection between ethnographic collections and colonial officers that cannot be denied.

Despite growing colonialism and an urge to build the biggest collection in the world, both Bastian and von Luschan, as well as most other German ethnographers, put the ultimate goal of their own work as enhancing the science of ethnography.⁹ This general feeling was met by a similar one in other European countries which led to a scientific community of ethnographic researchers. Articles and books were constantly exchanged, as most ethnographers were fluent in multiple languages, and visiting scholars were invited into museums and storerooms. Up until the First World War, the scientific community and their common goals of archiving the past and present of human variations was stronger than national interests and information was not a currency to be dealt in but was freely and willingly given. Nevertheless, securing a piece that no one else had or having the biggest museum and most generous supporters still attracted envy from other ethnographers, both from abroad and other museums in the same country.

For example, in June 1898 Ormonde Maddock Dalton, from the British Museum, paid an official visit to the ethnographic museums in Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden and Leipzig. In his subsequently published pamphlet, *Reports on Ethnographical Museums in Germany*,¹⁰ Dalton points out that “the Museum für Völkerkunde at Berlin is in all respects so admirable that it stands in a class by itself.”¹¹ Moreover, he laments that “work at the German ethnographical museums is carried on under more favourable conditions than is the case in this country”¹² and adds that “in both the extent and the quality of the collections Berlin has no rivals. [...] On a moderate estimate the Berlin collections are six or seven times as extensive as ours.”¹³ Most importantly, though, Dalton points out that “the scientific importance of ethnography is far more universally recognised than is the

⁸ *Führer durch das Museum*, (Berlin: Völkerkundemuseum Berlin, 1898).

⁹ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 97.

¹⁰ Dalton, "Report on Ethnographical Museums in Germany, [to C.H. Read, Keeper of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography]."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

case in Great Britain.”¹⁴ He then emphasises this point by stating that “the widespread public interest in the subject has led to a great influx of gifts, and to offers of local assistance on the part of official and non/official residents in foreign countries.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, his *Reports on Ethnographical Museums in Germany* is far from an envious account of the ease of access to resources and public support of German ethnography but can rather be seen as an attempt to gain support from official sources for the British Museum.

This scientific community of collectors stood in contrast to private collectors who became more numerous at the same time as ethnography became a university discipline. Private collectors who donated parts or all of their collection to museums for research had to be grudgingly tolerated in acknowledgement of the free research material made available through their work. However, private collectors who did not share their collections with those pursuing scientific goals were seen as a hindrance whilst travellers who collected for profit, and not with the sanction of an ethnographic museum, often had trouble selling the objects in their possession.¹⁶

Moreover, the pretence to act on the behalf of a museum could get private collectors into real trouble as the case of Thomann-Gillis reveals. Thomann-Gillis was accused by British officials in Burma of having “illegally” taken “cartloads of religious artefacts” and “frescoes” from Burmese temples while pretending to work for the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin.¹⁷ The British officials alerted their German counterparts who in turn passed the information on to the museum curators and urged them to distance themselves for Thomann-Gillis and not to acquire any of his collections. In the end Thomann-Gillis, who was not part of the scientific community, was censored for stealing these artefacts and was blacklisted as untrustworthy by ethnographic museums all over Europe.¹⁸

However, the ethnographers’ own relationship with native people and their material goods was rather ambiguous. As we discussed in chapter 3.3, while most ethnographers promoted a better treatment of native communities and emphasised the importance of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 101.

¹⁷ Memorandum, British Embassy to the German *Auswertiges Amt* [Foreign Office], 06.06.1900, in Bundesarchiv Potsdam: Auswertiges Amt, R901, 37869:66. Quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁸ Ibid.

recognising their traditions and customs, they also gave priority to the ‘greater good’ and the advancement of their science. As can be seen from von Luschan’s report on the colonial exhibition in 1896 (chapter 3.2), the turning point of supporting native rights was reached when they refused to become subject to scientific research. The Cameroonians on display at the colonial exhibition in 1896 were singled out as *Hosen-nigger* [trouser-nigger] because they did not allow von Luschan to make plaster casts of their scarification marks.

This ambivalence is not just true of the treatment of native people in Germany and their respective home countries but also of the handling of their possessions. The plundering of native religious sites by a private collector such as Thomann-Gillis may have been condemned but similar acts in the name of science were accepted by European ethnographers and even repeatedly carried out by members of the community itself. Frobenius’s expeditions are notorious for his methods in obtaining objects and skeletons with or without the consent of the owner of the specimen or the family of the deceased, corrupting many archaeological sites in the process.¹⁹ It is also reported that members from Georg Thilenus’s (1868-1937) South Sea expedition, from 1908 to 1910, would take interesting pieces while their owners were absent and left some form of payment behind as an “anonymous purchase.” Even methods of violent intimidation and deception were employed if the ethnographers saw fit.²⁰

As mentioned above, it was the common scientific goal that gave legitimacy to the methods of ethnographers while private collectors were stigmatised for the same wrong doings. Penny has argued that the rejection of the methods of private collectors by ethnographers was one way to ensure that their own authority stayed intact and that the colonial authorities as well as the public would thereby continue in their support of scientific goals.²¹ This argument seems credible. However, German ethnographers were also supportive of establishing a large community of travellers who were affiliated to the wider scientific project.

Several key ethnographers, including Bastian and von Luschan, gave papers at different colonial, geographic and missionary societies in the hope of reaching people who would have the opportunity to visit Africa. These papers were then often used to

¹⁹ Heinrichs, *Die fremde Welt, das bin Ich: Leo Frobenius, Ethnologe, Forschungsreisender, Abenteurer*.

²⁰ Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany*, 100.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

promote their views on the proper treatment of natives and as a way of informing travellers of the importance of making certain collections. This form of educating the middlemen who would (hopefully) bring new collections to Germany can be seen in some of the popular articles by von Luschan. In an unpublished manuscript in von Luschan's private archive, titled *Zur Einleitung Ostafrika* [Introduction to East Africa],²² von Luschan's plea to travellers becomes clear. He laments that "there will always be travellers that only know of an African hut whether it is easy or hard to set on fire and whose diaries report more about the Negroes he 'hunted down' than living people."²³ It is important to him to rebuke the behaviour of some travellers, but he also notes that "there are also travellers that make an effort to understand the people with whom they live and who are sensitive to their many amicable traits."²⁴

He makes his sentiment stronger by playing subtly on the differences and similarities between natives and travellers. The manuscript shows that von Luschan had decided to change the words "Negro" and "people" and place them in a context that emphasises his feeling towards different kinds of travellers. Thus, in the negative example above he changed "report more about the people he 'hunted down' than living peoples" to "the Negroes he 'hunted down' than living peoples." He thus highlights that for this kind of traveller the native population is a race of people not made up of individuals. Moreover, he took out the term 'Negro' when talking positively of the approach of other travellers. A sentence that read "that are sensitive to the Negroes many amicable traits" now reads "that are sensitive to their many amicable traits." The common humanity of traveller and native is thus stressed rather than their different races.

Ethnographers were very aware of the colonial and zoological discourses in Germany at the time and they were capable of engaging with them to their advantage. Playing with the terms to emphasise common humanity and different races in the example of von Luschan's unpublished manuscript made it possible for him to alert future travellers to the job at hand. By such methods German ethnographers came to be seen in a favourable light by most institutions and authorities and their work was supported financially, materially and psychologically by both private individuals and organisations. As has been discussed in chapter three, this interest in and support of ethnography was also carried out

²² Felix von Luschan *Zur Einleitung Ostafrika*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan, 2.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

on a public level. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that many of the university educated, culturally interested German scholars of art history would have been aware of important new arrivals in the ethnographic museums certainly as the following example of the so-called Benin Bronzes will show that these high profile arrivals were extensively marketed through print media.

Chapter 4.2 Felix von Luschan and Benin

In 1886, Felix von Luschan became keeper of the collections from Africa and Oceania at the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, after having been appointed Adolf Bastian's assistant a year before.²⁵ Like Bastian, von Luschan was formally trained in medicine but his manifold interests included archaeology, anthropology and ethnography. It was von Luschan and his "ambition, diplomatic skill, [his] instinct for the right opportunity and [his] unqualified identification with the position of a curator in the Prussian museum service,"²⁶ which turned the African collection, and especially the Benin collection, into one of the biggest such ethnography collections in the world. As mentioned above, the support for ethnography was already evidenced in the size of the collections. The rapid expansion was aided by the federal law that saw any ethnographic objects coming to Germany being offered to the *Völkerkundemuseum* first (see Chapter 1.4). Nevertheless, the overcrowding that followed this collection craze, was not seen as a reason for the curators at the Berlin museum to slow down their efforts to build a complete "thesaurus of scientific research,"²⁷ that represents every possible object from every people, as Bastian had noted in his essay on the tasks of ethnography in 1898.

Von Luschan updated Bastian's notion of the tasks of ethnography with his own version, published after Bastian's death and in the same year that he left the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin for a full professorship at the Berlin Charité medical school in 1909. According to von Luschan,

the question of the position of humans in nature, which in earlier decades appeared to have been the most important aspect of ethnography, [...] has stopped being current. Unfortunately, it is still true that we know more about the genealogy of horses, cattle and pigs than our own. But it is certain and indisputable that we are more closely related to apes than to any other mammals, and that our closest relative, meaning those with which we have the closest shared ancestors, are the anthropoids.²⁸

Moreover, von Luschan also took the opportunity to emphasise that all humankind has a shared history of origins and that the idea that "the Negroes [come from] a gorilla, the

²⁵ Völger, "Curator, Trader, Benin Scholar: Felix von Luschan – an Austrian in Royal-Prussian Museum Service," 224.

²⁶ Ibid., 213.

²⁷ Bastian, *Die Aufgaben der Ethnologie*, 22/3.

²⁸ Felix von Luschan, "Die gegenwärtigen Aufgaben der Anthropologie," in *1. Sitzung der Abteilung für Anthropologie, ethnologie und Prähistorie* (1909), 201.

Pygmies from a Chimpanzee, and the Southeast Asians from an Orang-utan like animal”²⁹ is untenable. This idea had been supported by the second edition of Ernst Haeckel’s *Schöpfungsgeschichte* published in 1870. He supported his ideas with an illustration of the evolutionary development of different human races from different apes. However, the use of this illustration was short lived as Haeckel’s theory was soon disproved and he deleted the relevant paragraphs as well as the illustration.

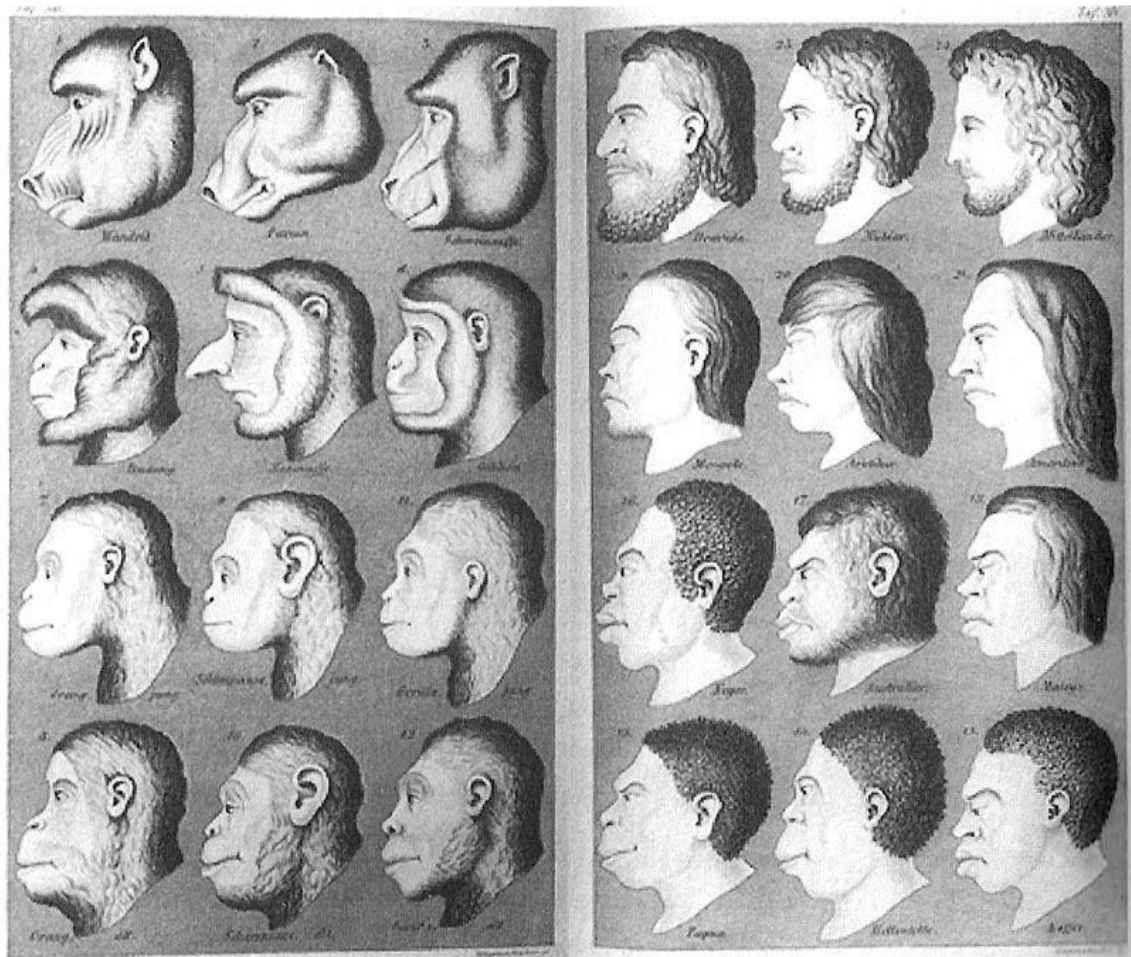


Figure 21 Illustration of ‘Evolution of the Human Race’ taken from Ernst Haeckel’ *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte*, 1870.

Von Luschan points out that the main task for contemporary ethnography lies in the “analysis of the position of the different human races relative to one another” even if the “term race itself will never be defined accurately.”³⁰ Von Luschan’s statement from a few years earlier that race was merely a word and that it had no clear meaning, comes to mind; but in this instance his remark seems more like a lamentation for the fact that it will never

²⁹ Ibid., 201/2.

³⁰ Ibid., 203.

be defined. Two years later, von Luschan published an article on the *Fremde Kultureinflüsse in Afrika* [Foreign Cultural Influences on Africa] stating that the earlier idea that “‘primitives’ from inner Africa [are] real children of nature [...] completely unsoiled by any other foreign culture” was false.³¹ Moreover, he continued using inverted commas, or put the word ‘so-called’ in front of the terms, whenever he spoke of human races or primitive man.³² This is further exemplified in his later book *Peoples, Races, Languages* (1922) where he wrote: “The whole of humankind is composed of only one species: *Homo sapiens*. There are no ‘savage’ people, there are only people with a culture that differs from ours. The distinguishing qualities of the so-called ‘races’ essentially originated due to climatological, social and environmental factors.”³³

To get a better insight into von Luschan’s attitude towards African art and the way he conveyed this to his readers, the next section considers some of his work on the Benin Bronzes. These bronzes - already featured in the last chapter - became a media sensation as soon as they arrived in Europe. While this was a decisive factor in the special treatment they had received in Woermann’s survey it also had an impact on popular ideas of African objects; changing from derogatory notions of fetishes to being brought closer towards the European concepts of ‘art.’³⁴ As will be shown, by impacting popular beliefs, and thus changing attitudes, the publications on these bronzes also indirectly affected Worringer’s research. Von Luschan was one of the first Germans to have known of the bronzes and to have realized their importance for ethnographic research. As will be seen, it was this work on the bronzes that supported his liberal ideas towards Africans.

Von Luschan had written the first scientific paper on the Benin Bronzes that was published in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* in early 1898. In his introduction, he already speaks about the bronzes as art works pointing out that “it is clear right from the beginning

³¹ *Fremde Kultureinflüsse auf Afrika* 1910, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan.

³² Von Luschan became a member of the Society for Racial Hygiene in 1908 and saw eugenics as a way to rid the world of criminals and drunkards, see Völger, "Curator, Trader, Benin Scholar: Felix von Luschan – an Austrian in Royal-Prussian Museum Service." This interest might stem from his friendly contact with Ernst Haeckel who, in 1887, thanks von Luschan in a letter that he had lent him two books and von Luschan also received acknowledgements for the birthday wishes he had sent to Haeckel for his 70s, 75s and 80s birthdays. Personal correspondence between Haeckel and von Luschan, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan.

³³ Von Luschan quoted in *ibid.*, 216.

³⁴ For a discussion on the impact of the Benin Bronzes on popular ideas see Husemann, "Golf in the City of Blood: The Translation of the Benin Bronzes in 19th Century Britain and Germany."

that a highly developed art like this did not just appear.”³⁵ In general, von Luschan calls the bronzes “works of art” or “old Benin-Art.” Only when he talks about the representations of musical instruments on the bronzes - and, thus, refers to their ethnographic value - does he choose the term ‘pictorial work’ [*Bildwerk*], rather freer from value judgement. By doing so, von Luschan clearly separates the parts in which he cites the bronzes as ethnographica from those in which he refers to their artistic value and importance outside the newly established science of ethnography. Thus, von Luschan makes sure that, as the first article on this topic, it can be quoted from either perspective and in the process he refrains from classifying the article, and with it the bronzes, as belonging to either discipline.



Figure 22 Graphic renderings of “carvings on ivory tusks from Benin” from Felix von Luschan’s article on the Benin Bronzes, 1898, pp. 156/7.

The drawings of carvings from the tusks are reproduced as a graphic rendering within the text. The verbal-visual syntagm in this case is very strong, as the text directly refers to them and adds further information. For example, von Luschan points out that in his

³⁵ Felix von Luschan, "Hr. F. V. Luschan hält einen Vortrag über Alterthümer von Benin," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 30: 146.

‘Fig. 3,’ the second from the right in the image shown here (Figure 22), shows a European leaning on “a badly misconceived sword.” Moreover, the images are used as synecdoches, as von Luschan points out that the “similar and more irregular misconceptions of arms and clothing of Europeans can be detected in many more carved tusks and single bronzes from Benin; they are especially noteworthy as they are very reliable proofs that these objects are the works of Negroes and not the works of Europeans.”³⁶ Using the drawings in this particular way makes the originals stand as examples for the whole culture; they become a symptom of the culture and their aesthetic qualities become less important.



Figure 25 Felix von Luschan, plate of bronze from Benin



Figure 24 Felix von Luschan, plate of bronze from Benin



Figure 23 Felix von Luschan, plate of bronzes from Benin

The reproductions of the bronzes, on the other hand, are separated from the text by several other articles as they can be found nearly 100 pages earlier in the volume (Figures 23, 24, 25). The text only refers to them in brackets right underneath the title and in a footnote to the statement that most bronze plaques from Benin “depict Negroes.” The verbal-visual syntagm in this case is very weak as the only times the text actually refers to the existence of the plates, it does not even refer to them individually and provides no associated explanation. Furthermore, the plates themselves do not refer back to the text, neither giving page numbers to identify an accompanying text, nor citing its title. The choice to reproduce photographs, each printed on a whole page, of these bronzes already implies that they were seen to be of a higher value than the tusks that were reproduced as

³⁶ Ibid.

graphic renderings in the text. While the reader/viewer can see these images in a synecdochic mode when he actively connects them to the descriptions of Benin culture in the text, the invitation to read/see these images in a metaphoric mode is far more evident than with the tusks. Here, their cultural connection is limited by the editorial choices; instead these images can be more easily understood as standing for a particular aesthetic.

Moreover, von Luschan stresses that “the style of the artwork is just African, definitely and absolutely just African,” and that “in the majority of objects, the engraving is evenly executed which demonstrates a sophisticated sense of art.”³⁷ He stresses the “African style” of the bronzes and highlights their real importance as lying in the fact “that we discovered a native and monumental art for Benin of the 16th and 17th century.” He gives the credit for the style of the art as well as its production to the people of Benin themselves and vehemently contradicts any other explanations. Thereby, he positively ‘foreignizes’ the bronzes. Yet, he likewise ‘domesticates’ them by comparing the work to European art, concluding that “at least single pieces are equal to contemporary European art and are executed with a technique that generally stands at the top of the accessible.”³⁸ By adding that “especially opposed to the prevailing contempt against Negroes, in some colonial circles, this evidence also seems to have some kind of general and moral impact,” he emphasises that in the light of discovering highly executed art works, like the Benin Bronzes, Europeans should reconsider their perspectives on other peoples, specifically those in Africa.

By calling the bronzes “works of art,” pointing to their “African style” and speaking of the “sense of art” of the producer, von Luschan uses art historical language as a metaphoric lingua franca to explain the bronzes to his readers. As mentioned above, in this way his article can be used by members from both disciplines but it also affects the non-academic reader in a particular way. Perpetuated by the weak verbal-visual syntagm of the text and the plates of the bronzes, this familiarity of the language paired with the unfamiliarity with the objects results in a domestication of their aesthetic and style, as the foreign style becomes approachable through the familiar terms for it. The people from Benin that made these bronzes lose their power over the interpretation of their visual culture which are translated to fit German cultural values on art.

³⁷ von Luschan, "Hr. F. V. Luschan hält einen Vortrag über Alterthümer von Benin," 149.

³⁸ Ibid., 153.

In contrast, von Luschan gave a paper at the *VII Internationale Geographenkongress* [VII International Congress of Geographers] in 1899.³⁹ This paper ‘On the Old Trading Relations of Benin’ was in most aspects rather different from his article in the ethnographic journal. While the latter was written for ethnographers sharing von Luschan’s interest in other peoples and their visual and material culture, this paper was presented at a Congress of Geographers and its main focus is hence somewhat different. But while he adapted his account to be of interest to geographers, he still makes some important points that he had already mentioned one year earlier. He opens his presentation by pointing out how “Benin, the little west African Negro Kingdom at the lower right of Niger suddenly came into the focus of numerous scientific interests, two years ago, after, in the two centuries before, [...] it had almost fallen into oblivion.”⁴⁰ He then goes on to talk about trade in Africa before he says that it was “the ruthless slave hunting, following the discovery and the colonisation of America, [that] provoked the natives to close their country to the ‘white savages.’”⁴¹ Von Luschan not only belittles the ‘African Negro Kingdom’ but also puts the ‘white savages’ on a par with them and thus, sets the tone for this powerful paper, which calls to be quoted extensively.

Furthermore, he laments how “the white barbarians had destroyed the native cultures and did not put anything in their place.” But worst for him was that “most of these cultures disappeared without trace and are lost forever,”⁴² giving his audience an insight into the concerns of an ethnographer. Similar to his article for the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, von Luschan did not fail to mention his ethnographic mission by announcing that

all the more important are the finds from Benin, which give us an exact insight into old African affairs. [...] Of the fabulous treasures of old art work, which after the destruction of the capital city fell into the hands of the English, a large part came into the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, and there they are accessible to the public.

According to him

they teach us about the state of the ‘ethnically unaltered originality’ of today’s Coastal Negroes, which still plays an important part in the brains [*Gehirne*] of some

³⁹ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Felix von Luschan, Vortrag auf dem VII Internationalen Geographen-Kongress in Berlin im Jahr 1899 in "Erweiterungsbau des Königlichen Museums für Völkerkunde" vol. 2, 1286/1903.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 608.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

ethnographers. [Even though,] it has long been proved, that these ‘pure savages,’ received crossbows and helmets from their European trading partners.⁴³

Moreover,

“a closer examination of their trade relations, these ‘from every kind of foreign culture completely unsoiled children of nature,’ have to be given a completely new position in the philosophical system of the old-school ethnographers, but concerns like this seem to be almost insignificant in comparison to the great moral and practical consequences, that will naturally arise from a better knowledge of the affairs on the coast of Guinea.⁴⁴

By emphasising that the envisioned ‘pure savages’ do not actually exist, he comes to the main point of his paper, in which the bronzes play an important part:

[t]his better knowledge, leads primarily to the conviction that you cannot regard and treat Negroes as ‘primitives.’ People that mastered bronze casting, [...] people that, for centuries, stood in secure relations with acknowledged cultural people [*Kulturvölker*] cannot be seen as half-apes.”⁴⁵

Here, he is making his audience, a few of whom as professional geographers would have certainly been part of many expeditions, aware of the fact that old colonial ideas of the ‘savage’ natives have to be reconsidered.

In fact, von Luschan had been an advocate of better treatment of colonial subjects for a long time,⁴⁶ and while this train of thought was actually not triggered by the find of the Benin Bronzes, he did use the bronzes to illustrate his ideas.

Certainly, [he suggests,] through such a consideration, [that the peoples from the Guinea coast cannot be seen as ‘primitives,] ‘the primitives’ would lose their claim to ‘unspoiled originality’ and indeed the study of their material property and psychic beliefs would become even more difficult and entangled, but this should not be a reason to close our eyes from historical facts, especially for a colonial power, this consideration would not be without use.”⁴⁷

Moreover, he understands that it would be of great magnitude

if the great and broad classes of the European peoples would see reason, that the culture, of the so-called ‘primitives,’ is not a worse one, but only a different one to ours.

⁴³ Ibid., 610.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 611.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Völger, "Curator, Trader, Benin Scholar: Felix von Luschan – an Austrian in Royal-Prussian Museum Service," 216.

⁴⁷ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, Felix von Luschan, Vortrag auf dem VII Internationalen Geographen-Kongress in Berlin im Jahr 1899 in "Erweiterungsbau des Königlichen Museums für Völkerkunde" vol. 2, 1286/1903, 611.

This understanding, which only now became second nature for ethnographers, and a few other selected people, deserves to be common knowledge for the nation.⁴⁸

By pointing out that ethnographers had already taken on this understanding as ‘second nature,’ he calls on the geographers and the rest of his audience to do the same - almost lecturing them, through the translation of the bronzes and the information in their iconography, on how to perceive natives in West Africa.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 612.

Chapter 4.3 Alois Riegl and the *Kunstwollen*

At the same time that von Luschan turned the African collection in his keeping into one of the biggest in the world, more and more art theorists aimed to explain the appearance of art production all over the world. While Alois Riegl (1858-1905) lived and worked in Austria it is important to consider his theoretical notions that greatly influenced German scholars. Hence, this section will reflect on the origin, relevance and uses of Riegl's idea of *Kunstwollen*. Employed at the K.K. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie [Museum of Art and Industry, today the Museum for Applied Art], Riegl for most of his career Riegl wrote on the history of ornamentation. This background impacted his theoretical thinking visible in his *Stilfragen* as it is largely collection oriented; working with stylistic differences as they can be seen in the museum and not in use in the different countries.

One of his most famous theories is the idea of *Kunstwollen*. This idea developed and was refined and adjusted throughout Riegl's career, making it impossible to give a single definition of the notion.⁴⁹ For the purpose of this chapter, this section will concentrate on the definitions that were important for Worringer's work: These are from *Stilfragen: Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* [Problems of Style: Foundations for a History of Ornament] (1893), *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* [Late Roman Art Industry] (1901) and the posthumously published lectures *Historische Grammatik der bildenden Künste* [Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts] (1966).

Although Riegl was an Austrian art historian, and a member of the Vienna school of art history, he published his *Stilfragen* with a company from Berlin, which was not an uncommon occurrence in the different German-speaking countries but still warrants noting as it shows the extent to which the scientific communities often extended beyond national borders. *Stilfragen* is the culmination of several works on the ornamentation of textiles, mainly of Islamic designs, that Riegl had published before.⁵⁰ It belongs to what Walter Benjamin has called, 'rigorous art history' as it, like many other works from the Vienna school of art history, sought to investigate the phenomenological structure of the works rather than their aesthetic characteristics as the 'vague' German art historians did.⁵¹

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of *Kunstwollen* see for example Andrea Reichenberger, "»Kunstwollen« Riegls Plädoyer für die Freiheit der Kunst," *Kritische Berichte* 31/1 (2003).

⁵⁰ Matthew Rampley, "Art History and the Politics of Empire: Rethinking the Vienna School," 2009, 454.

⁵¹ Vlad Ionescu, "The Rigorous and the Vague: Aesthetics and Art History in Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer," *Journal of Art Historiography*, no. 9 (2013): 1/2.

Instead of the contemplation of aesthetic emotions, whether universal or dependent on cultural traditions, Riegl employed the idea of *Kunstwollen* [will to art]. For him, the term 'art' was not just specific to European fine art but included all visual creations from all places,⁵² thus freeing the term from hierarchies of objects. Riegl believed that all arts - archaeological, craft and ornament - reveal the *Kunstwollen* and can serve the same historical examination.⁵³ Riegl disengaged aesthetics from their philosophical theories and incorporated it in his rigorous art history as the expression of the *Kunstwollen*. Moreover, he uses it as a way to descriptively reflect on the creation of artistic pleasure.⁵⁴ He rejects metaphysical speculations and instead favours the notion of an artistic drive that is the cause for art-making. Arguing that "the artistic creation expresses itself merely as an aesthetic drive,"⁵⁵ Riegl identifies two dimensions of the *Kunstwollen*, the inner force and the outer motion.⁵⁶

Rather than seeing *Kunstwollen* as a universally constant entity, Riegl seems to think of *Kunstwollens* in the plural, as Elsner put it.⁵⁷ While the will to art is inherent in every culture, and is thus a link between all peoples, the way this will is articulated is highly specific to different peoples and times which also means that any one *Kunstwollen* is specific to one culture and cannot be replicated in different circumstances. Moreover, he sees the art of a people and their worldview as two different entities that develop separately but argues that the world view determines the *Kunstwollen* and hence has indirect influence on art production.⁵⁸ For Riegl, the relationship between the different *Kunstwollens* is not just through their inherent link but also through an evolutionary transmission from one to the other, making it possible for the researcher to investigate the development of these *Kunstwollens*.⁵⁹

In the *Spättrömische Kunstindustrie* (1901) he develops the concept of *Kunstwollen* and it becomes apparent that Riegl's idea is part a more encompassing entity. He

⁵² Ibid., 17/8.

⁵³ Jas' Elsner, "From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*," 2006, 753.

⁵⁴ Ionescu, "The Rigorous and the Vague: Aesthetics and Art History in Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer," 19.

⁵⁵ Alois Riegl, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 60 as quoted and translated by ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Elsner, "From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*," 751.

⁵⁸ Ionescu, "The Rigorous and the Vague: Aesthetics and Art History in Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer," 14.

⁵⁹ Elsner, "From Empirical Evidence to the Big Picture: Some Reflections on Riegl's Concept of *Kunstwollen*," 751.

acknowledges the active part of humans in the art world: people do not just receive the world as a given but through acts of imaginative engagement actively shape their surroundings. The *Kunstwollen* here regulates the relationship between man and his surroundings, including all four types of plastic art. However, *Kunstwollen* is not a personal product but a cultural one. Artworks from one culture might still present personal variations but will be connected through the culture's *Kunstwollen*, combining the objective and the subjective, with each influencing the other.⁶⁰

Riegl thus believed that one could retrieve the beliefs and world views of a people by studying their *Kunstwollen*, as expressed in their art, or any form of visual culture in Riegl's definition of the term. The work of art can, thereby, be seen as "the result of a specific and consciously purposeful artistic will that comes through in a battle against function, raw material, and technique."⁶¹ This sentence shows Riegl's rejection of Gottfried Semper's (1803-1879) materialism which portrayed art to be nothing more than the culmination of technique, material and function.⁶²

As a product of its time, Riegl's theory included evolutionary connotations and a tendency to conflate prehistoric and non-European peoples. In his *Stilfragen* he points out that "as defined by the modern natural sciences, we consider it justified to regard natural peoples as the rudimentary remains of humankind's earlier, long forgotten cultural periods."⁶³ He reasons that "seen in this light, the geometric ornaments of today's natural peoples are also a historically long-overcome phase of development of the decorative arts, and are, thus, of a high historical importance."⁶⁴ This shows that Grosse and Riegl had similar views towards non-European art and ornaments. They both saw non-European visual culture as the precursor to their own culture as well as a leftover of prehistoric cultures; something that may be called art but at the same time is merely the beginning of art proper.

At the same time, Riegl also concedes that the art of 'natural peoples' is still further developed than the real beginning of art. He points out that "the geometric animalistic figures are [...] in no way primitive any more, but are the result of a progress that is

⁶⁰ Ibid., 752.

⁶¹ Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, 9. As quoted and translated by ibid., 750.

⁶² Ionescu, "The Rigorous and the Vague: Aesthetics and Art History in Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer," 3.

⁶³ Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin: Georg Siemens, 1893), 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

already above the first step of the artistic development process.”⁶⁵ In doing so, he implies that there must have been, a now totally lost, real first step of art that is not practiced anymore, even among the ‘natural peoples.’ Moreover, he goes on to note that “a doubly advanced state of development must be assumed from the instant that the geometric configurations are used for symbolic purposes.”⁶⁶ Here, Grosse and Riegl disagree with each other while the former believed that the symbolic meaning of geometric form is the first step towards its existence as art, the latter thinks that a symbolic use of geometric form is only a later addition to the form of an object.

The ornamentation of the ‘natural peoples’ is also part of *Kunstwollen* and the artistic drive. Here, Riegl speaks about the *Schmuckbedürfnis* [need for ornament] and the *Schmückungstrieb* [ornamental drive]. Ionescu argues that these two concepts exemplify Riegl’s use of the idea of aesthetic pleasure despite his intrinsic rejection of the notion and its theoretical study, as, according to him, the “primitive man experiences aesthetic pleasure in his ornamentation.”⁶⁷ This aesthetic pleasure, generated in response to the *Schmuckbedürfnis*, is, however, not identical with a Hegelian idea of aesthetics but rather works within the notions of his own *Kunstwollen*. Riegl gives the example of Polynesian tattooing, which, according to him, shows that the *Schmuckbedürfnis* is an elementary need of humans as they “scorn any clothing but tattoo their skin from the brow to the toes.”⁶⁸

The aesthetic pleasure in their existence can be seen in Riegl’s commentary on the ornamental drive towards producing these and the *Schmuckbedürfnis* of showcasing them on one’s skin. Moreover, they exteriorise the *Kunstwollen* of the Polynesians. This connection between the artistic or ornamental drive, the *Kunstwollen* and the aesthetic pleasure that comes from even this shaping of the world according to one’s *Kunstwollen*, is at the core of Riegl’s research.

While Grosse’s and Riegl’s view on aesthetics and the importance of the aesthetic pleasure differ they still pursued the same goal; the elaboration of artistic laws. Grosse searched for universal laws of the function of art and Riegl for universal laws of style. It is Riegl’s association to collections rather than philosophy that explains the differing

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ionescu, "The Rigorous and the Vague: Aesthetics and Art History in Riegl, Wölfflin and Worringer," 18.

⁶⁸ Riegl, *Stilfragen Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik*, 46.

interest and findings. Furthermore, this connection to collections and tangible assemblages of visual culture, explains the impact Riegl's work had on many German scholars, including Wilhelm Worringer, who mainly came into contact with non-European visual culture through ethnographic museums.

Chapter 4.4 Wilhelm Worringer and *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*

Wilhelm Worringer was born in Aachen in 1881, the second youngest of five children to Peter Gustav Worringer and his wife Bertha Michaela, née Cille. His parents became the managers of the restaurant of the Zoological Garden in Cologne and were sufficiently established that when his father died only five years later, his mother was able to retain her role in the restaurant on her own, despite the difficulties for a woman at that time. Apart from a reminiscing note on his early interest in Nietzsche, very little is known about Worringer's formative years but it can be speculated that he would have had a relatively stable financial background through his mother's well-established business. He studied in Freiburg, Munich and Berlin before writing his doctoral thesis in Bern. As part of his studies he attended lectures by Alois Riegl, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Theodor Lipps, Artur Weese and Heinrich Wölfflin and showed a special interest in the work of Artur Schopenhauer, Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Wilhelm Wundt and Karl Lamprecht.⁶⁹

In the new foreword for the reprint (1948) celebrating 40 years of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Worringer talks about his stay in Paris in 1905. He particularly refers to the time he visited the Trocadero and saw Georg Simmel, relating that "it was the ensuing hours spent in the halls of the Trocadero with Simmel, in a contact consisting solely in the atmosphere created by his presence, that produced in a sudden, explosive act of birth the worlds of ideas which then found its way into my thesis."⁷⁰ He goes on to mention the "state of spiritual intoxication" that followed and enabled him to write his dissertation.

While this chance meeting with Simmel in the Trocadero might well have happened, it is the way Worringer puts it as the "explosive act of birth" of all his ideas that reminds one of Picasso's account of his visit to the same museum. Picasso relates in a letter to Malraux that "*Les Femmes d'Alger* must have come to me that very day."⁷¹ It is feasible to suppose that Worringer, as an art historian, would have known about this widely published incident. The similarity of a sudden flash of inspiration for a ground breaking piece of work in the same museum is interesting and suggestive. It appears that, in hindsight, both men have created an elaborate backstory to the conception of their most

⁶⁹ Grebing, *Die Worringers: Bildungsbürgerlichkeit als Lebenssinn: Wilhelm und Marta Worringer (1881-1965)*, 17-25.

⁷⁰ Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997), xvii.

⁷¹ Arianna Stassinopoulos Huffington, *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1988), 90.

famous works. Moreover, Worringer has connected the art historical side, through Picasso's account, of this story to sociology, through the encounter with Simmel, and thus linked the influences on him with those he would influence in future. Also interesting is that Worringer's visit occurred two years before Picasso's, who went in 1907, thus, in historical terms he places his own experience before that of the famous artist.

After finishing his doctorate in 1907, his brother, who owned a small print shop, made several copies of his thesis to be presented to the university and friends. One of these copies was sent to the poet Paul Ernst. Ernst did not realise that he was holding a doctoral thesis and published an enthusiastic and complimentary review in the journal *Kunst und Künstler* (see last section in this chapter). It was through this review that more scholars became aware of Worringer's book, and that finally the publishing house Piper decided to publish it. Forty years later, Worringer noted that he did not suspect the "whole period" to be "disposed for a radical reorientation of its standards of aesthetic value" but that it was this disposition that resulted in "the unusually wide influence" of his work.⁷² Even today it stands amongst the most read art historical doctoral theses.

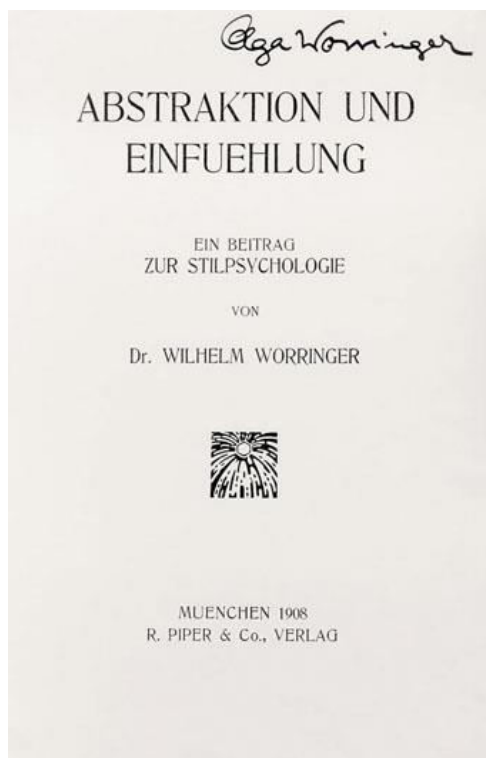


Figure 26 Front page of Wilhelm Worringer *Abstraktion und Einfuehlung*, 1908.

Worringer wrote his dissertation on the *Abstraktion und Einfuehlung* of art in 1907 and after the favourable if accidental review published it in 1908. His work was prompted by his disappointment with the art historical research of the previous decades. While he, like Grosse, believed in the importance of finding universal laws of aesthetics, he was adamant that there could not be one overarching aesthetic feeling that ruled art production and, more importantly for Worringer, art consumption. The book is separated into two parts, he first explains the theoretical base and then applies it to concrete examples. Most parts of Worringer's work deal with Roman and Greek art, especially the latter chapter. This chapter on the application of the

theory then leads to a very short account of the history of the development of abstraction

⁷² Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, xv.

and empathy up to the Renaissance. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework has a great bearing on non-European art reception. And while Worringer never mentions sub-Saharan African art in particular, the following descriptive section will point out the ways in which his theory has implied the aesthetic value and meaning of it.

The first part of Worringer's book is a detailed exposition of his theoretical ideas, including an analysis of some of the works of Theodor Lipps, a philosophical aesthetician whose notion of the *Einfühlung* [empathy] Worringer adopted, and Gottfried Semper, whose idea of the importance of technique, material and function he followed. He begins by pointing out that "this work wants to make a contribution to the aesthetics of art works, especially to the art works belonging to the visual arts."⁷³ Hence, he points out right at the beginning that his work is, unlike Woermann's but like Grosse's, an art scientific investigation into the aesthetics of art and not an art historical survey of data. He sees the art work as autonomous and its essence as independent from nature. It is this independence from nature that needs to be kept in mind for all of Worringer's interpretations.

Moreover, he turns to theories of modern aesthetics, pointing out how, compared with previous aesthetic ideas, these changed from aesthetic objectivism to aesthetic subjectivism; aesthetic objectivism is, the aesthetic of the object in question and aesthetic subjectivism is the aesthetic feeling of the beholder provoked by looking at the object.⁷⁴ Worringer notes that this shift "climaxed in a theory, which one can generally and widely call the doctrine of empathy [*Einfühlungslehre*]."⁷⁵ While his own theory came out of this doctrine he emphasises that "the fundamental idea of our experiment is to show how modern aesthetics, which emanates from the empathy, is not applicable for vast areas of art history."⁷⁶ Thus, he notes that for these other areas of art history – mainly prehistoric and non-European art – one would have to find different aesthetic explanations.

These first few passages already show the major differences between the two aestheticians Grosse and Worringer. While both were advocating that the aesthetic feeling induced by an artwork is highly subjective and will be very different from one culture to another, they differ in important aspects. Grosse believed that one could work out general laws of aesthetics, derived from the subjective stream of aesthetics, which are universally

⁷³ *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 3 ed. (München: Piper, 1911), 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

valid and govern the enjoyment of art of every people at every time. By 1900, this notion had become an essential part of art historical writing.⁷⁷ Worringer, on the other hand, emphasised that this doctrine of empathy, as he calls it, was limited to only a few, modern, western peoples and could not be applied to any other peoples.

Hence, Worringer came up with the two poles of 'aesthetic feeling,' as he calls it. Different balances between these two poles, the *Einfühlungsdrang* [need for empathy] and the *Abstraktionsdrang* [need for abstraction], comprise the various aesthetic feelings of different peoples. While "the *Einfühlungsdrang* as a requirement of the aesthetic experience finds pleasure in the beauty of organic forms, the *Abstraktionsdrang* finds beauty in the life-denying, inorganic, in the crystalline, or generally speaking, in all abstract principles and necessities."⁷⁸

Worringer begins his detailed explanation of the two different poles by giving an account of Theodor Lipps' (1851-1914) ideas regarding the *Einfühlungsdrang*. Above all he notes the "simplest formula" which is: "Aesthetic pleasure is objective self-pleasure." In his words, this means that "to aesthetically enjoy [myself] means to enjoy myself in a sensual object that is dissimilar to me, to empathise with it."⁷⁹ According to Worringer, this is also where the ideas about the beautiful and the ugly originate. Quoting Lipps, he points out that objects can only be beautiful if this empathy is possible, whereas the absence of this empathy makes an object seem ugly. Nevertheless, Worringer also points out that this is only one side of the coin. While this lack of empathy might make the object ugly in the eyes of a modern European the same is not true for all peoples. He rather wants to "prove that the assumption that this process of empathy is, at all times and in all places, the prerequisite for artistic practice, is unsustainable."⁸⁰

In order to take his theory further he, here, introduces Riegl's notion of the *Kunstwollen* as it is explained in his *Spätromische Kunstindustrie*. He points out that this *Kunstwollen* is "the primary moment of every artistic creation and every work of art is in its innermost essence only an objectification of this *a priori* existing absolute *Kunstwollen*."⁸¹ Moreover, like Riegl, Worringer disagreed with Semper's interpretation

⁷⁷ Leeb, "Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne," 202.

⁷⁸ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 3.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁸¹ Ibid., 9.

of art as being a combination of technique, material and function. He rather points out that “art is a history of will” or desire and that it becomes clear from this psychological premise that “skill is only a secondary effect of will.”⁸² For Worringer, this means that different styles are not the result of a lack of skill but rather of a different will, with technique, material and goal only having modifying influence. To get a sense of the importance of the *Kunstwollen* in Worringer’s theoretical writings it is useful to quote a longer excerpt of his work; he says:

True art has always satisfied a deep psychological need other than the mere imitative instinct, the playful joy of the reshaping of a natural prototype. The gloriole that hovers around the concept of art, all the worshipping dedication it has enjoyed at all times, can only be motivated psychologically by thinking of an art that, originating from psychological needs, satisfies psychological needs.⁸³

By pointing out that every style has come into being through bringing the highest aesthetic pleasure to the people that use it, Worringer further emphasises the importance of the *Kunstwollen* for his work. “What appears from our position as the largest distortion, must have been for the producer the highest beauty and the fulfilment of his *Kunstwollen*.”⁸⁴ His claim that all judgements made from the contemporary point of view of modern aesthetics are “absurdities” and “banalities”⁸⁵ does not directly refer to assumptions of their applicability to non-European art but in light of current knowledge, it can well be understood in this way.

At the same time, Worringer also tries to distance himself from the idea that the *Kunstwollen*, apart from small differences in style, always saw the imitation of nature as the ultimate goal. Even though, Worringer does not mention non-European art specifically, one can still notice the similarity to Frobenius’s work on ‘Die Kunst der Naturvölker’ in which he also pointed out that it was not a lack of skill but a distinct style that led the African peoples to change the natural human form. While Frobenius supported his ideas by mentioning different styles, Worringer, by means of elaborating on Riegl’s work, seems to give the theoretical underpinning of Frobenius’s ideas.

To further distance his own ideas from current aesthetic doctrines, Worringer makes it very clear that the imitative instinct, which is often used to justify the belief that all art

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 14/5.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

initially tries to imitate nature, is not connected to art production. He points out that “the imitative instinct is to be differentiated from naturalism as an art style” and that “they are no way near identical in their physical quality.”⁸⁶ While he does concede that some smaller “idols” and “symbolic games,” especially during the “oldest times” were made as results of this imitative instinct, he also points out that these often have nothing in common with the creations that were a product of the true “need to art.”

And this “need to art” is, according to Worringer, characterized by a “need for abstraction.” This “need for abstraction is the result of a large inner disquiet of man with the phenomena of the outside world and corresponds in a religious connection with a strong transcendental strain in all ideas. This condition we want to call an immense spiritual dread of space.”⁸⁷ He goes on to point out how the peoples following their *Abstraktionsdrang* were “tormented by the occurrences in the outside world,” were “helpless” and only saw “ambiguity and arbitrariness” in Nature. Hence, the reproduction of this ambiguous outside world would not result in aesthetic pleasure but rather recreate the dependency and angst felt towards it. Instead, they “ripped the object out of the never ending interplay of existence.”⁸⁸ The detachment from natural models, thus, distanced art from the feeling of angst that is emphasised by nature itself and in its place created an abstract anti-nature that may result in aesthetic pleasure due to the order and absoluteness of form, which Worringer calls “their beauty.”⁸⁹

He makes clear, that this use of geometric forms is not an intellectual decision but rather a “creation of instinct.” According to him, this creation of instinct was possible as “the intellect had not yet clouded the instinct,”⁹⁰ which implies that “primitive” peoples are people whose instincts rule their lives and not their intellect. This idea of the ruling instinct that in evolutionary terms is replaced by intellect is already familiar through Frobenius’s writing, even if Worringer never mentions the self-taught ethnographer in his work. Instead, Worringer refers to Riegl and his study of the development of ornament. He quotes an excerpt of Riegl’s work that notes the connection between the geometric style and the comparatively low cultural level of their makers and summarizes that “there must be a causal relationship between primitive culture and ornamental art according to

⁸⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

the highest, purest principles. [...]. The less humanity, by virtue of their intellectual cognition, made friends with the appearance of the outside world and gained a familiar relationship with it, the more tremendous is the dynamic out of which the highest abstract beauty is sought.”⁹¹

As shown, Worringer, decided to build his own work on Riegl's studies of the development of ornaments and applies Riegl's observations of the use of strict patterns amongst “primitive” peoples to show that art itself began with the *Abstraktionsdrang*. Interestingly, here is a similarity to Grosse, which reaches further than the common trend to see the art of ‘primitive’ peoples as the beginning of European art.⁹² Worringer's notion that dependency on nature is the reason for a particular, in this case, abstract style of art brings a specific passage from Grosse's *Anfänge der Kunst* to mind. In this passage he says that “advance in culture leads peoples out of servitude under nature to mastery over nature; and it may be presumed that this change finds corresponding expression in the development of art.”⁹³ It is exactly the same idea, of a connection between a people's relationship with nature and their art, that led Worringer to his notion of the *Abstraktionsdrang* and *Einfühlungsdrang*; once humanity is not dependent on nature anymore, but masters it, the need for abstraction is lessened while the need for empathy increases.

Worringer expresses this in slightly different terms: “for the primitive man the instinct for ‘the thing itself’ is strongest. The increasing spiritual mastery and the familiarization of the outside world denote a numbing, a clouding of this instinct.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, he points out that “after the human *Geist* in thousands of years of development has gone through the whole path of rationalist knowledge, the sense for the ‘thing itself’ will reawaken as a last resignation of knowledge. What was instinct is now the final product of knowledge.”⁹⁵ In this way, Worringer explains the newly arisen interest in ornamental design.

While Worringer sees empathy and abstraction as two complete opposites, he also believes that the change from one to the other happened slowly and gradually and in many

⁹¹ Ibid., 19.

⁹² See also Leeb, “Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne,” 202.

⁹³ Grosse, *Die Anfänge der Kunst*, 297.as translated by Frederick Starr, 1897, 312.

⁹⁴ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

cases both ‘needs’ co-exist with one or the other taking the upper hand. Moreover, these two poles are only two different nuances of a much more important ‘desire’ of art; the desire of self-expression. Worringer pointed out that empathy and abstraction had the desire of self-expression in common, “the last essence of all aesthetic experience.”⁹⁶ Both, abstraction and empathy, are polar opposite ways of giving into this desire of self-expression; on the one hand the *Abstraktionsdrang*, “which is widened to the general organic vitality” and on the other, the *Einfühlungsdrang*, “which is only directed towards the individual existence.”⁹⁷ Worringer thought it important enough to repeat the meaning of these two concepts time and again, even repeating it in the very last sentence of the theoretical part of his work. But he also points towards a much bigger and more easily understandable notion, the idea of self-expression. Having discussed Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* in detail and given much weight to the accumulative artistic style of a people it seems somehow surprising that Worringer reveals in the very end of the theoretical chapter that he actually believes the most important thing to be self-expression.

Yet, in the context of Worringer’s earlier remarks about the different personal styles within the *Kunstwollen* of a specific people, and the constant reminder that the *Abstraktionsdrang* and the *Einfühlungsdrang* are gradients of art production, the importance he places on self-expression becomes clearer. It seems as though Worringer had put more weight on the individuality of the artist in these last chapters to make his observations valid for contemporary times. By noting that “the thing itself” becomes important again after having mastered rational thought from all its angles and connecting this idea to the importance of individuality, Worringer is able to appease the growing number of anti-Winckelmann art historical scholars who began to lay more stress on individual artists.

This connection to the contemporary art historical establishment is noticeable throughout the book and is by no means surprising, given that it was originally written as a doctoral thesis. In one of the earliest academic volumes that concentrated solely on Worringer, Neil Donahue pointed out that Worringer “was never primarily a systematic ‘scientific’ scholar, but rather a rhetorician and cultural theorist of art and aesthetics.”⁹⁸ This non-scientific stance to the study of past cultures and their objects becomes apparent

⁹⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁸ Donahue, *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer*, 2.

in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* and the way Worringer used language to convey his different ideas and notions.

As an example one may look at Worringer's discussion of the principles of ornamental styles during which he compares the geometric style and the organic style,⁹⁹ pointing out that neither derived from nature and that the organic style only took the principles of natural forms as an inspiration. Here, he speaks about certain principles of ornamental styles that are also observable in the natural form of plants, like "regularity, arrangement around a centre, balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces [...], balance between bearing and burdening factors [and] proportionality of the ratios."¹⁰⁰ By using terms that have long been utilised for the description of art works, Worringer deeply anchors his new theories in a German art historical tradition.

However, Worringer also diverges from contemporary art historical conventions in a number of aspects. He does not stress the finding of universal laws of art, and also supports the idea of a psychology of style, which Leeb has pointed out was introduced in Heinrich Wölfflin's dissertation *Prolegomena zu einer Psychologie der Architektur* (1886).¹⁰¹ Furthermore, he does not use the term style as a signifier of a common appearance and practice of a certain art form, as it was used by traditional art history, as for him, "this involves, as a primary and decisive factor, the desire to reproduce the natural model."¹⁰² As such, it is counterproductive for his stream of thought so he argues instead that all the different products of the *Abstraktionsdrang* - like the use of geometric lines to bring order to principles also observable in nature - can be construed as 'style.' Hence, in his work, style is not a specific way in which the different natural objects are reproduced, but the way in which different natural principles are interpreted.

Nevertheless, Worringer does follow other contemporary linguistic conventions, for example the use of the term *Naturvölker* for non-European peoples. From the few times Worringer actually directly refers to *Naturvölker*, it is not apparent whether or not this term itself is intended to register a value judgement in any way. As he began to show in his theoretical analysis, he makes more use of the term 'primitive man.' While this term is often thought to have been used in a similar manner to the English tradition and as such

⁹⁹ Worringer uses the term *botanisch* [botanic].

¹⁰⁰ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 64/5.

¹⁰¹ Leeb, "Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne," 197.

¹⁰² Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 37.

interchangeably with *Naturvölker*,¹⁰³ it seems that Worringer used the term 'primitive man' to refer to a psychological state. In agreement with Frobenius, this psychological state is mainly credited to an extinct instinctive man that has living relatives in many of the *Naturvölker*.

So while Woermann saw possible inspiration for 'primitive art' in everything in nature, in his *Geschichte der Kunst* - he even noted the possible influence of a snake's marks in sand for the zigzag line - Worringer believed in almost the opposite, as the *Abstraktionsdrang* had the 'unnatural' as the goal. Apart from Woermann's ideas, he also rejects the contemporary impression that one can compare prehistoric art with other 'primitive' drawings and sculptures. According to him, neither "the 'art achievements' of African natural peoples" nor "the doodles of a child [...] can, in our view, be used for comparison where it concerns real art."¹⁰⁴ According to Worringer, single-minded scholars of art would have one believe it fruitful to make use of such invalid comparisons, making it their fault that such ideas were taken for granted. His strong belief in the very subjective *Kunstwollen* of a people made Worringer refrain from such comparisons and analyse different arts by their own standards.

It becomes apparent that Worringer suggests a difference between 'real art' and something other. While the other 'art practice' that is not 'real' may be compared to similar practices that use the same skills and *Kunstwollen*, 'real art' cannot be compared. In this way, Worringer implies that 'real art' needs to be analysed in isolation. The study of the unique cultural aspects of this 'real art' is at the core of his own ideas and research. Nevertheless, it is also interesting here that he uses inverted commas for "'art achievements' of African natural peoples," putting into question whether one can consider these as 'real art' and thus justify a complete translation.

This can be read in two different ways. In accordance with contemporary stereotypical beliefs of 'primitives' this act might be seen as a lessening of the value judgement the phrase 'art achievement' implies. On the other hand, one could also read this in connection with his other statements on art, especially when he pointed out that the strict European sense of 'art' only fits European artworks and that a study of the psychology of art needs to refrain from affixing European standards to non-European art. Seen in this

¹⁰³ See for example Gluck, "Interpreting Primitivism, Mass Culture and Modernism: The Making of Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy," especially 156/7.

¹⁰⁴ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 58.

light, the inverted commas used for ‘art achievements’ might also imply a questioning of the idea of ‘art achievement’ - only using the phrase for want of a better term. It is certainly possible, even probable, that both reasons featured in Worringer’s decision to use the inverted commas.

However, one also has to point out that this was not the only remark of Worringer’s that alluded to a non-art status (in European terms) of non-European peoples. When he discusses the abstract tendencies of some people’s *Kunstwollen*, Worringer notes “that the *Kunstwollen* of the natural peoples, as far as it is present with them at all, the *Kunstwollen* of all primitive art periods and finally the *Kunstwollen* of certain developed oriental cultural peoples shows this abstract tendency.”¹⁰⁵ Given that Worringer saw the *Kunstwollen* as a basic psychological element that always accompanies the production of art, his questioning of the presence of a *Kunstwollen* amongst ‘natural peoples’ means that he also questions the production of art amongst ‘natural peoples.’ As was mentioned above, in another part of the same book Worringer said that some smaller figurines may have been made as finger exercises and their natural appearance was only an indication of the imitative instinct and not the *Kunstwollen*. While Worringer does not actively connect the two instances - in which he prohibits artefacts from presenting a *Kunstwollen* - it still shows a specific hierarchy of art and non-art.

This hierarchy of art is also evident in the way he listed the *Kunstwollens* of the ‘natural peoples,’ all ‘primitive peoples’ and some ‘oriental cultural peoples’ as the ones presenting abstract tendencies. In this way, all of their art is translated as having been made by peoples who are only instinctive; their *Kunstwollen* reveals a certain helplessness in the face of ever-changing nature while also allowing the possibility of several different levels of a developed *Kunstwollen* linking them to the peoples with an empathetic idea of art.

Even though, Worringer does support relatively liberal views on art he does not manage to break free of developmental ideas. While this evolutionist thinking is more noticeable in the *Formenprobleme der Gotik*,¹⁰⁶ he also makes the connection between the peoples of the “oldest times” as he calls it and non-European cultures in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. He notes that “most natural peoples” are “from the standpoint of modern

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁶ *Formenprobleme der Gotik* (Munich 1911), 117. Quoted in Leeb, "Die Kunst der Anderen: „Weltkunst“ und die Anthropologische Konfiguration der Moderne," 200.

science not considered peoples in childhood but rudimentary relics [*Überbleibsel*] of earlier long gone cultural periods that are unable to develop.”¹⁰⁷ As he mentions himself, these were contemporary ideas supported by the modern sciences and Worringer had no reason to question these. Rather he made sure that his ideas would fit with the scientific findings. In this instance, for example, he states that most ‘natural peoples’, that are mere relics of earlier times have, “despite the praised naturalism of their depictions no actual artistic skill and because of this also no artistic development.”¹⁰⁸ On the other hand some ‘natural peoples’ show “eminent artistic skill” in their ornamental works. Thus, he makes sure that the naturalistic depictions of these ‘primitive’ people cannot bring his theory of the *Abstraktionsdrang* into question by denying them the status ‘art.’ Nevertheless, he also goes on to point out that modern art history, adapted to naturalism, has overlooked these works until recently.

Worringer makes no use of illustrations. This was presumably originally planned in this way to keep the printing costs of the doctoral thesis down, as in the first instance it was not meant for publication. However, we are not concerned with the production choices but how the finished product operated within the canon of publications on African art. The lack of images supports the theoretical character of the study and reveals its academic purpose as the reader is expected to be familiar with not only Greek and Roman art but also with an array of different ornamental and ‘natural’ arts from all parts of the world. Moreover, this lack of images also creates an interesting relationship between the theoretical text and the objects he talks about as they are indexicalised into Worringer’s schemata of *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung*.

Once it has been made available to the public this concentration on text also leaves room for interpretation on the side of the reader. While Worringer had very particular ideas about what his translation of the different styles and ages of art was trying to achieve - the support of his theory of the abstraction and empathy of the maker of the art work - it could have resulted in totally different associations for the reader. By not connecting his theories with specific objects, Worringer left it open to the reader to make these connections with objects they were already familiar with from other literature or the museum. Alongside the intended reading and understanding of Worringer’s theories, it also creates a purely individual one depending on the visual cultures the readers conjure

¹⁰⁷ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 59.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 70.

up when reading specific parts of the book. The non-existent verbal-visual syntagm thus results in a possible parallel translation as the text is not specific to one object or a group of objects.

His whole book deals with the idea that a people's *Kunstwollen*, and with this, the objects produced by this people, can be classified on a scale from abstraction to empathy. He only very rarely names examples of objects and, even when he does, the descriptions would not fit just one object but several, made under roughly similar circumstances. Hence, the objects, referred to are not any actual, existing, specimens but rather the idea of a class of objects. The vague examples given do not resonate with a specific object in the reader's mind but generate a template of an array of different types of objects that Worringer indexicalises somewhere on the scale between *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung*. Any physical art object in the vicinity of the reader could become a visual aid to be classified on this mental image of the scale of *Kunstwollens*.

In the descriptions of his examples of the art of 'natural peoples' he referred to the work of ethnographers, which he often criticised for their lack of knowledge in working with objects. For example, he states that their studies do "not [go] into depth" and laments that they "denied any direct inclination of man to geometrical shapes" and rather explained their occurrence with "entirely random moments."¹⁰⁹ In particular, he refers to Karl von der Steinen's (1855-1929) work on the ornamentation of "Brazilian natural peoples." Worringer disagrees with von der Steinen's claim that the Brazilian's preference for the triangle was triggered by the fact that women would cover their pubic area with a triangular cloth. This leads him to assert that the last thing the ethnographers take into consideration when working "on artistic matters is psychological data."¹¹⁰

While he concedes that, for reasons of time and lack of experience, he is unable to disprove the claims of the ethnographers, he still concludes that "we must content ourselves with rejecting them in principle." To underline this principle he refers to the Dipylon style from ancient Greece, which, according to him, would push any attempt to explain it, in the manner of the ethnographers with triangular pubic cloths, into absurdity. He goes on to point out that "one has to be careful with analogies with the natural peoples," noting, again, that their idea of art is inherently different to ancient Greek or modern European art and needs to be classified in a different register on the scale of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 67/8.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 68.

abstraction and empathy. He goes even further by claiming that “the degree of artistic predisposition,” which “has nothing to do with the manual skill” to shape “a lump of clay or a piece of wood” into a human-like figure, is completely “unlike” amongst the different peoples. For Worringer, this is another reason to study a people’s art according to their *Kunstwollen* and its placement on the scale between abstraction and empathy.

Here he shows that even if he followed contemporary conceptions of the similar cultural development of non-European and prehistoric peoples, he thought their art, or better their *Kunstwollen*, to be completely different entities. Moreover he also alludes, yet again, to his belief that many ‘natural peoples’ had no such thing as an art practice as he inserts, as though it is a side note, that an artistic predisposition is “barely suggestively present.” These differences of artistic predisposition let Worringer to conclude that “generalisations of existing symptoms lead onto false paths.”¹¹¹ Thus, Worringer is able to criticise the anthropologists’ methods while at the same time promoting his psychological research model.

Furthermore, he not only questions whether ‘natural peoples’ make art and classifies these objects as products of manual skill, but also underlines the difference between the European scholar and the non-European subject. This type of ‘foreignization,’ of emphasising the difference of the material studied to anything familiar to Europeans, is made very clear throughout the book. This is already apparent when looking at the whole concept of the scale between *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung* which suggests a clear distinction between the abstract art and naturalistic non-art that the ‘natural peoples’ produce, and the empathetic art made in modern European times. However, he does not use this type of ‘foreignization’ in order to enrich European art practice, following Venuti’s model of ‘foreignization.’ Instead he attempts to enrich contemporary European art philosophy with his concept of the two poles in art. The clear division between non-European and European art suggests to the reader that the differences are what distinguishes important fine art from mildly interesting artistic practices, which is thus heightening the value difference.

Despite Worringer’s efforts to emphasise the foreignness of non-European objects one can also detect some passages that allude to a common ground of artistic production. When describing the development from *Abstraktionsdrang* to *Einfühlungsdrang*, for

¹¹¹ Ibid., 69.

example, Worringer refers to the “lost and helpless” standpoint of man in opposition to the view of the world. Worringer quotes the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) who has written that the “visible world we are in [...] is an unstable and inconstant illusion without substance, [...] a something of which it is equally false and equally true to say that it is and that it is not.”¹¹² Here, he compares the peoples with *Abstraktionsdrang* with modern man and emphasises their common lost predicament in the face of the universe and, thus, brings these peoples and their abstract *Kunstwollen* closer to modern man. However, the referencing of these highly philosophical ideas of the world itself also implies modern man’s intellectual superiority in having developed to a point of producing such philosophical notions.

As this detailed analysis of Worringer’s *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* has shown, he turned his attention to primitive man in the psychological sense of his position in nature and not the *Naturvölker* as such. Nevertheless, his few direct comments about ‘natural peoples’ reveal that he did not integrate the objects they produced into the terms of European art. For him, most of their naturalistic objects are mere exercises of manual skill that lack the all-important influence of the *Kunstwollen* and as such do not belong on his scale of *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung*. Thus, the translation he produces suggests to the reader that most non-European objects can be dismissed from warranting an artistic analysis at all. The only artistic works from primitive men he mentioned that could be considered as art were ornamental in style, most of which, according to him, were made by prehistoric peoples and some ‘Oriental’ peoples.

But, despite his apparent lack of appreciation for African art, his book was still incredibly influential in the development of a more positive reception of it, as it was picked up by contemporary modernist artists. This positive influence was aided by the lack of direct examples and images. Leaving his ideas as theoretical, and giving only vague descriptions of the types of objects he had in mind when speaking about a particular topic, left his words open for interpretation. So while Worringer himself may not have had a positive view of African art, or believed it should be called ‘art,’ the way he had written this study opened up a whole new way of looking at the appellation ‘art’ in general, the work of art history, the development of art as not a single stream of upward tendencies and the making and appreciation of art. This last point, of the making and appreciation of art, especially in an intercultural context, will be further analysed in the

¹¹² Ibid., 24.

next chapter. Here, one can summarise that the non-specific nature of Worringer's translation opened up the possibility for his readers to engage with his theoretical writing by forming their own translations of artworks of their choosing.

Chapter 4.5 The reception

Today, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* is still popular and has even been called a “bestseller in the field of academic art history.”¹¹³ It has been translated into 20 languages¹¹⁴ and new editions are regularly published, the last one in 2007 to mark the 100th anniversary of the thesis. But even though, a new edition was printed every year for the first 12 years,¹¹⁵ the ideas in *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* were not incorporated into academic art history. The book became what might be called a painter’s work.¹¹⁶ Instead of taking direct influence on the discipline of art history, it influenced artists of many fields whose work, in turn, was taken on by art history. This status was not intended by Worringer himself but was mainly induced by a review by the poet Paul Ernst (1866-1933), which will be discussed in this section.

At the time of writing *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* Worringer himself was not especially drawn to the early stages of modern abstract art that he had seen while on his study trip to Paris. Although, it has to be repeated here that these beginnings were still far away from being truly abstract in Worringer’s sense of the term. His attitude to the emerging changes in art can already be detected in his early work. When talking about the “lost and helpless” standpoint of man in opposition to the world and quoting Schopenhauer on the ambiguity of the world, he goes on to point out that,

this knowledge was artistically barren already because man had become individual and had detached himself from the populace. Only the dynamic force, that rests in a, through the common instinct compressed and undifferentiated, crowd, could, on its own terms, create these forms of highest abstract beauty. The single individual was too weak for such abstraction.¹¹⁷

Here, Worringer identifies that the aesthetic feeling is not just generated through the making but also in the viewing of the art. Moreover, he reveals that he believes the modern individual man is unable to recreate the abstract aesthetic feeling that the ‘peoples of instinct’ felt when looking at art. He attributes this difference to the fact that modern man has become intellectually and mentally aware of his standpoint in and with nature whereas the ‘peoples of instinct’ did not have this awareness and acted like an analogues populace.

¹¹³ Der Spiegel 25/1959, ZR ABK 3431 Karton II.

¹¹⁴ Betthausen, Feist, and Fork, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon: Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus Vier Jahrhunderten*, 493.

¹¹⁵ Donahue, *Invisible Cathedrals: The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer*, 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 1.

¹¹⁷ Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: Ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie*, 21.

As the aesthetic feeling of the audience has changed and cannot be recreated the production of abstract art is, thus, also flawed as the modern audience with their empathetic aesthetic feeling is unable to empathize with abstract art, whether made at a different time or contemporaneously and will, as such, not find it beautiful.

This attitude was most likely the reason why Worringer never wanted to be the “Church father” of the avant-garde, as he told his friend, the architectural critic Sigfried Giedion, in a letter in 1950.¹¹⁸ He argued that the artists just happened to be interested in the same ideas but also conceded that “somehow I have understood as little as I wrote back then, as my equally young readers understood.”¹¹⁹ The artists were selective in their reading of Worringer, taking what they saw as fitting with their new practice and leaving aside what did not.¹²⁰ These discarded ideas were not just Worringer’s uncertainty about the recreation of abstract art but also his negative words on the naturalistic objects made by ‘natural peoples.’ It was his critique of the contemporary focus on antique and renaissance art and his new ideas on how to work with styles that challenged the narrow concept of art that made his work so relevant for expressionist artists.

But it was not just practitioners of the fine arts that were interested in Worringer’s work, one example is Ernst, the author of the review that led to Worringer’s thesis being published in the first place. As mentioned, Ernst had obtained a copy of Worringer’s thesis without knowing that it was not intended for publication and was so taken by Worringer’s observations that he published a positive review in the journal *Kunst und Künstler*. Ernst opens by pointing out that “this little book deserves very much to be considered. It contains nothing short of a programme of new aesthetics.”¹²¹ He then follows these positive and supportive opening sentences by repeating the main point of Worringer’s book, which for him is that:

we have been, for a long time, both in our art and our consideration of art influenced by the Greek antiquity and the Renaissance; but there are peoples and ages who had a very different feeling for art and that expressed this in their

¹¹⁸ Preuss, “Geistiger Rauschzustand Sebastian Preuss über Wilhelm Worringer und die Kunst der Moderne.”

¹¹⁹ Worringer quoted in *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Der Spiegel* 25/1959, ZR ABK 3431 Karton II.

¹²¹ Paul Ernst, “Review of Worringer, W. Abstraktion und Einfühlung,” *Kunst und Künstler* 12 (1908): 529.

works. Today we generally consider this as an effort of a lack of skill, while they are actually efforts of a different desire [*Wollen* as in *Kunstwollen*].¹²²

Moreover, he also gives a brief overview of the idea of the *Abstraktionsdrang* and *Einfühlungsdrang* as ways to analyse a people's *Kunstwollen*. The end of the review reveals why Worringer's work would become so important for avant-garde abstract artists: Ernst closes by saying that "in the visual arts as well as in poetry we have reached the furthest point of naturalism; the pendulum will now swing to the other side and it is the merit of Worringer's work to have explained this process in historical-philosophical terms."¹²³ It was exactly this idea of the pendulum swinging from abstraction to naturalism, or empathy, that Worringer had addressed in his work. But while Worringer had disregarded a possible turnaround due to changing perceptions, creative people like Ernst saw this as the main message of his book.

Conclusion

As has been shown in this chapter the first few years of the 20th century saw the advent of many changes in the reception of African art. As scholars began to study the psychology of style, the notion to be able to work out one overarching law of art was eclipsed by the plurality of *Kunstwollens*. Colonialism became increasingly more prominent and ethnographers had to position themselves and their discipline in a way that would deliver the most benefits for their collections and studies. German ethnographers were adamant about a peaceful and mutually beneficial interaction with the native inhabitants of German colonies. However, where their studies were concerned they were willing to resort to unscrupulous methods of grave robbery and the like, thus tainting the otherwise liberal attitude of German ethnographers. These changes in colonial rule and theories of race also affected the collections of ethnographica in German museums and their systematic study slowly emerging at this time.

The arrival of the Benin Bronzes in Europe encouraged von Luschan's positive attitude towards native peoples, as he was the first scholar to be absolutely certain that the bronzes were in fact made by the people from Benin themselves. Moreover, it is also a good example of his eye for significant pieces as he was adamant about their importance as

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

soon as he heard about them. Von Luschan presented these bronzes not just as ethnographic specimens but also highlighted their history and aesthetic value. With the arrival of the Benin Bronzes even ethnographers like von Luschan became aware of the influence of art on society beyond being merely an expression of social circumstances. By focussing attention on the style of these pieces, which he called truly African, von Luschan highlighted the fruitfulness of stylistic studies of non-European art.

Riegl's idea of the *Kunstwollen* can be viewed as the art historical equivalent of this realisation on the part of ethnographers. With his background in the museum of applied arts, Riegl had been trained to consider the entity of a collection and had an eye to draw out common styles. He saw the geometrical ornaments of the non-European peoples to be of high historical value as they mirrored the stages that Europeans had gone through before. According to him, all people share the same underlying *Kunstwollen* that makes them want to produce art in all its different forms and styles.

Worringer then adopted this idea of the *Kunstwollen* and concentrated his efforts on studying the reason for its expression in different styles and forms. His opposing pair of *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung* took up the challenge of explaining the universally valid *Kunstwollen* despite the apparently totally different styles of art. According to him, the *Abstraktionsdrang*, the need for abstraction, is the artistic answer of the 'natural peoples' that are dependent on nature and as a result try to order and abstract their world by visual means. The 'cultural people,' on the other hand, have become independent from nature and as such are more drawn to create and appreciate naturalistic art that they can empathise with. It is for this reason that Worringer disregards naturalistic non-European art, like the Benin Bronzes, as he believed them to be a mere exercise of manual skill.

Nevertheless, Worringer's idea of a psychological need that dictates the abstract or naturalistic look of a people's art found resonance with many German intellectuals and artists. He managed to explain the differences between European and non-European art while at the same time uniting the basic concept of the two and thus keeping the general idea of art itself intact. It was Ernst's interpretation of Worringer's text that connected it to contemporary art and made it thereby relevant to a wider audience. Ernst not only opened up Worringer's thesis to a broader audience but was also the main trigger for its success with contemporary artists. This success, along with popular art historical books and Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Formal Responses to African Art

**The progression from a common comparison
to Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik***

This chapter will consider the wider response of artists and art historians to the psychological engagement with non-European objects in German collections, discussed in the last chapter. Worringer had initiated this practice of looking for formal ideas in non-European art. It was not the naturalistic, recognisable, shapes of the art of ‘natural peoples’ that he was interested in, but instead the ornamental, rudimentary, principles to be discovered in art works. In particular, German art production, art history writing and Carl Einstein’s (1885-1940) *Negerplastik* (1915) will be considered.

As discussed in the last chapter, Worringer’s book had the most influence on practicing artists while art historians were looking at it more critically, or completely disregarding it. Beyond the influence of Worringer’s works, the general *zeitgeist* also led German scholars to start looking at the objects in question not just as ethnographic symptoms of their culture, but also as types of an aesthetic feeling and a particular form of artistic self-expression. This is especially evident in their influence on the ‘primitivists,’ most popular through the artist groups *Die Brücke* (Dresden, 1905) and *Der Blaue Reiter* (Munich, 1911). They took on Worringer’s ideas about the psychological ‘primitive’ and, in the manner of Ernst’s interpretation of Worringer, swung the pendulum back from the empathetic to the abstract.

The expressionists’ works brought non-European art out of the ethnographic museums and ethnographic and art historical publications on theory and into the realm of popular and avant-garde art. At this time, it also became customary in art historical publications to include a chapter on ‘the beginnings’ in survey texts, and non-European objects were used more frequently to explain particular changes, developments, styles and notions. Both the art historians’ and the artists’ approaches to African visual culture at this time have in common that they are inherently formalist in their attitude and framework. As will be discussed in the following sections, both were more concerned with the aesthetic of the objects themselves than their original use and meaning.

Most notable, however, is this new appreciation of the formal qualities of African art in Carl Einstein’s book *Negerplastik*, which will be examined in the last section of this last chapter. *Negerplastik* included the highest quality and number of images of these objects so far, highlighting African art in particular as important for art historical contemplation.

Chapter 5.1 German Expressionism

In *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* Worringer had transformed the ‘primitive man’ from a foreign person having lived long ago and in distant places into a psychological state. Even if Worringer himself did not believe it possible for modern man to recreate the psychological state of ‘primitive man’ (see chapter 4.3), modern artists saw his theories as a liberation from contemporary ideas of fine art. Turning away from empathetic impressionism, in the pursuit of depicting the feeling of the moment, expressionist artists searched for the psychological ‘primitive’ within themselves.¹²⁴

This section will therefore include a short overview of the works by *Die Brücke*, the artist group founded in 1905 and before Worringer’s book was published, and then give a more detailed account of the still lives of Emil Nolde, who first became interested in non-European art in 1911. Nolde’s work is somewhat unique amongst expressionist artists as he did not change his style but rather his subjects, which, it will be argued, is related to the chaotic circumstances in the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin where Nolde made many of his preliminary drawings. Moreover, Nolde and the artists of *Die Brücke*, to which he belonged for a short time, were searching for similar things in their distinctive ways of dealing with the idea of the ‘primitive.’

Despite art history’s neglect of Worringer’s *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, the artist’s interpretation of Worringer’s thoughts on the psychological ‘primitive man’ and their discovery of the psychological ‘primitive’ within themselves has long been integrated into art historical works on the subject of expressionist art. In 1947, Gustav Hartlaub (1884-1963), the director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, stated that primitivism is divided into ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ expressionism.¹²⁵ While this interpretation of German expressionism might not have been influenced by Worringer’s notion of the psychological ‘primitive,’ it does have some very striking similarities. The big difference is that Hartlaub widens Worringer’s use of the term ‘abstract’ to the now more in vogue ‘expressionist.’ He notes that *Naturvölker* are unconsciously expressionistic, which in Worringer’s terms was due to the *Abstraktionsdrang*, and are, as such, primary

¹²⁴ Gluck goes so far to call Worringer’s book a “manifesto of expressionist art,” however, as Worringer never intended his writing to become the guiding principle of expressionist art, I do not agree with this terminology. Gluck, "Interpreting Primitivism, Mass Culture and Modernism: The Making of Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy."

¹²⁵ Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, *Die Graphik des Expressionismus in Deutschland* (1947). Quoted in Rubin, *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. Vol.2, 369.

expressionists. German expressionists, on the other hand, are secondary expressionists that chose to be ‘consciously primitive’ by recreating the psychological ‘primitive’ of earlier times.

Die Brücke was founded in 1905 by the Dresden based architectural students Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938), Fritz Bleyl (1880-1968), Erich Heckel (1883-1973) and Karl Schmitt-Rottluff (1884-1978). In 1906, the same year that Emil Nolde (1867-1956) and Max Pechstein (1881-1955) joined, they published their manifesto, which Kirchner made into a woodcut. They wrote: “we call all young people together and, as young people, who carry the future in us, we want to wrest freedom for our actions and our lives from the older, comfortably established forces.”¹²⁶ In such statements they were not just expressing their dismay about the status of the current art world but also identifying that this established art world needed young artists with

Figure 27 *Die Brücke, Manifesto*, 1906.
MoMA 479.1941.2.

fresh ideas to regenerate the old ways.

The likes of *Die Brücke* found these fresh ideas mainly in folk art and non-European art and quickly surrounded themselves completely with it, living in a sort of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a ‘total work of art.’ This included trips to various museums in order to make sketches, and trips to the countryside to get back to nature. Moreover, they even went as far as decorating their studios, first in Dresden then in Berlin, with handmade wall murals and chairs in the ‘primitive’ style.¹²⁷ These handmade objects, modelled after non-European prototypes, then featured in the many drawings that showed people

Figure 28 Studio of *Die Brücke* in Dresden.

¹²⁶ *Die Brücke, Manifesto*, 1906.

¹²⁷ See Bettina Schaschke, “Die Idee Vom Gesamtkunstwerk,” and Hanna Strzoda, “Ernst Ludwig Kirchners Berliner Atelier in Der Königsstrasse,” in *Brücke und Berlin: 100 Jahre Expressionismus*, ed. Anita Beloubek-Hammer (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nicolai, 2005).

within the studio space. For example the drapes that were hanging in the group's studio in Dresden were integrated into many sketches made in the space. However, they were not just made to create a backdrop but also as inspiration and to recreate 'primitive' living conditions.¹²⁸

It is often said that German primitive artists were not so much influenced by the 'primitive style', as French artists were, but rather by the psychological idea of going back to the more 'primitive' lifestyle which reminded them of their own agrarian roots, forming a sort of kinship with unknown predecessors.¹²⁹ While, for most French artists, non-European art was an external factor that informed their taste and let them strive for primitive expressions,¹³⁰ German artists reinterpreted the forms they saw, searching for the 'primitive' *Geist*.

Figure 29 Erich Heckel, *Female nude in the Studio*, 1910.

Part of this reinterpretation of objects and going back to the 'primitive' lifestyle was the adoption of stereotypical behaviour, like nudism.¹³¹ This tendency can be seen in Heckel's *Female nude in the studio* (1910), which shows the drapes with 'primitive' motifs in the background, but was also acted out on holidays and day trips to the country and seaside. Taking into account Ernst's interpretation of *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, it becomes especially clear that this recreation of 'primitive' living conditions is part of the making of expressionist art, as, according to Worringer, the context of the collective - which in Worringer's interpretation is peoples of different cultures, and in the case of *Die Brücke*, is the artist group - has influence on their *Kunstwollen* and thus on the art they produce.¹³²

¹²⁸ Hartlaub, *Die Graphik des Expressionismus in Deutschland*, 72.

¹²⁹ Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 104.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ More information about the nude in the art of *Die Brücke* see for example Cathy Stoike, "Vom 'Viertelstundenakt' zur freien Sinnlichkeit der Geschlechter," in *Brücke und Berlin: 100 Jahre Expressionismus*, ed. Anita Beloubek-Hammer (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nicolai, 2005).

¹³² One may also consider other interpretations of expressionist art and the artists group. For example see Anita Beloubek-Hammer et al., *Brücke und Berlin: 100 Jahre Expressionismus* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2005). Donald Gordon, "German Expressionism," in *Primitivism in 20th century art: affinity of the tribal and the modern. Vol.2*, ed. William Stanley Rubin (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

Figure 30 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fruit Bowl, 1912. Henze 1911/11 collection E.W.K. and oracle dish, Yoruba, Nigeria 19th century, SMB, Ethnologisches Museum III C 44939.

These direct influences on internal factors found their way into art by providing the backdrop and also by changing style and even method. For example, the interest in ‘primitive’ techniques led to the recreation of pieces such as chairs and bowls seen in museums. For example, Kirchner’s fruit bowl (1912) which he fashioned after a Yoruba dish. This close contact with the material and the craftsmanship needed to create the pieces was also carried over to the *Brücke*’s art practice. The woodcut format of their manifesto is already an example of this idea.¹³³ The traces left behind in the wood are a direct marker of this idea of craftsmanship and contact with the material. Moreover, this direct and free application of expression heightened the pure feeling that they were trying to portray. For example, the apparent

Figure 31 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Girl from Fehmarn*, 1913. Stiftung Sammlung Kamm K.D 335.

¹³³ This idea of craftsmanship is also partly influenced by their interest in folk culture.

lines left behind by the ridges and cracks in the wood in Kirchner's *Girl from Fehmarn* (1913) show a very intimate relationship with the material that takes direct influence on the finished art work. While woodcutting itself is a traditionally European technique, the expressionist's wariness of modernisation tainted the close relationship between medium and artist that they were after. The final print is not just an art work like any other but shows the natural and sculpted surface of the material of the plate.

These woodcuts also show the influence that non-European art in general, and African art in particular, had on expressionist artists. Beloubek-Hammer has connected Kirchner's woodcut to a sculpture from Cameroon.¹³⁴ On the one hand, the influence can be seen in formal aspects like the placement of the hand, the distinctive treatment of the very visible teeth - that have been placed in the centre of the image - and the protruding eyes with the emphasis on the half closed eyelids. On the other hand, it is also visible in the treatment of surface. The rough surface of the Cameroonian model that in contemporary art circles may have been called unfinished (as it is not smoothed out and instead shows visible tool marks), becomes a

Figure 32 figure of a king or dignitary, Bangu
Cameroon, 19th C. SMB Ethnologisches
Museum III C 21058.

symptom of the abstract and 'primitive' *Kunstwollen* for the expressionists. Hence, these tool marked surfaces are taken into their own art practice turning a portrayal of a young girl that, in a different style could have been personal and particular, into a vehicle of pure expression - the artist's feeling instead of the sitter's.

Die Brücke artists, as well as any other German artists interested in non-European objects, had one major advantage over their counterparts from other countries: the German ethnographic museums. Compared to most other European museums the acquisitiveness of German ethnographers, paired with their aspiration to create a complete picture of all peoples, meant that the German public was able to see all kinds of different objects from most parts of the world, while many other European countries tended to specialise in collections from their own colonies. In Robert Goldwater's terms, this meant

¹³⁴ Beloubek-Hammer et al., *Brücke und Berlin: 100 Jahre Expressionismus*, 262/3.

that “[German artists] immediately became acquainted with a range and variety of styles which the French took some years to discover.”¹³⁵ This access to a great variety of objects is especially visible in Emil Nolde’s works, which made the most use of direct comparison by mixing different objects from different peoples in his still lifes.

Emil Nolde was born as Emil Hansen in 1867 and later changed his surname to the name of his native village Nolde. His first 10 years of life, spent in this village, shaped Nolde’s work in very specific ways, as its location in north Frisia meant it was part of a strip of land that had a long history of belonging to either Denmark or Prussia. Even though Frisia was culturally a homogenous unity, at the time of Nolde’s youth, it was uncertain whether it would stay part of Prussia long term. The mainly German speaking population was forced to live with the uncertainty of what the future would bring, where to send their children to school and what political system to follow. These uncertain national circumstances were similar to those of the residents of North-Schleswig, before it became officially part of Schleswig-Holstein and Prussia in 1867, who had to deal with the same ambiguous political situation in their cities and villages.¹³⁶

This insecurity had been taken up by Schleswig Holstein literature since the 1840s, one example being Claus Harms’ *Schleswig Holsteinische Gnomon; Ein allgemeines Lesebuch* [The Schleswig-Holstein Gnomon; A Common Reader] (1843). Containing almost two hundred entries about a variety of subjects, it was used in many public schools throughout Schleswig-Holstein, which widened its circle of readers immensely. One of the many passages that particularly emphasised pride in the German heritage reads as follows:

The German is born to dwell in the world of the spirit; his life is completely inward-oriented, his heart and his mind are more developed than his senses [for contemplation], his greatest pleasures are those of sentiment and of thought. ... His happiness does not spring from material things; he is hardly affected by that which goes on around him ... His freedom does not exist in political institutions, but rather much more in undisturbed pursuit of free ideas.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art*, 105.

¹³⁶ William S. Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land*, Studies in the Fine Arts. The Avant-Garde No. 52 (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1986), 15/6.

¹³⁷ Claus Harms, *Schleswig-Holsteinischer Gnomon, Ein allgemeines Lesebuch* (1843), 136/7. Die Deutschen, number 53, as quoted and translated by; Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land*, 18.

This inwardness of life, and the freedom from political institutions were two characteristics that had been shaped by decades of insecurity surrounding the particular political conditions of the northern areas of Germany. These are also two characteristics that Nolde would later ascribe to himself. Looking at this quote from the point of view of a German expressionist, one sees the similarities to Worringer's ideas, or more precisely Ernst's interpretation of Worringer's ideas. For Worringer, the original 'psychological primitive' is a man of instinct, not thinking abstractly but creating an abstract world to order the world that unsettles him. The empathetic, modern man on the other hand is ruled by his thoughts and intellect, controlling nature rather than living in fear of it.

In Ernst's interpretation of Worringer, the pendulum that had so far swung from the abstract to the empathetic now swung back the other way. What Worringer had thought would be a time where contemporary men were able to appreciate abstract primitive art for its formal qualities, Ernst took to be a return to these "primitive qualities," to produce primitive art themselves. Even though Harms published his account over 60 years before Worringer published *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Harms's ideas were still prevalent in the minds of those who grew up with his teaching books, and most prominently in those brought up in the uncertain circumstances in the north. In this way Harms' concept of the inward-oriented life and Worringer's book complemented each other. The inward oriented German is able to search for these instinctive *Überbleibsel* [relics] of the 'primitive mind' in the contemporary humans that Worringer had referred to.

Harms plays another important part for the analysis of Nolde's works, as he addresses the idea that nature has an effect on man. This effect is, according to Harms, "individual" and "changes from land to land, for the earth consists of regions, each of which has its own particular character and differing influence on its inhabitants. Every landscape has its own people."¹³⁸ While Harms' ideas are clearly taken from Taine's notion on racial character (see chapter 2) and were neither followed by German ethnographers nor by German artists at the beginning of the 20th century, an element of the theory was echoed in Friedrich Ratzel's work on anthropogeography (see chapter 2). Moreover, this idea of nature is meaningful both in the context of Nolde's upbringing in political limbo and in his still lives, which are assemblages of objects from all over the world.

¹³⁸ Harms, *Schleswig-Holsteinischer Gnomon, Ein allgemeines Lesebuch*, 141. as translated and quoted by; Bradley, *Emil Nolde and German Expressionism: A Prophet in His Own Land*, 18.

Figure 33 Emil Nolde, *The Missionary* formerly known as *Exotic Figures. European, Mask and Clay Figure*, 1912. Private collection.

One of these assemblages, which he referred to as “still lifes with exotic figures,” is *The Missionary* which Nolde finished in 1912. Originally called *Exotic Figures. European, Mask and Clay Figure*, the painting depicts a group of three different objects held by the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin. Taking up the left of the painting is a figure of a Korean sculpture, originally 2.9 m [9.5 ft] in height, clad in black with a black wide-brimmed hat. The figure’s mask-like face, with prominent, gap-toothed grin and five long, whisker-like, brown strands of hair sprouting from the chin, looks out at the viewer and holds in both hands a white roll of paper in front of his body. The right lower two thirds of the painting are occupied by a Yoruba (Nigeria) figure of a woman who is kneeling, facing left, and holding a vase in both hands. The woman, who is wearing a blue and white striped garment that reveals her bosom, and supports a child on her back, gazes

directly to the left while the child on her back looks out towards the beholder. Behind the figures there is a white mask on a yellow wall, hung by a string through a hole at the top rim. The mask has a rectangular mouth and eyes, pink cheeks with a triangular large nose, and eyebrows and teeth that are represented by short, parallel, black brush strokes.

While the initial title simply suggests that the Korean sculpture is a European standing next to a mask and a clay figure, the changed title *The Missionary*, which is first listed in an inventory in 1930, implies a very specific narrative. The European, now a missionary, had been identified as a living person before but as a result of the changed name, the clay figure now became an imaginable real person who also gave the mask in the background another level of symbolic interpretation. But before looking at this new interpretation it is necessary to give an account of a possible reason for this conscious reinterpretation of Nolde's own work.

In 1913/4, Nolde participated in the *Medizinisch-demographische Deutsch-Neuguinea-Expedition* [Medical-Demographic German-New-Guinea-Expedition]. Unlike Pechstein or Gauguin, however, Nolde did not try to escape "Barbaropa" (a neologism containing *Barbar* [barbarian] and *Europa* [Europe]) forever. Instead, Nolde was, during his limited time in New-Guinea, searching for *Urvölker* [primal people] that are still in accord with nature in order to sketch them. Max Sauerlandt, a German art historian and close friend of Nolde, pronounced that it was "the strong feeling of a profound relation of sentiment, [...] the search for the primal, the primordial – the last religious humanism" that led Nolde to the South Seas.¹³⁹ In a letter to his friend Hans Fehr (1874-1961), Nolde wrote that "the native primal people live in nature, are one with it and part of the whole. I have now and again the feeling as if only they are still real people."¹⁴⁰

It is also during this expedition that he began to condemn colonialism and the work of Europeans in the colonial territories. He writes to Fehr:

With touching devotion, with his best knowledge and intentions and with the most modest success at the beginning, the devout white man's missionary work seeks to loosen and undermine the cult, the self-confidence and the will of the primal people. He works with the energy of the slightly fanatic, until one harmless victim after the other lands compliantly in his lap. He sacrifices himself till death, the martyr's death, and then the soldiers come with apparent right and

¹³⁹ Sauerlandt, M. *Die Kunst der letzten 30 Jahre*, Berlin 1935, p. 114 in Manfred Reuther, "Zu der unbeschreiblich schönen, wilden Südseereise," in *Emil Nolde und die Südsee*, ed. Ingrid Brügger, Johann Georg Prinz von Hohenzollern, and Manfred Reuther (Vienna: Kunstforum Wien, 2001), 14.

¹⁴⁰ Emil Nolde letter to Hans Fehr, March 1914 in *ibid.*, 16.

severity to take revenge. Here, the floodgates are opened for adventurers, for the dubious venereal-diseased European mob, and the greedy businessman. The colony is subdued!¹⁴¹

While Nolde did not write that the missionary himself is the problem, he saw him as the beginning of a chain of events that ends in the loss of native culture. So when Nolde changes the name of his previously innocuous group of objects, he places them in the context of a colonial debate and the simple “European” holding a piece of paper, becomes a mildly fanatic missionary holding a biblical script. The kneeling woman to his right, which was merely a clay figure, becomes a subordinate ‘primitive’ who has to turn away from her traditional religions and ‘idols,’ symbolised by the mask on the wall. As a whole, the group now represents the chain of events, initiated by the missionary’s arrival that would lead to the complete colonial surrender of the woman’s people, leaving the next generation, as symbolised by the child on her back, to grow up under European rule.

Figure 34 Emil Nolde, preliminary drawings for *The Missionary* made in the *Völkerkundemuseum* Berlin, 1911. Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde.

The primary studies for *The Missionary* were, like many others, made during the winter 1910/1 when Nolde spent several months in Berlin, in which time he often frequented the *Völkerkundemuseum*. He did not go to the *Völkerkundemuseum* to revel in Bastian’s scientific thesaurus, but instead to see the art of other peoples. Like his colleagues, he used the narrow aisles between the overcrowded cabinets (see chapter 1) to make a number of sketches of the exhibits. In a folder called *Allerlei Studeienzeichnungen für Stilleben* [all kinds of sketches for still lifes] Nolde stored, next

¹⁴¹ Emil Nolde letter to Hans Fehr, March 1914 in Andreas Fluck, "'Absolute Ursprünglichkeit' Emil Noldes Studienzeichnungen im berliner Völkerkundemuseum," in *Emil Nolde und die Südsee*, ed. Ingrid Brügger, Johann Georg Prinz von Hohenzollern, and Manfred Reuther (Vienna: Kunstforum, Wien, 2001), 32.

to other drawings, some 120 sketches, made in the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin.¹⁴² These studies that also show the objects in *the Missionary*, would then form the basis of his still lifes that he would create back in his studio by making a composition from his preliminary sketches.

In 1911 Nolde planned a book expressing his own attitude towards the art of other cultures. However, *Die Kunstäußerungen der Naturvölker* [The Artistic Expressions of the Natural Peoples] never progressed beyond the preliminary notes for the preface. These were, instead, later included in his autobiography:

Not long ago, only a few periods were seen to be appropriate to be represented in museums. Then, however, was added: Coptic and early Christian art, Greek terracottas and vases, Persian and Islamic art. Why then are Indian, Chinese and Javanese art still considered as science and ethnography? And why is the art of natural peoples not valued as such? [...] Our time brought that every piece of pottery and jewellery, for every basic commodity or every garment, a concept has to be formed beforehand. With the material in their hands, between their fingers, originate the works of the natural peoples. The expressed deed is the pleasure and love of making.¹⁴³

This excerpt shows how much Nolde treasured the work of the *Naturvölker*; the craftsmanship of working with the material in hand, the obvious pleasure in the making, were aspects that appealed to his training as a woodcarver. While he was in favour of the advancements that the study of the history of art has made in recent decades, he lamented that the art of ‘natural peoples’ was still not valued as fine art and was only exhibited in ethnographic museums.

In his autobiography, Nolde also reflected on the artists’ emerging interest in the objects in ethnographic museums when he noted that “we raised them [the ethnographica] to that which they are: the strange, harsh folk art and primordial art of the natural peoples. For the science of ethnography, however, we are still like tiresome intruders because we love sensuous vision more than mere knowledge.”¹⁴⁴ Here, Nolde laments retrospectively that ethnographers were less than thrilled to have artists stand in front of the cases for long periods in order to make sketches of the displays. Moreover, he also points towards

¹⁴² Ibid., 28.

¹⁴³ Reuther, "Zu der *unbeschreiblich* schönen, wilden Südseereise," 32.

¹⁴⁴ Emil Nolde, *Das eigene Leben* (1931), 214. quoted in ; Fluck, "'Absolute ursprünglichkeit' Emil Noldes Studienzeichnungen im berliner Völkerkundemuseum," 33.

the self-marketing of artists as the discoverers of ‘primitive’ art that not only used it for their own practice but at the same time promoted its aesthetics.¹⁴⁵

As has been mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, articles on these artists had also used this self-marketing as a way to promote their works. Recent decades have seen the contextualisation of these self-marketing claims, turning away from a single epiphanic museum visit to considerations of contemporary society as a whole. The publications discussed in this thesis are part of this context: for example Woermann talks about a “bowl bearer with her child on her back” that can be seen in Berlin as “a good example of sculptures of humans that are relatively true to nature but yet show the racial peculiarity of the Negro to exaggerate.”¹⁴⁶ While in 1900, Woermann refers to a figure from Dahomey and Nolde’s kneeling bowl bearer from 1912, is according to Andreas Hüneke, based on a Yoruba figure,¹⁴⁷ this comparison is only one of many that show that the art historical interest and the aesthetic treatment of these objects had been set in motion long before the expressionist artists used them for their own practice.¹⁴⁸

In many of the publications on non-European art - whether ethnographic, art historical or popular - the peoples were described as unfinished, strange, rough, raw or ‘primitive’. It is particularly these characteristics of non-European art that drew modern German artists, like the members of *Die Brücke* and Emil Nolde, to them. While they interpreted the foreign objects in their distinct ways, what the expressionists had in common was that, for them, non-European art constituted the counter-argument to the established art world; taking on the free and personal treatment of the used materials in order to reach pure expression. For Nolde, in particular, this became a search for the psychological idea of the simple things while keeping true to his own style. This counter-argument was part of the pendulum of art swinging the other way, from empathy to abstraction, as Ernst had interpreted Worringer’s ideas. So, while the artists may have found their sought after change to the established art practices in non-European objects, it was the art historians

¹⁴⁵ This same self-marketing as first supporters of primitive art can be seen in France. See, for example, Picasso informing Malraux about his discoveries in the Trocadero. Huffington, *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer*, 90.

¹⁴⁶ Woermann, *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker: Erster Band: Die Kunst der vor- und ausserchristlichen Völker*, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Beloubek-Hammer et al., *Brücke und Berlin: 100 Jahre Expressionismus*, 146.

¹⁴⁸ In *Man, Woman and Cat*, 1912 Nolde does use an image taken from a wooden carved door from Nupe that is also illustrated in Woermann’s *Die Geschichte der Kunst*.

and ethnographers writing about these pieces that stressed their role as the opposites to this practice in their publications.

Many of the artists may not have seen all, or even any of the specific publications mentioned here but, as the next section will show, the inclusion of non-European art in discussions otherwise devoted to European art had become common place, and subsequently common knowledge, by the time expressionist practices developed. The importance of expressionism for the later history of art is significant and it is not my intention to lessen this fact. However, it has to be highlighted that the contemporary intellectual context, discussed in the previous chapters, had included parallel discussions of the art practices and styles of non-European and European art for a long time. Hence, as this thesis aims to point out, the influences, whether direct or indirect, that the writing or, as it may be called, the translations of these objects, by art historians and ethnographers, had on the expressionist artists has to be seen as important in the same way as the influence that was drawn from the objects themselves.

Chapter 5.2 Non-European art as a common comparison

After Grosse's ideas on how to widen art historical research, Woermann's survey of all art and Worringer's psychological view on 'primitive' art, non-European art had truly become integrated into art historical discourse. The discussion of non-European art was not just left to ethnographers and a few pioneering art historians, but was included in several art historical arguments.

In order to remain focused on general developing attitudes, this section will give a more detailed discussion of one example from three different fields; the survey text, the specialised analysis, and the discussion of subjects. Max Osborn's *Die Geschichte der Kunst eine kurzgefaßte Darstellung ihrer Hauptepochen* [The History of Art: A Short Account of its Major Epochs], published in 1909, will be the example for the survey text. The specialised analysis will be exemplified by Max Verworn's *Die Psychologie der Primitiven Kunst* [The Psychology of Primitive Art] (1908) and Wilhelm Hausenstein's *Der nackte Mensch in der Kunst aller Zeiten* [the Nude in the History of Art] (1911) will stand as the example for the discussion of a subject.

The German art critic and journalist Max Osborn (1870-1946), born in 1870 in Cologne, wrote articles on art in newspapers and acted as an editor for the *Annual Reports of the New German History of Literature*, as well as publishing books on a variety of topics within literature and art history. *Die Geschichte der Kunst Eine kurzgefaßte Darstellung ihrer Hauptepochen* [The History of Art a Short Account of its Major Epochs], published in 1909, is his most popular work. It was also published under the title of *Meisterbuch der Kunst eine kurzgefaßte Geschichte der Kunst* [Master Book of Art: a Short History of Art] and was still being republished in 1929. As the title suggests, the book is a survey of the major art epochs throughout history, including, among others, the Antique, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classical and Romantic periods, through to Impressionism and up to the impact of Cézanne.

Like Woermann, Osborn includes a brief description of pre-historic and non-European art in a first chapter and, like Grosse, he calls this chapter 'the beginning of art.' He points towards the contemporary state of research, including the idea that every man-made object, whether declared as art or not, is based in some form or other on principles of aesthetics and that the desire for art - Osborn does not use Riegl's term *Kunstwollen* - was

and is a primal drive of all humans.¹⁴⁹ This very short chapter, which consists of only 16 pages, is arranged in the same way that Woermann had arranged his first volume of the *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker*. Osborn talks about prehistoric art first and then categorises non-European art into the same classifications – using the three age system as a model - before turning to Egyptian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Persian art.

In the section about prehistoric art he points towards the “artistic ambition” of even the earliest peoples before listing the different art and craft forms, styles and materials used in the different prehistoric ages. After finishing this section on the Bronze Age and the “imagination of space” that becomes apparent at Stonehenge, Osborn turns to the ‘natural and half-cultural peoples.’ He notes that “the same spectacle as this primal development of human artistic expression is offered to us by the works of the natural and half-cultural peoples of the time before their contact with the culture of the Occident and Orient.”¹⁵⁰ Instead of listing the different art forms, styles or materials, as he did with the prehistoric ages, Osborn simply organises the different peoples as belonging to the same level of development as the various prehistoric ages. These classifications, like “the Australians, the Bushmen and the Eskimos in the far north” that belong, according to him, to the early Stone Age, all correspond to the same classification as Woermann had given them in 1900 (see chapter 3.3). After this short account of the ‘natural peoples’ he turns to the ‘old American cultural peoples’ and Egyptian architecture.

The only African people he names without using racial umbrella terms, like ‘Bushman’ or ‘Negroes’, is the “the people from Benin to the north [sic.] of the Gold Coast” and he refers to their “exquisite knowledge of the casting technique.”¹⁵¹ Especially interesting is that the images - mainly photographic - he used do not correspond to the text. For example, many non-European objects and drawings are shown on the pages that deal with prehistoric art. This is especially noteworthy in the case of Benin material, as two ivory pieces from Benin are shown on the same page that talks about the Bronze Age. While they do have captions, stating “sculpted work [*Bildwerk*] from Negroes of Benin (West Africa)”, they do not refer to the text associated with them. The lack of a link between text and corresponding image again suggests that, for Osborn, the styles of prehistoric and non-European art are alike.

¹⁴⁹ Max Osborn, *Geschichte der Kunst. Eine kurzgefasste Darstellung ihrer Hauptepochen* (Berlin: Ullstein & Co., 1909), 1/2.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Osborn does not give any new insights into the development of research on African art. But it is not the things he says that make this book relevant for this study, but the fact that he felt it was important enough to include non-European art at all. With such limited space, Osborn, or his editor, could have made the decision not to include this chapter, which after all does not give much information. However, the expectations of the contemporary popular audience must have warranted the inclusion of the beginnings of art. Arguably, Woermann's first inclusion of African art in a survey text had truly integrated it into the history of art, even if only as representing the living childhood of European art.

Max Verworn (1863-1921), a physiologist from Berlin who had undertaken some study with Ernst Haeckel in Jena before becoming professor at the physiological institute in Göttingen in 1901, published his *Die Psychologie der primitiven Kunst* [The Psychology of Primitive Art] in 1908. The book developed out of a paper he had given at the opening of the Museum of Prehistory in Cologne the year before. Given that the book was published in the same year as Worringer's thesis *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, it is to be expected that Verworn was not yet familiar with his ideas. Verworn's pairing - of physioplastic and ideoplastic art - works in a very different way to Worringer. Verworn concentrates mainly on 'primitive' art without the inclusion of contemporary art and considers the maker instead of the viewer of art works. While Worringer's works has gotten by far more attention, through the interest of German artists, Verworn's book still went through several editions and he kept publishing on the theories first described in this book.

Verworn opens his account by pointing out that ideas surrounding the psychology of art mainly adopted traditional understandings of aesthetics and most often placed the "concept of beauty of the cultural peoples" at the core of their research. According to Verworn, by doing so the field was effectively restricted. He points out, like Worringer, that in order to understand the art of peoples that do not conform to such ideas of beauty one has to change the framework itself. Verworn introduces a new pairing of physioplastic and ideoplastic art. Physioplastic art is the reproduction of an object that is as true to nature as the skill of the maker permits; ideoplastic art is an "abstraction" of the

natural model as it does not just concentrate on the one single object to be copied but takes memory and associations of the object into account.¹⁵²

Before he turns to his new way of analysing visual culture he notes that “artistic production is a human means of expression of perceptions and ideas, for thoughts and feelings.”¹⁵³ He concedes that in most situations art is not as practical as writing or speech. However, he believes that knowledge of its capacities is the key to understanding peoples without writing, those one is unable to speak to, and that it gives access to contextual truths that the makers themselves may not have been aware of reproducing. In this way, Verworn connects his theoretical interests to the aims of the museum and the scholars of prehistory. In order to show his theoretical notion’s uses in practice, Verworn discusses children’s drawings, prehistoric art and the art of ‘natural peoples.’ It is the last of these that concerns us here.

For Verworn, most of the art of ‘natural peoples’ is ideoplastic, as its maker “expresses the fantastic, mystic, religious and mythological ideas.”¹⁵⁴ The ideoplastic art-producing peoples include the “Negroes from Africa as well as the Indians from America, the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands as well as the Mongolian tribes from North Asia.”¹⁵⁵ He believes the “primitive thinking” of these peoples to be different from that of the ‘cultural peoples’ as it is not critical nor experimental but rather short-lived without the ability to form long, logical threads of thoughts. For Verworn, this is the reason that the art of ‘natural peoples’ is not true to nature, “as the most adventurous creations of an excited imagination do not cause critical concerns.”¹⁵⁶

The small group of peoples making physioplastic art consist of the “Bushmen from South Africa” and some ‘Eskimos.’ He notes that the cave paintings of the ‘Bushmen’ are free from any ideoplastic characteristics and that, in opposition to their “African countrymen”, their whole thinking is occupied by the hunt for food. As Grosse before him, Verworn sees the “skill of observation” as the reason for their physioplastic art which only represents what they have seen. So, according to Verworn, African art can be distinguished between the ideoplastic - very imaginative and non-natural, the art of most African peoples - and the physioplastic which he described as true to nature but simple:

¹⁵² Max Verworn, *Zur Psychologie der primitiven Kunst* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1908), 20.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

the art of the 'Bushmen' in South Africa. As most scholars did at the time, he compares the art of 'natural peoples' with prehistoric art and points out that the "Palaeolithic cave art is physioplastic" while later art forms become increasingly ideoplastic. The only difference is that, unlike most scholars, Verworn begins with the art of 'natural peoples' before turning to prehistoric art. However, this might easily be explained by the fact that his paper was written for presentation at the opening of the museum of prehistory which allowed him to structure the main body of the text around that topic.

Moreover, he points out that naturalism is not always a "higher developmental level of the artistic skill [...] than the distorted, grimacing, bizarre, fantastic manner of representation of most natural peoples."¹⁵⁷ Here, he makes two points that feed into contemporary beliefs about non-European peoples that sees them as the living counterpart of prehistoric peoples and is certain of the superiority of Europeans. On the one hand, he calls the art of 'natural peoples' "distorted, grimacing, bizarre [and] fantastic" and thus judges them, by European standards, as strange. On the other hand, by talking about the developmental level of artistic skill, he is able to clarify his view that physioplastic art does not equal artistic skill. He makes this point even clearer when he goes on to say that it was a lot easier for hunting people to give a natural representation of objects as they were not devoted by "abstractions and associations of knowledge and thinking" as 'cultural peoples' are and hence do not have to exert themselves to produce such art.

Unlike Worringer's pairing of *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung* that took Riegl's idea of the *Kunstwollen* into account, Verworn's pair of ideoplastic and physioplastic art does not include the idea that they are simply two different ways of expressing an equally valid and valued art; rather his analysis incorporates a clear value judgement. As has been shown, he keeps to existing ideas of levels of culture, putting the 'Bushmen' and 'Eskimos' at the lowest end, followed by all other 'natural peoples' leaving the 'cultural peoples' of Europe as the pinnacle. By favouring physioplastic art as the more difficult and demanding form of art Verworn introduces his new theoretical pairing to explain contemporary frameworks and not to expand on them.

Wilhelm Hausenstein (1882-1957) was a German historical author, journalist and later diplomat who had published an array of different books, including travel journals, art historical works, biographies and translations of poetry. One of his early works *Der*

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 29.

nackte Mensch in der Kunst aller Zeiten [The Nude in the History of Art] (1911) will be briefly analysed here to give an idea of how common the inclusion of non-European art had become, even in subject-specific studies. Hausenstein was an adamant supporter of the sociological approach to art history, believing that the choice of subject and the style of representation were a product of the culture. This idea, in accordance with some of Riegl's ideas about the *Kunstwollen*, lead him to use the naked human form, as an apparently socially neutral object, to analyse these social circumstances – an approach which is underlined by the fact that *Der nackte Mensch in der Kunst aller Zeiten* was shortly after published under the name *Die Kunst und die Gesellschaft* [Art and Society].

Hausenstein begins his book without any introduction and jumps straight into the chapter on 'Die Anfänge' [The Beginnings] which precedes a survey looking also at the East, Classic Antiquity, then the Middle-Ages heading onto chapters on Classicism and the Romantic before turning to contemporary works. He also adds chapters on the meaning of the nude and new syntheses which invokes in detail the development of the social standing of nudes in art and how contemporary artists like Cézanne and Degas play with the conventions of representing nudity to make it more natural, not staged. The general structure of the book can be accounted as part of an emerging trend in art history that was still interested in the survey format but started to concentrate on specific topics or genres. Instead of giving a survey of all art, Hausenstein gives a survey of a specific subject in art, the nude, and instead of rushing through a historical account only briefly mentioning many different artists and styles, Hausenstein focusses on a few, specific, examples that he deals with in detail.

In the very first sentence, Hausenstein refers to Herder, who had called poetry the mother language of humankind. He goes on to note that the definition of poetry as civilised, "as we call it,"¹⁵⁸ lessens the sculptural achievements of the South Sea islanders or the Neolithic clay figurine found in Romania. He thus calls attention to changes in the scientific treatment of such objects and also mockingly indicates that he does not conform to contemporary beliefs of civilisation. Furthermore, he points out that in artistic terms he believes this poetry to be "knowledge of the truth of the factual, the feeling for the lines, which are also in everyday life and give it its rhythm."¹⁵⁹ This "feeling of the lines" is a

¹⁵⁸ Wilhelm Hausenstein, *Der nackte Mensch in der Kunst aller Zeiten*, 3 ed. (Munich: Piper, 1917), 1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

first step towards a formalist overhaul of non-European art that was beginning to emerge in studios in Dresden and Berlin at the same time that Hausenstein was writing.

Even if German expressionist primitivism was still in its early stages, Hausenstein refers to Gauguin and notes that it is his work that makes it easier to change ‘the expectations of the eye’ from earlier styles of art to expressionism. By the time the third edition was published in 1917 he incorporates these works in an epilogue by pointing out that they are a return to the older programmes of form.¹⁶⁰ Differentiating his own writing on these programmes, which he calls, in accordance with Grosse, ‘the Beginnings,’ Hausenstein does not begin with the work of prehistoric peoples in order to mould the objects of non-European peoples into the same classifications. Instead, Hausenstein begins his account, in which he concentrates only on a very few examples, with non-European artwork. He connects prehistoric and non-European art by pointing out that the Stone Age is the natural condition of European culture which means they belong to “roughly the same art historical group.”¹⁶¹ He calls this classification “not accurate but sufficient for a very general consideration” and thus makes a distinction, even if it is only a small one, between prehistoric peoples as the natural state of Europeans and the still living peoples whose artistic poetry is broadly comparable.

His short description of the art of non-European peoples shows, in the manner of the whole book, some limited details. In this fashion, he only concentrates on a single pair of wood carvings from the South Seas. So even if he does not actually mention African art¹⁶² the contemporary beliefs that the art of “South Sea islanders” and the art of “Negroes” are to be placed on the same art historical level - because they have the same level of *Kunstwollen*, development, formalist ideas and societal structure - makes this example interesting for this thesis. Any changes in the treatment of works from the South Seas would thus have had substantial influence on African art as well.

Throughout the analysis, Hausenstein uses art historical analytical tools to speak about the two objects that he calls either *Holzstatuetten* [wooden figurines], *Skulpturen* [sculptures] or *Kunstwerk* [art work] and even names them *Holzplastiken eines Südseeinsulaners* [wooden sculptures of the South Sea islanders] in the caption of the accompanying photograph rather than the more common form *Bildwerk* [pictorial work].

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 218.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶² However, the 1917 edition mentions the high level of pleasure in the natural-objective of “Negro art” that one can speak of a naturalistic return when faced with contemporary art. Ibid., 218.

Although he refers to the maker of the work as “a primitive from the South Sea” when first introducing his idea of calling him a poet, he goes on to talk of him as a *Bildhauer* [sculptor] or a *Künstler* [artist] and thus uses the same titles that he also gives to all the other art and artists he outlines in his book.

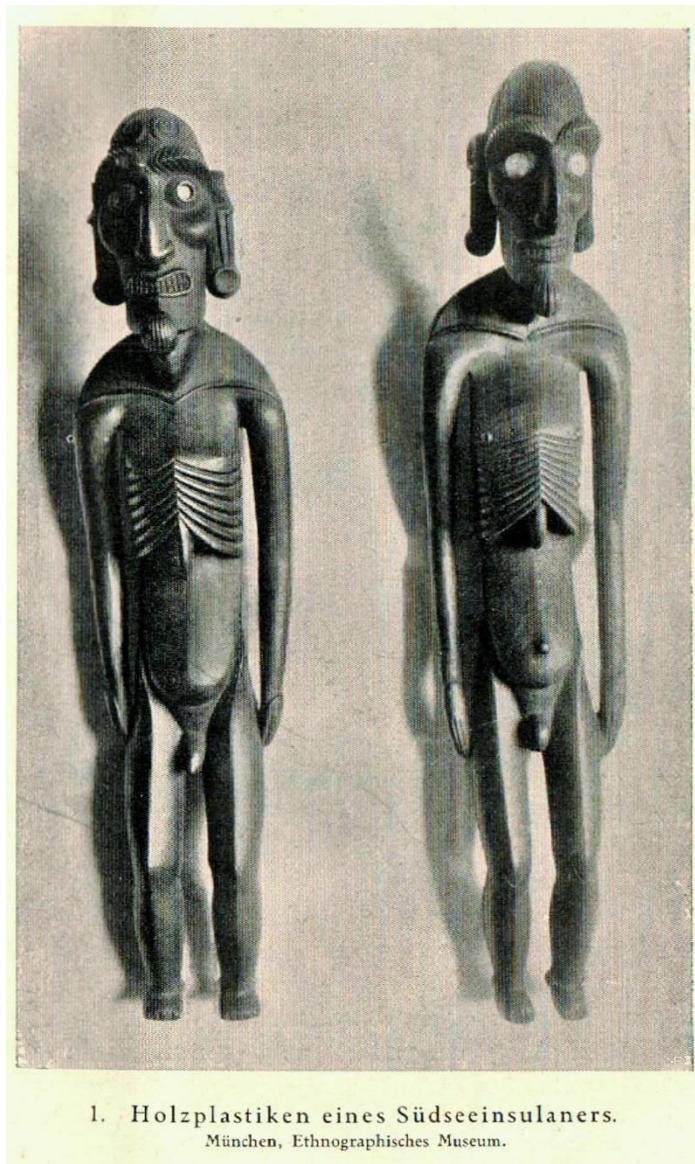


Figure 35 Illustration of "Holzplastiken eines Südseeinsulaners" taken from Wilhelm Hausenstein's *Der nackte Mensch in der Kunst aller Zeiten*, p.3.

Moreover, Hausenstein talks about many aspects of the two depicted sculptures in detail, making the verbal visual syntagm of art historical text and photograph very strong, and strengthening the art historical importance he gives to these art works. In particular, he pays great attention to the formal devices of the statues, noting, for example, the “convex arch” formed by the collar bone which stands in contrast to the “concave arch” of the rib cage. He also notes the “countermovement” of the ribs, “the rhythmic pattern” generated by the parallels of the ribs and the “stylisation of the hair.”¹⁶³

The treatment of the chest is, according to Hausenstein, not random but necessary as the

artist was bound by “certain boundaries of technical conventions” to “create an art work that is self-contained and truly proportionate,” which is “the secret of all art and all poetry.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, he points out that the hair might remind one of the stylistic devices

¹⁶³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

of Greek or Renaissance art. The differences and similarities are, as he notes, due to the artistic principles and the intent rather than any perfection of technical skill. “In this way the work of an anonymous maker of a natural people may be witness to many plastic creations of the international and timeless collective of style.”¹⁶⁵ In Hausenstein’s writing this international and timeless collective of style is the essence of all art styles, an essence that is not just visible in all art ever produced but also able to affect every viewer from any background.

For Hausenstein, it is this shared collective of style, that is both international and timeless, that constitutes all art. The stylistic variations are then generated by the boundaries of technical conventions, the intent of the artist, and the culture in which an art work was made. These ideas are very much in line with Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* and even echo some of Worringer’s ideas on style. Leaving out the dichotomy of abstraction and empathy they are more likely to go back to Semper, who Worringer had referred to as the source of the notion of style. Moreover, this short, 3-page, inclusion of non-European art shows that its artistic relevance had been established. When art historical conventions moved on - not making sweeping comments anymore but concentrating on the details of single pieces - the formerly ethnographic objects are considered. Even though they are still considered to be ‘the Beginning,’ a sort of prologue to European cultures and art, the fact that they got carried over to new art historical ideas confirms that they have been truly admitted to the discipline of art history.

As has been shown in this section the interpretations of Grosse and Woermann had influenced many popular studies, like Max Osborn, who were publishing survey texts for art enthusiasts. These scholars saw non-European art as important enough to include in their short manuscripts, even if it still constituted “the beginning of art.” Moreover, even more specialist art history studies also considered non-European art as a part of their analysis. Verworn, for example took on the idea of the connection between the procurement of food and artistic styles to integrate it in his model of ideoplastic and physioplastic art. Unlike Worringer, who focussed on the viewer’s influence on the act of looking at art, Verworn’s model dealt with the making of the art. And unlike Worringer’s pairing of abstraction and empathy which saw both as equally valid,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

Verworn saw his physioplastic art as superior, but only the highly skilled, difficult, physioplastic art from Europe.

Hausenstein's study on the nude in history shows that some art historians recognised a common ground in all art. Hausenstein still saw non-European and prehistoric art as belonging to roughly the same stylistic group and examined them both in his chapter on 'The Beginning.' However, he also treated them with the same art historical methodology and language that he used for the other works in his book. These three examples show that non-European art was not, just a novel idea that some scholars included in their studies but, that it had been truly integrated in art historical considerations.

Chapter 5.3 Carl Einstein and Negerplastik

Carl Einstein was born in 1885 in Neuwied and was training to be a banker before deciding to move to Berlin and study philosophy, art history and history. During his time at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-University he was taught by Georg Simmel, the sociologist, and Heinrich Wölfflin (1864-1945), the art historian and early formalist. Sometime around 1905, he went on the first of many very influential trips to Paris where he met Picasso, Braque and Gris and found his interest in French art in general, and abstraction in particular. Until the end of the First World War, and hence after the publication of *Negerplastik*, Einstein favoured French expressionism to its German counterpart. Moreover, he met the dealers in African art, Joseph Brummer and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the latter was the dealer of Picasso who became a close personal friend of Einstein.¹⁶⁶ However, Einstein was not able to write his doctorate as he did not complete his Abitur, a fact that would often hinder him in the search for work later on in his life.¹⁶⁷

After leaving university in 1908, Einstein concentrated more on his literary works, starting to publish the first chapters of his famous novella *Babequin*. By 1912, he had joined the political paper *Die Aktion* and published commentary and literary works. At the same time he also started publishing theoretical texts on literature and more importantly art. It is at this time – when he is loosely connected to *Die Aktion* to write about politics and had visited the avant-garde artists in Paris to see and hear about innovations in art - that Einstein refined his opinion on the position of art in society, its influences and impacts.

Einstein was critical of the general premise of a history of art as a totality, especially if this totality was built on the idea of general laws of aesthetics. He thus disagreed with most art historians of the time and with Grosse and Worringer in particular. He noted that “practicing art history on the premise of an aesthetic phenomena means to lock it into a late definition from the outset – whose historical validity and existence is very short lived.”¹⁶⁸ He did not see history as a constant, never-changing entity that was only

¹⁶⁶ Heike Neumeister, "Sculptures, Monuments and 'Fetishes': The Intersections of German Kolonialwissenschaften (Colonial Sciences), Ethnography and National Identity," in *World Art and the Legacies of Colonial Violence*, ed. Daniel J. Rycroft (London: Ashgate, 2013), 182.

¹⁶⁷ Betthausen, Feist, and Fork, *Metzler Kunsthistoriker Lexikon: Zweihundert Porträts deutschsprachiger Autoren aus Vier Jahrhunderten*, 74.

¹⁶⁸ Carl Einstein, *Kunstgeschichte als Geschichte eines ästhetischen Phänomens*. Quoted in Dethlefs, *Carl Einstein: Konstruktion und Zerschlagung einer ästhetischen Theorie*, 45.

augmented as time goes by but rather as a dynamic ever-changing, reconceived construct of a given culture. In a note on ‘Antiquity and the Modern Age’ he made this point clear by pointing out that “history does not form itself in monotonous unchangeability. Each specific time produces a corresponding historical sequence.”¹⁶⁹ This particular version of history is, according to Einstein, produced because each culture writes its own history, resulting in plural histories. Thus, “every event that is added to our awareness, whether it is a past or a possible future event, influences and changes our view on historic development.”¹⁷⁰

This idea of an ever evolving and changing historical awareness is very important in Einstein’s theoretical work and also becomes evident in his ideas on art. For example, when writing about the position of German painting, Einstein noted that although impressionism was often seen as a “specific historic phase” that gave freedom to the painterly form and was thus the height of expression, it was “impossible to see it as the ultimate goal of painting.”¹⁷¹ He goes on to note that “maybe we will see that what these impressionists tried to dissolve were not the laws of painting, as these are undissolvable and the prerequisite for every art, but that they were revolutionaries against a non-art [*Unkunst*], a rotten that one dared to identify with art.”¹⁷²

This view that impressionism is not the ultimate goal of painting but a revolutionary act against an antiquated art practice is connected with Einstein’s idea on history when he points out that “what was called new, will later become a medium to see the old in stringent purity.”¹⁷³ Thus, other times might see expressionism as a countermovement to the older established art. Here, Einstein had already voiced what has become increasingly more important in today’s art history writing. Weaving new knowledge about a particular event, group of people or person into the flow of history - a history writing that is specific to each time - changes the apparent aims, influences and impact of the contextual evidence.

Einstein sees it as more fruitful to think in plural terms of histories, leading him to concentrate on the understanding of art more than on the history of it. He made this clear

¹⁶⁹ Carl Einstein, *Antike und Moderne* 1912-14, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 94.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Carl Einstein, *Die Stellung zur deutschen Malerei* 1914, 7/8, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 188.

¹⁷² Ibid. 7/8.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 7/8.

by mockingly pointing out that “it must be very gratifying for a man’s family if he knows all the dates of the Byzantine and Egyptian art by heart. [...] but another question is whether the pride of the family, Julius, understands the works of art.”¹⁷⁴ In terms of non-European and prehistoric art, Einstein was certain that avant-garde French art could foster the understanding of contemporaries. According to him “Cézanne went beyond only the coloured aspects of impressionist seeing and seized [...] the perspective as the real moment of visual representation. [...] A doctrine which Picasso drove unwaveringly further. Thus, we were almost forced to finally understand Egyptian sculpture for its own sake.”¹⁷⁵ Here, he points to the possibilities of approaching non-European art in the same way, a formalist way -approaching a work by Cézanne or Picasso would lead one to recognise the beauty of this “elementary art.”

In the preparatory notes for his *Handbuch der Kunst*, a large volume on art which he worked at for decades but never finished, Einstein connects his thoughts on history and the understanding of art. Trying to understand art in its own terms rather than identifying different styles,¹⁷⁶ Einstein comes to the conclusion that the study of art must not be seen in the same fashion as the natural sciences and, thus, rejects Grosses ideas. He points out that “we can determine an ‘evolution of knowledge’ in the sciences that is hardly possible for the arts.” This leads him rather to establish that “it almost seems as if one of the functions of art is to preserve the primitive skills and drives of humans and that the activity of the fantasy or the poetical skills causes the stagnation of humanity as a kind of mystical primitivism.”¹⁷⁷ So Einstein sees the art of all times as connected to the underlying primitive urges and drives shared with modern man, which resonates with Worringer’s idea of the psychological primitive.

Einstein goes even further in his rejection of a development in art and especially a Social Darwinistic view of these ideas when he states that “the stylistic modifications or the changes in art can hardly be classified in an evolutionary schemata.”¹⁷⁸ Moreover, contrary to many, he did not believe that art secondarily evolved due to changes in the

¹⁷⁴ Einstein has never referred to the identity of this man, Julius. Carl Einstein, *Religion und Historie*, undated, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 93.

¹⁷⁵ Carl Einstein, *Antike und Moderne 1912-14*, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 94, 5.

¹⁷⁶ In Carl Einstein, *Bemerkungen zum heutigen Kunstbetrieb*, 1912, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 100, he points out that today one judges only the content of style, which leads him to ask what style includes and how one can define uniform styles.

¹⁷⁷ Carl Einstein, *Handbuch der Kunst*, 1 Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 23.

¹⁷⁸ Carl Einstein, *Handbuch der Kunst*, 2 Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 24.

culture that produced it, as Grosse had claimed in citing a connection between the provision of food and art. Instead, Einstein believed art to “fulfil only a small relatively little changing group of needs” and that “in order for us to satisfy the demands we have of the work of art, we are forced to employ numerous complexes.”¹⁷⁹ Thus, for Einstein, the fundamental core of art itself is not an evolving ever-changing unit but rather a constant entity. It is only perceived to change due to the contextual ideas of a specific time and the different styles forced upon it.¹⁸⁰

It is this view of art itself, its placement in history and amongst different people at different times, which informs Einstein’s work on African art. In practice, this meant that he saw the most important redefinition of contemporary art coming not just from French but also from African sculpture as, according to him, it is not the development from one style to another and from one age to another that is relevant in art but the way it engages with the fundamental core that lies within art itself. So, while there is a lot of common ground between Worringer and Einstein in the ideas of the underlying ‘primitive’ in humans and art, it seems that Einstein resonated more with Ernst’s interpretation of Worringer’s ideas. He can thus truly be seen as an author who both published on art - non-European and contemporary - and was also an expressionist writer.¹⁸¹

This positioning of Einstein as the expressionist writer and art critic influenced his work on *Negerplastik* and is apparent in its overall concept as much as the character of the writing. When he started the research for his project, sometime between 1912 and 1913, Einstein did not only rely solely on his own ideas and notions but was also in touch with other scholars. For example, in August 1913, he wrote to von Luschan in order to ask for his assistance:

You may be aware that some of our leading artists have drawn attention to the great achievements of ‘primitive’ peoples, and without doubt, this has profoundly influenced current [artistic] production. In order to raise and promote interest in the great artistic value of Negro sculpture [and] Mexican works I would like particularly to engage with the plastic arts and publish some of the wondrous things in the possession of the *Völkerkundemuseum* [...]. One could prompt the modern collector to include primitive art in his collection just as almost every Parisian amateur is already doing. [...] I would be grateful for your kind and invaluable

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ This term of the expressionist writer is often used for Einstein see for example Braun, *Carl Einstein: Zwischen ästhetik und Anarchismus: Zu Leben und Werk eines expressionistischen Schriftstellers*.

assistance. Doubtlessly there are existing clichés [electrotypes] etc., which perhaps could be used.¹⁸²

Admittedly, Einstein is not asking here for von Luschan's expertise in understanding the sculptures he wants to deal with in their appropriate cultural setting but is rather asking a fellow scholar for assistance with access to collections and reproductions.¹⁸³ While a letter answering this request for assistance is not available, Heike Neumeister determined in her doctoral thesis (2010) that a cooperation between the two had indeed arisen as seven of the objects illustrated, have been successfully identified as coming from the collection of the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin. Furthermore, the assistance of von Luschan can also be assumed from the fact that Einstein changed his original plan of publishing a journal article to writing a whole book as gaining access to museum collections and sourcing illustrations for the publication would become far easier with the support of an ethnographer.¹⁸⁴

Einstein's originally small project thus found enough resonance in the scholarly community that he felt confident enough to widen his article into a book. Even though

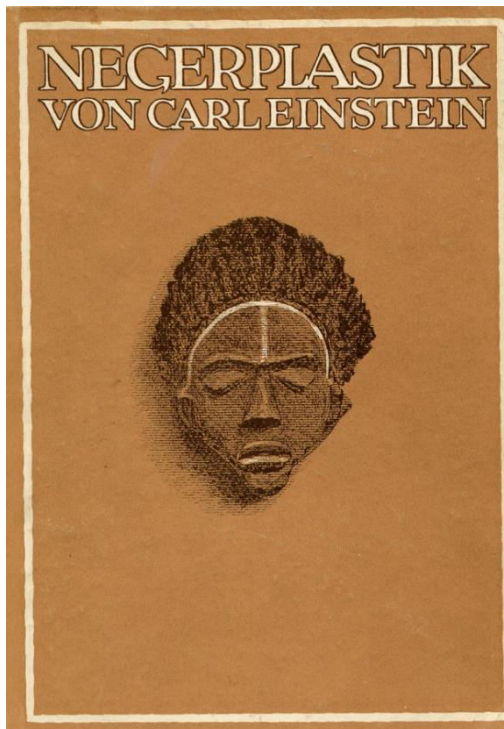


Figure 36 Book cover of Carl Einstein
Negerplastik, 1915.

his lack of a doctorate hindered him in the procurement of an academic position, he was given the opportunity to voice his theoretical ideas on history and art as well as becoming known as an expressionist literary author. His innovative notions on the subjectivity of history and art, and the way he applied these notions to contemporary and non-European art in an effort to promote their understanding, have made him into one of the most prominent figures of the reception of expressionist and non-European art.

Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) is divided into two very distinct parts. The first part -

¹⁸² Letter Carl Einstein to Felix von Luschan, 18.08.1913, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischen Kulturbesitz Handschriftenabteilung, Nachlass Luschan. As translated by Neumeister, *Carl Einstein's Negerplastik: Early Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Encounters between Art and Ethnography*, 78.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 80.

which begins without a table of contents, acknowledgements, a list of figures or any other structural body one might expect from a scientific book - is a theoretical reflection. This is split into different sections dealing with 'Remarks about the Method,' 'the Pictorial,' 'Religion and African Art,' 'Cubic'¹⁸⁵ 'Perception of Space' and 'Mask and Cognates.' Einstein begins his account by pointing out a fact that he saw as very important: "There is scarcely any art that the European approaches as wearily as the African."¹⁸⁶ He goes on to note that "he [the European] is disposed to deny that it is art at all" which gives rise to a contempt that is expressed by a "veritable terminology of negation."¹⁸⁷ He makes clear right from the start that such prejudice "impedes any aesthetic assessment: indeed, they render it completely impossible."¹⁸⁸ According to Einstein, an aesthetic assessment is only possible through approximation which is hindered by the belief that "the Negro is from the outset considered inferior [...] and his works are condemned a priori as deficient."¹⁸⁹

Even though Einstein brings the negative connotations of African art to his readers' mind by drawing attention to these prejudices, he also rejects them openly. He makes it very clear that in order to be able to assess the objects in question aesthetically, which is the aim of the book, one has to leave such thinking behind. This leads him to include evolutionary ideas in a list of unhelpful thinking that should be avoided. He points out that these kind of prejudices only came into being through reverting to "convenient theories" that are all based on one assumption: "the absolute, downright fantastic superiority" of Europeans. Moreover, he notes that a style-critical assessment of an art work is often forced into a strict framework from the simple to the complex as one "yielded to the presumption that the simple and the first are identical."¹⁹⁰ However, such theories about "the Negro and his art denotes rather the judge than the object."¹⁹¹

While on the first page Einstein points out that "de facto our disregard of the Negro corresponds merely to a lack of knowledge about him, which burdens him unfairly,"¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Cubic refers to the German *Kubisch*; it was decided to use cubic instead of cubist for its closer resemblance in style and meaning to the German original.

¹⁸⁶ Carl Einstein, "Negro Sculpture," *October* 107 (2004): 124. As translated by Charles W. Haxthausen and Sebastian Zeidler. On the following pages *Negro Sculpture* refers to this translation by Haxthausen and Zeidler while *Negerplastik* refers to the German original with my translation.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 124.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ *Negerplastik* (Verlag der Weissen Bücher, 1915), vi.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., v.

he does not try to give more detailed ethnographic information. Instead of giving an account of the peoples and their culture, Einstein is only interested in their art. Moreover, he makes clear that the use of this art to gain knowledge about the peoples and their culture, as was sought by ethnographers, is not his aim and, according to him, not fruitful either as he points out that “to regard art as a means to anthropological or ethnographic insights seems dubious.”¹⁹³ Rather, Einstein aims to gain an understanding of the way the art objects themselves work on a formal level. He notes that “knowledge about African art is in general limited and unspecific”¹⁹⁴ and that “the fact [...] I consider more reliable than all possible ethnographic or other knowledge is this: the African sculptures themselves!”¹⁹⁵

In this way, Einstein highlights that, for him, it is only the sculpture itself that is of interest and goes further by explaining that:

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.¹⁹⁶

This quote shows that Einstein’s idea of formal analysis was a universal one that could be applied to any work of art. However, as will be shown, instead of believing in universally valid laws of art, as Grosse and Worringer did, Einstein believed in universally valid laws of vision and ways of seeing. For him, the importance lay not in the gathering of information surrounding the art work but understanding the art work itself. This is the same idea he had mockingly written down when referring to the family pride Julius who did not understand the works of art but was able to recite all the dates of Byzantine and Egyptian art.¹⁹⁷ The importance lies in the ability to translate the message the art work is conveying and not just to list the data.

¹⁹³ Ibid., vii.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., vi.

¹⁹⁵ "Negro Sculpture," 125.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹⁹⁷ Carl Einstein, *Religion und Historie*, undated, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 93.

Data that had been important for other researchers - like when an object was made (for Woermann) or what it was used for (for von Luschan and other ethnographers) - were all just “subject matter and [...] contextual associations”¹⁹⁸ for Einstein. His interest lay in the way the sculpture works as an object, what shapes, lines and balances make it work as itself without functioning as a tool or symbol for something else. From today’s point of view, these ideas are indeed true formalism. However, Einstein was not yet at a point that he could free the art work completely of its surroundings. According to him, this formalist view of African art is possible because of its specific religious meaning as he claims “the art of the Negro is primarily determined by religion.”¹⁹⁹

For Einstein, the main difference between European art and African art is that while a European artist makes a sculpture with the viewer in mind and forms to have the most effect on the viewer, the African artist does not do this. European religious art only points to, or symbolises God, while African religious art is the deity itself. Einstein points here in particular to the idea that the object already embodies the spirit of the god before it is finished, meaning that the finished form is irrelevant and does not have to convey a message about the god. “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.”²⁰⁰

According to Einstein, “the work's transcendence is presupposed and conditioned by its religious nature.”²⁰¹ Because of the work’s religious condition and transcendence, it “corresponds to a spatial vision that precludes every function of the beholder.”²⁰² By striving for effects and integrating symbols, the sculptor would compete with the god and, as such, does not aim to include such things. Einstein included permanent body modifications, such as tattoos and scarification, in this idea of religious art. For him, body modifications are a form of sacrificing one’s own body to enhance it. While other researchers saw it as a symptom of the ornamental drive (see Grosse in chapter 2), Einstein was certain that the modification of the body was a form of religious worship as “his body is visibly dedicated to the universal [...]. It is a mark of a despotic,

¹⁹⁸ Einstein, "Negro Sculpture," 125.

¹⁹⁹ *Negerplastik*, xiii.

²⁰⁰ "Negro Sculpture," 129.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

unconditionally dominant religion and humanity when man and woman use tattooing to transform the individual body into a universal one.”²⁰³

For Einstein, this level of devotion that lets someone become physically the object of it, is another example of the distance between artist and artwork. This “sense of distance” is “a tremendous gift for objective creation,”²⁰⁴ and is not just noticeable in tattoo art but is also the reason for the importance of the cubic form in sculpture. All expressions of art and self-objectification - like dance, hairstyles and masquerade - are also determined by a “religious canon.”²⁰⁵ Einstein noted that this canon, for both sculpture and tattoo, would only change through religious cataclysms.

It is this importance of religion and the involvement of a sense of distance that lets Einstein argue for the formalistic assessment he attempts. A sense of the distance of the artist makes it easier for his European readership to distance their viewing as well and not try to empathise with the naturalistic forms as Worringer had argued before. For Einstein, this sense of distance is made apparent through a very specific idea of space. “Ordinary space is threefold, with sculpture its third dimension.”²⁰⁶ Sculpture, he argues, can be separated into entirely distinct “thrusters into depth and into the foreground.”²⁰⁷ In a conventional assessment of sculpture, the viewer will assess what they see and also naturally imagine the parts of the sculpture they cannot see. Thus, the assessment includes the visible aspects as well as those suggested. However, “such an effect would have nothing to do with art”²⁰⁸ which is why his own assessment concentrates on the forms that are visible and not suggestive. He makes this point more prominent by emphasising 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

²⁰³ Ibid., 137.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ *Negerplastik*, xx.

²⁰⁷ Einstein, “Negro Sculpture,” 134.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

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.²⁰⁹

Due to the religious connotations explained above, Einstein sees African art as prime examples of sculptures that embody these ideas of fixed movement within the object itself. While “every three-dimensional point within a mass can be interpreted in infinite ways [...] 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.”²¹⁰ This formal dimension is the object in itself, not pointing to anything outside, and that is not expecting the viewer to imagine what is not there. However, one of the drawbacks of this specific kind of art from a European perspective is this paradoxical affect. In the eyes of a European, used to interpretative and symbolic approaches to art, these sculptures look grotesque and are “frequently chided for [their] so-called errors in proportion.”²¹¹

Returning to his initial observations at the start of his book – the want of understanding on the part of European viewers - Einstein now turns to explain why indeed these works must be called art. He notes that the “errors in proportion” are not errors at all but signs of the sculpture as an object that is in itself detached from the space outside. “The decisive factor is precisely not their relative size but rather the cubic expression assigned to them and which they must represent without compromise.”²¹² He goes even further questioning European views on African art and overturning European views on their own art styles.

He emphasises that “the optical naturalism of Occidental art is not the copying of external nature.”²¹³ Again, noting that European art comprises what is there and what is imagined by the viewer, he notes that “it adapts to the viewer (frontality, remote view).”²¹⁴ Thus the naturalism of Occidental art is an empathetic one, one that is made for the viewer. Here, Einstein not only calls to mind Worringer’s idea of empathy and the way a work of art draws in the viewer in order to evoke a reaction but also indicates his expressionistic influences. Many of the French avant-garde - for example Cézanne or Picasso - did not depict the way a viewer would see a certain object but the object

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., 134/5.

²¹³ *Negerplastik*, xix.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

itself in all its forms. This “formal realism” is, according to Einstein, not “an arbitrary and artificial creation” but “a mystic reality” that is real by virtue of its closed form; since it is self-sufficient and exceedingly powerful,” which will “compel a tremendously intense art.”²¹⁵

These favourable words for the distant and formal realism of African art are echoed by the language Einstein used throughout his book. As the title *Negerplastik* already suggests, Einstein most often used the term ‘Negro’ to refer to the African makers of the objects in question. However, he uses this term, unlike Woermann, not according to Haeckel’s racial classifications but, rather as a universal term for African people. For example, while Haeckel and Woermann only included peoples from the Niger Delta to Somalia in the east as *Neger*, the objects Einstein included in his book are from all parts of Africa. For example, he included sculptures from Madagascar which, according to Haeckel, was inhabited by *Malayen*, and from Angola, which Haeckel ranked among the *Kaffern*. Moreover, he never uses the term *Naturvölker* and thus emphasises his detachment from ethnographic studies and racial ideas of evolution on a linguistic level. Instead, when not using the term ‘Negro,’ Einstein rather refers to the people in his account as African people. Given that ‘Negro’ did not hold the same racial and political connotations it does now, this underlines his liberal outlook and his aim to use African sculpture as a model for his formalist assessment.

This mutual support of object and method is also evident in the way he speaks about the objects themselves. Einstein mostly uses the terms *Kunst* [art], *Kunstwerk* [art work] *Plastik* [sculpture] or *Skulptur* [sculpture] and thus enforces his translation of African objects as art and the detachment from the objective agenda of ethnographic research. However, when referring to the religious background of African art, Einstein reverts to the use of *Bildwerk* [pictorial work] which was used by both Grosse and Woermann instead of the more value laden *Kunstwerk* [art work]. On the two occasions that Einstein uses *Bildwerk*, he writes that “the pictorial works are venerated”²¹⁶ and that “even in the pictorial work of the common man something divine is envisioned.”²¹⁷ He even points out that “the idols are often adored in darkness,”²¹⁸ and thus makes use of the religious and often negatively intended term *Idol*.

²¹⁵ “Negro Sculpture,” 130.

²¹⁶ *Negerplastik*, xiii.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

This changing of terms reveals how Einstein was balancing two different positions in his analysis of African art and that, even though he stated that he thought of the extraction of ethnographic information from these objects as dubious,²¹⁹ he was not able to fully detach himself from ethnographic concepts. Even if he tried to avoid it, Einstein was still balancing art historical enquiry with ethnographical knowledge. He dedicated a whole chapter of his short survey to 'Religion and African Art' and, even if he situated it as a distinct chapter, he used this connection to explain his formalist method as a natural way to assess African art. Many references to the sense of distance that, according to Worringer, is between the art work and its maker and viewer, who are "a priori psychological, which is to say essentially identical,"²²⁰ support his new method.

Nevertheless, his meticulous accounts of the production and veneration go beyond what is needed for his argument, apart from the point where he explains that many of these sculptures are kept in darkness for most of the time. In such a short account of only 22 pages, a significant explanation of the position of the objects in their own culture can only be interpreted as an effort at ethnographic statement. The use of the terms *Bildwerk* and *Idol* only heightens this effect of the ethnographic statement further and reveals that, despite trying, Einstein was not yet able to form a purely art historical translation of African art. He may have introduced formalist visual translation but still includes ethnographic viewpoints. By this change of terms he suggests to his readers that ethnographic data needs to be kept separate from an art historical translation and thus implies that these are not possible in the ethnographic museum.

Other than this, the language used is purely art historical and it becomes clear that he was writing his book for people with a keen interest in art. For example, in the chapter on 'the Pictorial,' which gives a survey of European painting and sculpture through the ages, he notes that "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 excitement and convey it to the beholder, had to be thoroughly pictorial and impressionistic."²²¹ Here, he not only uses terms like impressionistic but also expects

²¹⁹ Ibid., vii.

²²⁰ "Negro Sculpture," 129.

²²¹ Ibid., 127.



Figure 37 Illustration of an unnamed sculpture from Einstein's *Negerplastik*, p. 106.

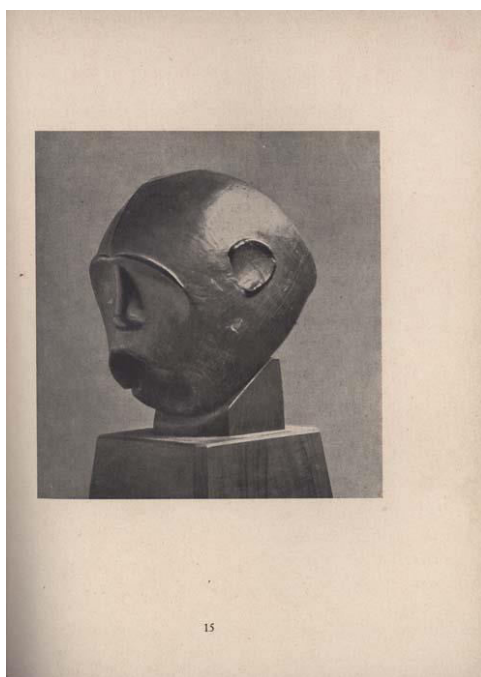


Figure 38 Illustration of an unnamed sculpture from Einstein's *Negerplastik*, p. 15.

his reader to be familiar with the style of the Baroque as he does not describe it but only refers to its effect on sculpture.

What is very interesting, and has been noted in many studies on *Negerplastik*, is that the text is completely separate from the large volume of illustrations and also makes no connection with the images shown.²²² In fact, Einstein only refers to the existence of the images once when he remarks that "perhaps the illustrations in this book will establish this much: the Negro is not undeveloped."²²³ But apart from this small acknowledgement of the existence of the illustrations the two parts stand completely separate, which is supported by the lack of contents and illustration lists.

In fact, even though the front page states that the book is *Negerplastik* by Carl Einstein and that it includes 119 illustrations, the actual structure of the book conveys that it is rather a photographic album of 119 images with a preface on the method of formally assessing the illustrated sculptures. Each object is given a whole page showing one or two photographs. While most are shown from just one angle, often but not always a frontal view, some are represented by two images, showing a frontal

²²² See for example Sebastian Zeidler, "Totality against a Subject: Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik*," who chose one of the illustrated objects and applied Einstein's theory to it or Neumeister, "Sculptures, Monuments and 'Fetishes': The Intersections of German Kolonialwissenschaften (Colonial Sciences), Ethnography and National Identity," who refers to the artistic aura of the way the illustrated objects are shown and mentions the connection to the popular Bilderatlas [pictorial atlas].

²²³ Einstein, "Negro Sculpture," 124.

and a side view.²²⁴ Through this method, the book is turned into a photographic album for the contemplation of single objects. This puts it into stark contrast to most ethnographic museums that displayed objects in large groups without concentrating on individual objects. In these displays, it was impossible to see single items for individual contemplation.

It seems that it was the main goal of Einstein's book to rectify this situation. This is not just supported by the lack of cross-references between text and image but heightened by the style of page numbering. While the pages with the images are numbered with Arabic numerals, as one would expect from the main body of a book, the page numbers of the text are marked by Roman numerals, as one would expect from the preliminary pages containing the list of contents, acknowledgements, preface and the like. However, in this way Einstein offers almost no translation of the single objects at all, resulting in a very specific set of possibilities that will be discussed below. It is suggested by the layout that the text itself is nothing but the preface, interesting but not essential to the understanding of the main part of the book: the Illustrations.

The lack of a strong connection between text and image supports this assertion. While the reader can actively make the connection between text and image, by skipping back and forth between the pages, he is rather induced to see each part individually. Moreover, an active connection on the side of the reader would only result in a very small gain in guidance and knowledge as the text does not actually refer to any specific type of sculpture. The closest description one gets from the text is that it is interested in sculptures that depict cubic forms that result in an image of a living human or animal. However, the two examples illustrated above already show how different two such sculptures can appear. The text speaks of all these objects as a group, and as such it declares them to be art. All that is provided is a possible method to approach these works. In this way, the text might guide the act of looking but does not guide the viewer intellectually. The reader is not given a translation of the objects but the theoretical framework to translate them formalistically himself. All he is told is that he is looking at art from Africa.

²²⁴ It is interesting to note that this procedure of photographing these objects in multi-perspectival view mirrors the photographs of living African subjects taken by physical anthropologists 'in the field' in the same time period.

The lack of captions supports the notion that the viewer is left to their own devices in an attempt to describe, explain and interpret the objects. Without any information, on the maker, the time, and place it was made or even the dimensions, the viewer can only interpret the sculptures metaphorically as an example of a particular aesthetic. Instead of seeing the sculptures as a synecdoche for the culture in which they were made in the viewer is only able to approach them aesthetically. Instead of searching for answers to questions like - Does it have a use? Who made it? How was it shown? What position does it have in its culture? - the viewers' questions are steered in a much more personal direction - Does it appeal? Does it not appeal? Does it evoke associations?

In many ways, this is exactly what Einstein was trying to achieve. Taking away ethnographic associations, apart from the religious connotations, leaves the viewer to assess the sculptures through his idea of formal analysis. However, without a set translation of the illustrated objects, the way the book is structured and the information that is given, allows several very different possible outcomes in addition to Einstein's ideal result. On the one hand, the reader could disregard the images and just concentrate on the text. In this way, the reader would still enjoy the full impact of the text, as the images are not essential to its understanding; they could also make mental connections between the text and any other sculptures from Africa they had access to. On the other hand, the reader could also disregard the text and just concentrate on the images, as the text does not add information to any specific image. In this way, the reader could still contemplate the individual sculptures, for as long or as little as they pleased, without the disturbing context of the overcrowded museum; and they could approach them with their own methodology in mind.

Moreover, there are several scenarios in which the reader picks only specific parts of the text to connect to the images which would always lead to different outcomes. To name just one example, the reader could focus on the relationship to religion that Einstein emphasises. Connecting the sculptures illustrated only to religion, the only contextual explanation Einstein gives, could result in the opposite of what Einstein tried to do. Instead of realising the resemblance of African and contemporary European art, this would lead to highlighting a major difference - for Einstein, African art is purely religious while European art has freed itself from the religious symbolism it contained generations before. Essentially, this would lead to questioning the importance of African art.

The one thing all these different possible interpretations have in common - and there are many more, is that Sub-Saharan Africa is portrayed as a single cultural entity. Without noting that the sculptures illustrated were made by different peoples, at different times and under different circumstances, the reader is left to index them as one and the same, for all that is conveyed is that they are African. Despite showing a variety of different sculptures, including busts, full figures, groups of figures and masks, Einstein represents just one thing. Different styles become one art and different regions become one continent; the sculpture is made to objectify an apparently homogenous Africa. If one does take the text into account, this homogenous Africa is indexed as one deeply rooted in religion.

As has been noted above, even though the great emphasis laid on the connection between African art and religion is meant to justify the use of the formalist assessment of the sculptures, it also highlights its difference from contemporary European art. By highlighting the differences, Einstein 'foreignizes' the African sculptures in his book. While the indirect comparisons have been noted above, Einstein also contrasts the two directly when he says,

while the European work of art is subjected to an emotional interpretation even of form [...] the Negro work possesses an unequivocal definition, due not only to formal reasons but also to religious ones. [...] 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.²²⁵

Here, Einstein not only compares two different types of art but two different types of religious worship; and while he vouches time and again that European and African art should be seen as equal he does not say this about African religions - or religion, as he only refers to one. Despite his explanations about the connection between art and religion, African religion stays an unknown. All the reader learns about African religion is that it affects art because of the worship of idols. However, this idol worshipping has often been cited as negative in accounts of non-European peoples and its use to promote the validity of the art of the same peoples seems somewhat arbitrary. It leads not to one coherent argument that promotes non-European art but rather to a juxtaposition of 'cultural' art and 'non-cultural' religion.

²²⁵ Einstein, "Negro Sculpture," 131.

However, Einstein also seeks to bring the art of these people closer to European art. Before turning to contemporary European, especially French, art he gives a short history of sculpture in Europe. As noted above, he surveys the way sculpture and painting have been practiced alongside each other and have affected each other in different time periods. Throughout this account he continually refers to African sculpture and how different European styles relate to it. By including the history of European sculpture, which his art-interested readership was potentially already familiar with, into a work on African art he offers his European readers something they can easily relate to. By these means, he ‘domesticates’ African sculptures by making them easier to read and understand. At the same time, the correlations between the two art forms support his claim that African art indeed fits into the history of art and does have a claim to the term ‘art.’

This becomes especially apparent when Einstein attends to French art which, according to him, works with similar stylistic ideas to African art. He pointed out that “a few years ago in France we witnessed the crisis that redefined the issues,” and goes on to note the French interest in spatial vision and the break from the usual means that had been used in art for generations. It is “around that time,” as Einstein puts it, “and necessarily so, one discovered Negro sculpture and recognized that, in isolation, it had cultivated pure sculptural forms.”²²⁶ Here, he emphasises that the problem of spatial vision, which the French artists recognised, had long been mastered by African artists. While he does refrain from claiming that the French artists had learned from the African sculptures in the ethnographic museums, he none-the-less notes that it was necessary that the “Negro sculpture” was “discovered.” Hence, he highlights how contemporary French art practices and styles have found their equal in African sculpture, which heightens the domestication of the single entity of African art.

As becomes clear from this analysis, Einstein was innovative in his support for African art. He was adamant in voicing his strong belief in the value of African art and its unique formal qualities. His formalist methodology gave him an interesting new perspective of African art that only expressionist artists had been experimenting with before. As the detailed examination of his words has shown, Einstein himself was greatly influenced by earlier scholars who had been advocating the importance of non-European art. He disagreed with Grosse on most counts and saw Woermann’s way of including

²²⁶ Ibid., 128.

contextual information, as well as ranking the art according to racial types, as dubious. Yet, it was in particular the developmental approaches to these objects that opened the field for Einstein's aesthetic contemplation of the sculptures. Moreover, his notion of the relationship between viewer and European art was based on Worringer's idea of empathy and this first stylistic approach.

His choice of terms, such as 'artwork' instead of 'pictorial work,' and discipline-specific language, like his references to art historical periods, reveal that he was writing for an art-interested audience that he tried to convince of the validity of African art and his research method in approaching it. Integrating European art, especially French contemporary artists, allowed him to show his readers more efficiently the ways in which African art is relevant for contemporary issues of aesthetics. However, his analysis of the relevance of religion for art confirms that, even though he never used the terms, he was not able to break free of contemporary notions of the chasm between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker*.

While the application of his notion to strip the sculptures of all factual denominators resulted in the amalgamation of all African peoples into one that practiced just one form of art and religion, it also forced his readers to approach them differently. In not providing a translation of the objects he illustrated, he forced his readers to engage with them extensively if they wanted to understand them. He took his idea of a total lack of context, even if not fully integrated due to his emphasis on religion as a justification of his methodology, to a point that the reader was at a total loss; but it prompted a crucial step in the reception of African art that led to important discussions in intellectual and art historical circles for decades to come.

Chapter 5.4 The reception

Expressionist art and expressionist art history were equally discussed by critics. Einstein's book quickly became popular with artists and a second edition was published in 1920. Moreover, well-known names like the philosopher Ernst Bloch, the authors Max Herrmann Neißé, Hermann Hesse and Hans Johst, as well as the art historians Hedwig Fechheimer, Curt Glaser, Wilhelm Hausenstein and Hans Tietzt debated its content and theory. This section will concentrate on two reviews published by Max Herrmann Neißé and Hermann Hesse that give an insight into the varying reception of Einstein's work in intellectual circles.

In the same year as the publication of *Negerplastik*, Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), the Nobel Prize winning author, already in the second quarter of a long career, wrote a review that was published in the *Vossische Zeitung*.²²⁷ He calls Einstein's work the "the first attempt to approach this strange world" and points out that "so far everything here is in chaos, a history of this art is missing completely."²²⁸ These first few lines show just how much broader an impact Einstein's work had than earlier works that had been dealing with the same topic. While the philosophic ideas of Grosse, the history compiled by Woermann and the stylistic study by Worringer found great interest in circles of art history and aesthetic philosophy, the author and art historian Einstein, who had already made his name in literary circles and popular media through his work in *Die Aktion*, was able to reach a far wider readership.

Hesse notices the lack of connection between the textual and visual parts of the book and writes that Einstein "abstains from any preliminary attempt at history. He remains entirely philosophical."²²⁹ Hesse comments that it is not important whether one accepts the ideas in the text or not; the book still offers a view of many "characteristic Negro sculptures."²³⁰ He goes on to relate his own ideas when looking at the illustrations as "the first impression is that of children's work, the impression of primitivism. [...] One stands in front of the new as an adult in front of a child, without much understanding,

²²⁷ Hermann Hesse, "Die Plastik der Neger," *Vossische Zeitung* 30. 07. 1915. Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 447.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

but with the invigorating feeling of being the superior. Until it is shown that this feeling of superiority is based only on this unknowing.”²³¹

Moreover, he notes in a different section that “certainly, I cannot say that I find the Negro sculpture ‘beautiful’”²³² but he also clarifies that “we have the right to decline this art, to perceive it as strange and disturbing but we do not have the right to not recognise it as art.”²³³ The recognition of African sculpture as art seems to have really resonated with Hesse and he repeats the point several times revealing his knowledge of Riegl’s idea of the *Kunstwollen*. He compares the first careful look at African sculpture with the first acquaintance with Gothic sculpture and East Asian art that had once been seen as “child’s play” and comes to the conclusion that “today we recognise in those art works the extremely valuable efforts of a *Kunstwollen* that, though it is not oriented in the same way as ours, but that we at least cannot deny the equivalence with ours.”²³⁴

Elsewhere he speaks of the way that it is not some inherent worthlessness in the sculptures themselves that disconnects him from them “but something in me, which needs to be resolved.”²³⁵ This “something” is, according to Hesse, evoked by the classical canon of beauty that he rejects adamantly and exclaims “let’s do away with it completely, this canon!”²³⁶ In an attempt to give credence to his denunciation of the classical canon he goes further saying that “it is good to realise that the Negro who carved his wooden image did not in the slightest have the ambition to please me; he had infinitely more necessary, infinitely more serious work to do.”²³⁷

He closes his generally favourable review by concluding that “we are thankful for this book,”²³⁸ but reminds his readers that this is “not because we have gained a piece of knowledge and a bite of the subject matter.”²³⁹ For Hesse, the most important message to take away from *Negerplastik* is that one should stop focussing on what differentiates the various peoples from one another and that “we should rather pay attention to what connects all humans!”²⁴⁰ In short Hesse thought *Negerplastik* to be a very important

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

book in the advancement of the interaction with non-European and European art and culture but really only saw it as a first tentative step. In his opinion, the future works on these topics would have to include more information. He thereby challenges one of Einstein's main innovations: the assessment of art without context.

A year later, the playwright and poet Max Herrmann Neißé (1886-1941) published an article on Einstein's literary and theoretical work which also included a discussion of *Negerplastik*.²⁴¹ Einstein's ideas were still keenly debated. Neißé writes favourably about Einstein and his work and characterises him as the "organiser, pacemaker of the ones to come, a striker type with standard gauge and binoculars."²⁴² Neißé emphasises this description of Einstein as a leading scholar that sets the basic principles today while also looking into the future by calling *Negerplastik* a "fundamental work."²⁴³

He goes on to give a short account of the "few short chapters" that give an insight into "an area, which has been buried and disdained" and "makes it accessible to serious processing." While a year earlier Hesse was reluctant to approve of the structure of the book, Neißé is in favour of it, calling it "exemplary for art compendiums of every description" as it "lays the primary stress on contemplation." For Neißé, it is not the text but this stress on the "irreproachably reproduced plates" that made him recognise the importance of African art that let him "want to sink in prayer" before the illustrations of them.

Moreover, reflecting on the illustrations leads him to point out that "the Negro and his art undergo a bright redemption of honour, and compared to our own continental sculpture that is strongly traversed by pictorial surrogates, the African sculpture is proven as the undiminished and complete effort of three-dimensional cubism." While Neißé seems to have taken on Einstein's theory of formal assessment and the importance of cubic details of sculpture, he is generally wary of many of the assertions Einstein makes in his theoretical essay. This becomes evident in the last sentence of the part on *Negerplastik* in which Neißé points out that "the random squibs about method, tattooing, masks [...], must set a whole pack of detailed exploratory examinations in motion."

²⁴¹ Max Herrmann Neißé, "Carl Einstein," *Die Weißen Blätter* 1916. Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Carl-Einstein-Archiv, Nr. 446.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

So, while Neißé was a great admirer of Einstein's accumulation of the images, and did not seem to have been concerned about the lack of information as to the time and place in which the sculptures were made, he pointed out that the information given about method and culture needed a closer study before being deemed of scholarly value. Hesse, on the other hand, saw the importance of the book as bringing African art and its relation to European art to the attention of a broad public while being sceptical about the layout of the study. These two opposing viewpoints give an idea of the general reception of *Negerplastik*. Most scholars were apprehensive about one or more of the innovations that Einstein had included. Yet, most scholars also saw it as an important step for the regeneration of the scholarly examination of African art.

The rule of the Nazis in Germany, which also resulted in his suicide in 1940, caused his work to fall into oblivion. It has not been academically analysed until modernity became the focal point of research at the beginning of the 1960s. It was then that Einstein's work became more completely known for its formalist assessment of art and the comparisons it made between European, especially French expressionist, and non-European art. As such, it fed into the closer attention to, and displaying of art, according to its formal content which arguably culminated in the much critiqued Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century art* in 1994.²⁴⁴

Conclusion

While Riegl and Worringer laid the groundwork to approach African art stylistically, the art produced and the art history written in the following years further established this treatment. Both were influenced by non-European art and its context of ethnographic and philosophical writing as well as popular media that had made non-Europeans and their objects become more commonplace. In art historical writing this meant that non-European art had become truly part of scholarly works. While Osborn, Verworn and Hausenstein included non-European art into their art historical studies in different forms, the fact that they did shows that non-European art had become part of the German discourse on art and its history.

²⁴⁴ See for example Ivan Karp, "Other Cultures in Museum Perspective," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991).

At the same time, artists began to recognise the objects in the ethnographic museums and in the many journals and books for their stylistic and psychological qualities. Ernst's interpretation of Worringer's abstraction and empathy as a pendulum that needs to swing back to abstraction resonated through most of the creative fields in Germany. A perceived need to break with the established art led expressionist artists to turn to non-European art in the search for pure and direct expressions of feeling. The members of *Die Brücke* came to be influenced by the free and personal treatment of materials, while Nolde was taken by the psychological idea of the 'primitive.' Both found what publications had been describing: the unfinished, strange, rough, raw and 'primitive' art that appealed because it stood at the polar opposite to their contemporary, modern, world.

While the German expressionists saw a psychological connection between the non-European and the modern European man which was evident in art, Einstein rather believed in a formal connection. However, both approached it stylistically, being drawn to it by its formal qualities and the psychology of maker-object-viewer interaction. For Einstein, African artists had found a solution to what had recently been problematised in Europe, especially France: three-dimensional space. While European artists were taking into account the viewer's natural drive to envision what is not there in order to complete the visual appearance, African artists took the object as a complete entity, representing all the cubic forms that are part of it.

However, he justified his praise of the cubic forms of African art by emphasising that this treatment of space was due to a religious belief that he presents as inherently different to European beliefs. So while he successfully brought the formal aspects of art closer together, he did so by negatively highlighting contextual and religious differences. The innovative way in which he structured his study, with only 26 pages of theoretical text and 113 full-page illustrations and without interconnection, has caused as much discussion as his ideas on a formalist approach to African art. While Neißé was taken by the idea, Hesse criticised the lack of information given about the objects, showing that contemporary critics were discussing his choice of layout as much as his theoretical text. His idea was to force the reader to concentrate on formal aspects of the objects instead of focussing on details like date and place of making. However, in the process he completely ignored the fact that the objects he presented were made by several different peoples and instead presented Africa as a homogenous unity.

Nevertheless, by repeating the importance of African art within a canon of art history that is not ruled by the classical idea of beauty but rather by formal aspects, Einstein's work constitutes an important step in the reception of African art. Expressionist artists saw their own ideas affirmed and art historians studied not only the differences between various styles from different countries and times but also their similarities. This way, African art came to occupy a new, more favourable position within the study of art and was not just presented as a faltering beginning.

Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the different approaches to African material and visual culture used by German scholars between 1894 and 1915. In particular it sought to bring together publications from the fields of ethnography, art history, philosophy and the popular press in order to gain an understanding of disciplinary peculiarities and investigate attitudes towards the notion of 'art' in general and especially African art. While previous studies have largely concentrated on single authors, institutions, disciplines or theories, this thesis aimed to give a fuller picture of the overall development of the reception of African art in Germany in the relevant period.

The sources and contextual evidence analysed show that at the turn of the 20th century German art historians were not just revising their existing methods and terminology but were also widening their scope. Scholars in the years between 1894 and 1915 had started to accept non-European as well as prehistoric art as part of their disciplinary domain. However, this early interest and acceptance did not constitute a pioneering beginning of what we would now call 'World Art Studies', but merely an early episode of testing disciplinary boundaries and experimenting with the possibilities of their field. After the disruption and destruction of the First World War - that took lives, shattered and changed political boundaries, drew an end of the German Empire and ruptured formerly strong bonds of a European scientific community - main stream art historical research turned back to more conventional research topics. The years between the wars saw the publication of some studies that approached non-European and prehistoric art within an art historical framework - for example Herbert Kühn's *Die Kunst der Primitiven* (1923) - but such publications did not foreshadow a decisive change in the scope of art historical writing but rather remained on the fringes of the discipline of art history, which in effect had reverted to its traditional constraints and concentrated mainly on European art.²⁴⁵ At the same time it became more specialised and exclusive, making the field of research into African art even smaller.

Despite the marginalisation of art historical work on Africa after the First World War and its complete discontinuation during the Second World War, the years between 1894 and 1915 are an important part of the historiography of African art. By concentrating on different approaches to African visual culture that formed the basis of a more

²⁴⁵ Ulrich Pfisterer, "Altamira - oder: Die Anfänge von Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft," in *Die Gärten von Capri: Vorträge aus dem Warburg-Haus*, ed. Martin Mosebach (Berlin: Akad.-Verl., 2007), 62-4.

comprehensive appraisal of existing collections and new acquisitions, this study considered how these approaches affected the general reception of African art. As has been shown, one can divide these approaches into two main positions; the developmental and the stylistic. Although many aspects of these positions remained ongoing discourses throughout time frame of the thesis and beyond, one notices that the most important art historical works - if one includes Grosse's work as a philosophy of art - changed from focussing on developmental notions to increasingly concentrate on style.

Before analysing these approaches it is worthwhile pointing out that it has been shown in the first chapter that the decades preceding the main time frame of this thesis were impacted by a great need to define events, disciplines and units. This began with the definition of Germany as a nation, unified in the 'revolution from above,' which led scholars, poets and artists from the different German states to explore what German-ness meant. Subsequently, modernisation and urbanisation changed German models of production and social life, and the importance of *Bildung* [education and self-edification] increased. As a result, the school and university systems were transformed to emphasise the natural sciences instead of the humanities and religious studies. Nevertheless, attendance at art history lectures and a good knowledge of basic art historical conventions and doctrines were still seen to be an important part of a well-rounded education. It is in particular this university education that sets German ethnographers apart from their colleagues from other countries. Having a good understanding of the history and science of art meant that ethnographers felt more secure in analysing non-European art through theories used in art history. This simple image analysis done by ethnographers, and their free use of the term 'art' when talking about non-European visual culture, facilitated the move to discuss these images as part of art historical research.

With a university education in philosophy, philology, history, art history and possibly ethnography, Ernst Grosse is a very good example of this *Bildungsbürgertum* and the importance attached to a well-rounded education. His work *Die Anfänge der Kunst* is the manifestation of early negotiations with non-European visual culture. He was adamant that a cooperation between ethnography and art history, that included non-European art, would lead scholars to find the underlying laws of art production. Within these underlying laws he saw non-European art as a mere beginning to what was to become the European practice of fine art. Ratzel, following Hegel's notion of beginning – one starting point of art at a specific time that develops into a multitude of different art forms through diffusion

–, and Bastian, following Herder’s notion of beginning – several starting points at different times and with different peoples – , used the collections in German museums purely to learn about the lives and culture of their makers. By considering aesthetics Grosse opened up a whole new way of looking at and studying them. While his own writings about the objects and peoples he discussed were ambivalent he made a first step towards a study of non-European art using art historical and aesthetic means. So, even though he failed to inspire contemporaneous researchers he did open many paths which were to be relevant for future research.

At first, these paths did not break free of developmental ideologies. Scholars like Frobenius included aesthetic considerations in their ethnographic writing, the ever popular *Völkerschauen* grew bigger and travelled further, and Social Darwinism gained followers. In this part of the thesis it became apparent that the approach to African visual culture as ‘art’ was initially accommodated within existing frameworks. This culminated in its inclusion in the canon of art developed by Woermann. His *Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* not only answered Grosse’s call for art historians to seriously consider non-European art, it also categorised different peoples according to Haeckel’s Social Darwinian scale of development. By integrating the art of prehistoric and non-European peoples into a survey text of all art – type of text that was immensely popular and stood in a long tradition of survey studies in Germany - Woermann made the objects accessible and understandable to a wider audience. However, at the same time he supported Social Darwinistic ideologies and highlighted racist stereotypes that proclaimed African peoples unable to produce art.

Only after these developmental considerations made it possible to include African art into the existing canon, did its study shift towards stylistic considerations. These stylistic approaches were first realised by a reappraisal of existing collections within Germany. In the course of this evaluation, collection politics were refined, specific groups of objects, like the Benin Bronzes, were singled out as particularly important, and theories concerning the production of art were devised. These collection-based notions supported attention to the psychology of both the maker and viewer of art within their appropriate cultural background. Worringer came to the conclusion that the opposite poles *Abstraktion* and *Einfühlung* are the inner force that have a bearing on the outer exercise - Riegl’s *Kunstwollen* - of the artwork. As such, Worringer’s study is the culmination of

this interest in psychological theories as well as the engagement with existing and expanding collections.

While Woermann was intrigued by the Benin Bronzes because of similarities to naturalistic styles of European art and their very high levels of skill, he was more interested in their differences. In fact, he excluded naturalistic works of non-Europeans from his studies as he thought of them not as art but as mere exercises of manual skills which he associated with a hunting life and thus found them lacking in the display of the *Kunstwollen*. So while for Woermann a higher grade of naturalism, and thus a style closer to European contemporary art, meant that he thought more highly of the foreign objects, for Worringer, non-European naturalistic objects were not art at all. This turn from praising naturalistic African art to disregarding it shows the ways in which European humanistic research was influenced by the growing popularisation of Social Darwinism.

Even though Worringer himself did not try to change ideas on social evolution as it applied to art but worked within the parameters given by the doctrine, his book became paramount in changing the reception of non-European objects from ethnographica, to the rudimentary beginnings of art and finally to art work. It was, in particular, Paul Ernst's interpretation of Worringer's book, which made it famous in the first place, that gave it its reputation as pioneering. At the same time that the comparison between non-European and European art had become common in art historical literature. Artists and scholars began concentrating on the formal aspects of African art and interpreting its pioneering role.

The influence of non-European art on German expressionists manifested itself in different ways with this thesis taking special notice of two different examples. The members of *Die Brücke* were trying to break free from the sober established art by aiming to produce an art that was as pure and direct an expression of feeling as non-European peoples were presumed to have created. On the other hand, Emil Nolde stayed true to his own style but used non-European objects to investigate the psychological connection between non-European peoples and himself. As with Worringer, the artists were intrigued by difference. However, unlike Worringer, they were equally interested in abstract and naturalistic non-European art and saw in them not primal forms but the purest form of art.

It was then Einstein's *Negerplastik* (1915) that combined the concentration on style and formal aspects with art historical writing. He was, like Worringer, interested in the

differences between established European art and non-European art but, unlike Worringer, he did not use the differences to revise a developmental model that runs from simple to complex and favoured European art. In fact, influenced by French primitivists, Einstein arguably turned this idea of superiority on its head and advocated the authority of African art. He did this, not by pointing to complexities but, by re-evaluating the ideals of art and promoting African art as its purest form of art. Despite justifying his praise of African forms through the connection with religion, Einstein's emphasis on the formal aspects of African art asserted that every style of art has its own unique value.

These different approaches to African visual culture have two things in common. They are engaging with African art and questioning the limitations of the discipline of art history at the same time. While ethnographers were happy to call African visual culture 'art' in a descriptive way, art historians were more reluctant, as they also applied value judgements and disciplinary conventions when using the term. The scholars analysed in detail have all dealt with this difference in diverse ways.

Grosse advocated the use of the same methods to analyse both non-European and European visual culture and emphasised the similarities he found between the two in terms of customs, traditions and objects. He did not successfully use art historical methods to analyse African art himself but he was able to arouse the interest of art historians in African art. Six years later, Woermann praised especially those non-European objects that were, in both style and technique, most similar to European traditions and made it easier for his readership to connect with them aesthetically. While his application of Haeckel's scale of different races is evidence of Woermann's Social Darwinistic attitude, his introduction of African Art into the canon of all art was the first of many that were to follow.

However, the favouring of European-looking non-European art changed after the turn of the century when the allure of the difference of these objects became prominent. Worringer's single minded views, configured to support an argument about abstraction and empathy rather than to promote knowledge of African, or non-European, art was still a gateway to allowing stylistic, as opposed to empirical, studies on African art. In the end, it was Einstein's idea of the self-contained cubic form that reversed contemporary ideas of African art. Nevertheless, Einstein's reversal of hierarchies was limited to art production and his choice of words revealed the influence on his thinking of earlier stereotypes of religious traditions and culture.

Even though Einstein's work was well received by a variety of different scholars, the changes after the First World War marginalised art historical study of non-European art and Einstein's book became, what it was known for when rediscovered, the manifesto of expressionist artists. As discussed, ethnographers had laid the basis for studying collections from Africa to learn about the culture that made them, but it was the aesthetic considerations of these philosophers and art historians that promoted the idea that the objects in ethnographic collections are relevant for art-historical research and should be seen as 'art.' These ideas were seen very differently by each of the authors, ranging from the notion of African art as a mere beginning of true art to elevating it as the only pure form of art. Nevertheless, each of the authors and each of their publications was an important step towards the integration of non-European art in general, and African art in particular, into a canon of art that is not solely defined by classical ideals of beauty. Even if this time before the First World War was destined to be a mere episode of World Art Studies and was discontinued for several decades before being taken up again more recently, it was still an episode of great change in the reception of African Art.

Ethnographers had used African art as a way to approach African peoples and their traditions long before. However, for most in Germany Africa remained an elusive place, known only vaguely in both popular writings and art history. While Grosse and Woermann started to talk about different areas and peoples of Africa it is still noticeable in their work that Africa was generally not seen as a continent with a myriad of different peoples and traditions that were all interconnected, constantly changing and possessed of a long history. Only once human zoos, panopticons, journalism and art history had brought Africa more into everyday life did the understanding of it as a continent and not an imaginary world grow more concrete and it became a place on the map, physically, culturally and historically.

This introduction of Africa as a place on the physical as well as the art historical map, in turn widened the meaning of the term 'art'. With the stylistic appraisal of African art at the beginning of the 20th century, 'art' came to encompass a more inclusive understanding of creativity. Worringer's and Einstein's studies were certainly an important step for art historical research; but, equally significantly, their attention to non-European art was also influential for European artists who worked more experimentally.

Furthermore, this thesis also facilitated the introduction and development of a new theoretical concept that has the potential for wide-spread applicability in the analysis of

other publications on visual culture. By applying theories drawn from translation studies this thesis has been able to show that the different scholars conveyed their various messages through a very particular use of language and images. They all adopted very positive art historical terms and language when they wanted to promote and praise; but they reverted to negative terms and language more often found in ethnographic accounts when talking about works that they held to be less important. Grosse often makes use of art-historical conventions when describing non-European visual culture but at the same time he calls their makers 'primitive' peoples. Both of these linguistic particularities highlight his aim of promoting an interrelation between ethnography and art history that, according to him, could be of mutual benefit to each other's methods and subjects.

Woermann spoke negatively about the Yoruba carved wood doors while he had nothing but praise for the cast bronze plaques and sculptures from Benin. In this way, it becomes clear that he favoured art works that his German readership could relate to, while objects that were too strange and unfamiliar were only regarded as interesting for cultural research. Worringer then changed this around, disregarding naturalistic art and speaking highly of ornamental and abstract non-European art in order to promote the validity of his theoretical pairing of abstraction and empathy. While Einstein was rather rigorous in the application of art historical language and descriptions, he still made use of more ethnographical terms when speaking about the connection between art and religion, which is a prominent feature of his formalist ideas.

Moreover, the authors' attitudes and agendas are evident in their use of images. Grosse's aim was to show his readers the value of art-historical analysis of non-European art by making use of images that underlined the artistic and aesthetic side of objects. Illustrations showing both simple, non-intricate graphics of carvings and cave paintings as well as more ornamental works emphasise his identification of these objects as the beginning of art. Woermann, on the other hand, was interested in survey rather than analysis. His presentation of the information he assembled is supported by a close connection that is evident between text and image. He adapted a variety of different images and printing techniques when representing different art styles. Here, it is not the quality of the illustration itself but the combination of text with illustration that is important in promoting Woermann's idea of evolution.

Worringer did not use any images. This may be due to the fact that his text was originally written as a doctoral thesis and images would have elevated printing costs

unnecessarily. Nevertheless, the lack of images in the publication also underlines the theoretical structure of the book which never refers to specific pieces but kept to generalities. The reader can potentially connect his text with any images that come to mind and made it possible for Ernst, for instance, to interpret it as a rallying call for change in European contemporary art practice. Einstein's use of images stands out from the rest. The appending of images without captions at the end of a text that does not refer to them was truly innovative and went against contemporary conventions. This lack of information about the objects illustrated highlighted Einstein's aim to promote a formal approach to aesthetics without overloading the reader with facts that he thought to be unimportant.

This thesis has been hindered by a lack of some archival sources - there is no surviving personal archive of Karl Woermann and many of the other scholars' archives, such as Wilhelm Worringer, Felix von Luschan or Leo Frobenius, focus on their later years. None the less, it has utilised the published sources in a way that made it possible to see the differences in approaches to, and analyses of, African art. Following the sources, the thesis describes the generalisations of the late 19th and early 20th century which refer to art from Africa as a whole rather than different cultures and characteristically use terms like 'non-European' or 'natural people.' A wider analysis of European approaches in the period to specific peoples' art – Eskimo, Oceanic, Asiatic etc. - is an interesting venture for future research that could not be realised here without losing our focus on the reception of African art particular to Germany. Another way to expand this research is to highlight the role of images within the textual sources. In order to present a concise and rounded argument, this thesis concentrated on the text itself and the relationship between text and image. However, the conventions of image composition and production in the different disciplines promises to be a fruitful venture for future projects.

Nevertheless, for the first time the scope of the present thesis has permitted an analysis of the changing reception of African art using theories from translation studies to analyse key ethnographic and art historical publications from the period 1894 to 1915. It has explored how studies from before the turn of the century were largely using developmental approaches whilst studies after the turn of the century increasingly moved towards stylistic approaches to study and translate African art. Moreover, it has been made evident that as the century went on, the inclusion of African art into German art

historical discourse widened the discipline's horizons and challenged the remit of earlier notions of 'art.'

Using different approaches to analyse publications from various disciplines and backgrounds this thesis has engaged with revisions in the reception of African art in Germany. It has become clear that earlier developmental attitudes towards African art were increasingly replaced by an attention to style which in turn led towards a formal appreciation of it.

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Visual translations of African art: A case study on the use of translation studies as a methodology for the reception of the Benin Bronzes in imperial Germany

Ethnography, the description of foreign peoples, was gradually replaced by ethnology, the science about them. The meek writing about and discussing of the foreign was no longer enough, in demand was the 'translation' of the described into the 'language' of one's own Culture. (Stelzig 2004)

The 'translation' into the 'language' of one's own culture, as Stelzig has termed the shift in German ethnography around the end of the nineteenth century, is at the core of this study. While the benefits of theories of translation in the exhibition of collections have been recognized in contemporary museology (Guillot 2014, Mack 2002, Nooter Roberts 2008), these theories will be used to approach historical writings in order to gain an understanding of the development of the reception of African art in particular. To take a closer look at how an analysis as such might be of interest the common understanding of two things has to be established:

- (1) Art historical and ethnographic writing are using language in order to convey a message. This message is the interpretation of an object, whether a painting, a sculpture or any other form of material culture. Thus, by using language, art historical as well as ethnographic writing is a linguistic act.
- (2) The Translator/Interpreter uses language to convey a message. This message is the interpretation/ translation of a written or verbal text in a language that differs from its own by time or space. Hence, by interpreting something and conveying it with language it is in effect a translation.

Following these two statements one may also call art historical and ethnographic writings linguistic acts of translation or, as is proposed here, of visual translation as it is conveying a message in written form that derives from interpreting a visual object and its meaning in co-text – from within the same string of signifiers [same text or image] - and context – from outside of this string of signifiers. Juliane House (2009) voiced her view on translation by saying that,

generally speaking, a translation is equivalent with its original if it has a function which is equivalent. The function of a text [...] consists of two components: an

interpersonal and an ideational one. These components reflect the undeniable fact that language has two basic uses: to transmit ideas and to link human beings with one another. (12)

Taking this statement into consideration, it becomes clear that verbal and visual translations do not work and function in the same way. A text, written about an object, does not have the same function as the object itself. While the object transmits ideas aesthetically and materially, the text only talks about these aesthetic or material qualities and is thus hardly able to convey the same interpersonal function as the artwork. Nevertheless, especially if the translation happens between different cultures, the text links human beings as the explanation of the 'visuaculture'¹ of the source culture is inscribed in the text.

The so-called Benin Bronzes were produced in a different country, of which little was known to the European public before 1897, they attracted enormous interest from many different parts of society – including popular media, ethnography and art history – and are still very well known today. They are ideally suited to be used as a case study in order to elaborate the proposed use of specific examples from the canon of translation studies. This study sets out to explore the merits of using such a methodology in the analysis of the historiography of art history and ethnography through this case study. By doing so this paper might seem to raise more questions than it can answer, but as a first step in the consideration of this use of translation studies, the generation of additional questions already represents a satisfactory result.

The Benin Bronzes

The last years of the 19th century were very significant for the popularity of ethnographic collections and museums in Germany. The acquisitiveness of German ethnographers drew them closer to a goal of accumulating a representative collection from all peoples of the world but also led to chaotic circumstances in the different museums. This was most noticeable in the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin, whose collection from Africa alone grew from 3,361 catalogued items in 1880 to 25,105 catalogued items in 1899 (Westphal-Hellbusch 1973, 15). When the first news of the Benin Bronzes reached German ethnographers the aim was to add as many of the finest specimens as possible to their collections.

After a British punitive expedition, in response to the so-called 'Benin Massacre', took over Benin City in 1897 they found a large number of brass and ivory works. Once these works were brought back to Britain the Foreign Office sold many of them by auction in order to pay for the large cost of the military action against Benin. German museums managed to

secure large numbers of these objects and through a number of supporters the collection in the *Völkerkundemuseum* in Berlin became the biggest in the world. As soon as they were exhibited in Germany, scholars as well as the popular press, voiced their curiosity and interest in these unusual objects and they quickly became a media sensation (Plankensteiner 2007, Husemann 2013).

Visual translation studies

In order to apply the methodology which is the subject of this essay to an ethnographical or art historical translation of visual culture we have to reconsider the three kinds of translation, described by the Czech structuralist Roman Jakobson ([1959] 2000). Jakobson's very influential concept is solely based on verbal signs and distinguishes between three different kinds of translation;

- (1) Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language;
- (2) Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; [and]
- (3) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. (114)

Implementing Jakobson's characteristics of linguistic translation for a study concerned with the translation of visual culture, it is necessary to re-examine the implications of these aspects. This study proposes that the three aspects of visual translation would read as follows:

- (1) Intraviscual translation or 'resymbolising' is an interpretation of visual signs by means of other signs of the same culture, for example the use of a Flag to symbolise a nation.
- (2) Interviscual translation is an interpretation of visual signs by means of signs from a different culture or time, for example the use of non-European symbols and objects in the paintings of European modernists.
- (3) Intersemiotic translation is an interpretation of visual signs by means of signs of non-visual sign systems, for example the written interpretation of art works by art historians.

The translation of the Benin Bronzes in Germany is part of the Intersemiotic translation in this proposed model as ethnographers and art historians used words in order to explain the meaning of the foreign visual signifiers. As a translation that happened between two very different cultures it is subject to the same power-relationship that has been discussed in post-colonial translation studies for some time now. As much as a translator of literary works holds the power to define character traits of the source culture in his translation, the ethnographers and art historians influenced their reader's attitude towards the source culture.

By choosing which objects to focus on, how to talk about them and what to say and to omit they held the power to present the source culture in a certain way. As the chosen case study is situated at a time during which so-called 'armchair-ethnography' was still practiced, it is important to note that the scholars interpreting the objects, just like their readers, did not know the 'source' culture first-hand but had only the information available to them from other ethnographic sources and travellers accounts.

Furthermore, Jakobson (2000, 114) uses Bertrand Russell's statement that "no one can understand the word 'cheese' unless he has a non-linguistic acquaintance with cheese" to argue the ways in which these translation theories can work interculturally. He argues that "in order to understand the word 'cheese'" one has only to have an "acquaintance with the meaning assigned to this word in the lexical code of English." In other words, even a person that never saw nor tasted cheese can understand the English word 'cheese' as long as he understands the concept of 'cheese' as a 'food made of processed curds.'

This example also works in visual translations. For someone to be able to understand the visual sign for 'cheese' - in England this could be a solid, square block in light yellow or orange representing cheddar cheese, whereas in Switzerland a piece of 'cheese' might be shown as a yellow triangle with one rounded side and holes in it, representing a piece of a wheel of Emmentaler cheese - one only has to be acquainted with the meaning of the visualisation of this 'food made from processed curds.' This visual sign is not only understandable for non-literate people but can also be part of a larger structure of signs. In literature this larger structure is a sentence and then a text whereas in visual culture this structure is a composition of an advertisement, a painting or a wood carving.

In the case of the Benin Bronzes this means that in order to understand the visual signs used, one does not have to be acquainted with the objects that are illustrated. For example to understand the visual sign for 'manilla' one does not have to have used a manilla as exchange value in order to buy products, but one does only have to know that these bronze rings were used as payment in the trade between Benin and Portugal. A U-shaped bronze ring could symbolize a lot of different things in different contexts, but in order to be able to read its meaning in Benin visual culture, one has to know that these manillas symbolised trading relationships and wealth.

While the people from Benin and the surrounding areas were able to understand this visual code just by looking at the object, European viewers needed a translation in order to grasp their significance. As was mentioned before, this translation is dependent on a very specific power relationship, in this case between a scholar and his subject. By analyzing the

ethnographic and art historic texts, with the tools of translation studies, it is possible to trace this power relationship. Moreover it is possible to distinguish when a specific text was written - a translation of the bronzes from the 19th century is different from one made today - and which disciplinary concepts influenced the translator - an ethnographic text on the bronzes is different to an art historical one. Tracing these specific traits in the different texts written on the Benin Bronzes at the turn of the 20th century gives a closer understanding of the development of the reception of these objects than already established methods in art history are able to.

Art history as a lingua franca

In a case study of the reception of Australian Aboriginal Art in Germany, Wilfried van Damme (2012) has noted the use of terms like ‘art’ and ‘artist’ to refer to non-European objects and their makers. He believes that ‘to find such views in a nineteenth-century context may well come as a surprise to some readers’ (135) and argues that these references are purely due to the attitude of Ernst Grosse, the author in question. While Grosse’s attitude towards non-European art was indeed favourable, this paper will emphasize the widespread use of these terms throughout German publications - contemporary to Grosse - on non-European art and suggest a cause for this general trend.

As in most parts of Europe, the nineteenth century beckoned many changes in the German territories. Beginning with the unification in 1871, modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation resulted in decades of prosperity for the German State. The *Bildungsbürgertum* [bourgeoisie or educated middle classes] was elevated to a higher status of more power which led to the foundation of universities all over the country. Belonging to an academic discourse on philosophy, the practice of art and academic drawing, art history was seen to be imperative to a well-rounded university education. Having just become an autonomous discipline in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, art history was still part of the general university syllabus (Dilly 1979, Prange 2004). As such, most of the members of this new *Bildungsbürgertum* would have taken art history classes at some point during their years at university and would hence be familiar with the language used to talk about art.

Hence, the university-educated ethnographers – who, for the lack of an autonomous academic discipline of ethnography until 1915, studied geography, zoology or medicine – took art history classes as part of their training and would thus be familiar with art historical methods and concepts. The argument is that when these ethnographers and the supporting individuals with editorial or publication roles were faced with non-European objects they fell

back onto art historical practices and language in order to make these objects accessible for their readership from the *Bildungsbürgertum*.

A visual example of these choices made by ethnographers and editorial staff is the two part article by Leo Frobenius dealing with the ornaments and sculptures of *Die Kunst der Naturvölker* [the art of natural peoples] (1895) published in Westermann's Monatshefte. The journal's front cover claims that it addresses "all of the intellectual life of the present" and thus fed into the ideal of self-edification that many journals in Germany at the time catered for. As a way to visually separate the individual articles and make links between thematically similar ones, the journal used ornaments to head the front page of each paper. Many of the often allegorical ornaments were intended for specific recurring sections of the journal. For example, the ornament depicting a woman, clothed in robes and a laurel wreath around her head, who holds a book in her left hand and appears to be reading to three putti on her feet, illustrated the novellas that were present in each issue. Here, the ornament of the allegorical instruments of the fine arts - architecture, sculpture and painting – which was used for articles about art and artists is of particular interest (Figure 1).

Interestingly, Compass, T-square and right angle as a sign of architecture; Palette, brushes and mahlstick as a sign for painting; and calipers, mallet and chisel as a sign for sculpture were, also used as ornaments for the decoration of the title page of the article by Frobenius. The inclusion of an article on non-European cultures is not surprising as the high interest in them at this time led to the publication of many such reports. However, the editorial decision to begin this article with the ornament reserved for reports on art and artists is worth emphasizing. While the title already describes the relevant objects as 'art', Frobenius stresses again and again that European art and the art of the 'natural peoples' – German scholarship distinguished between 'cultural peoples,' with a long lasting written history, and natural peoples, which were believed to have no history - is inherently different. In addition, even though none of the instruments in this allegory were used to produce the objects discussed and illustrated, these European objects nonetheless head an article on foreign objects. The exact circumstances of this choice cannot be reconstructed but it becomes visible that it underlines the ambiguous title; which at once strengthens the position of the discussed objects whilst also highlighting the difference between European and non-European art.

Moreover, this ornament appears on the same page as an image of poles from different parts of Africa that all have different uses and would also have different sizes in reality (Figure 2). By keeping the set with the breadth of the ornament and aligning the length of the poles the non-European objects not only conform to the ornament on top but also the

European convention of presenting images in journals in neat displays. However, these changes have not been mentioned in the image label nor the text, altering the reader's experience of the poles as well as making it possible to refer to connections between the objects that one would not see if faced with originally sized reproductions. Despite the different subject matter – allegories to the fine arts and poles from Africa – both images on the page appear as a square of imagery, read from left to right and are thus placed in relation to each other. The unity of the allegorical meaning of the ornament correlates to the poles that are therefore seen as one whole and not as individual objects. The objects themselves might stem from a distant culture but the image in which they are presented translates them to conform to European expectations.

By applying the idea of art history as a *lingua franca* it becomes clear that art historical processes and conventions in ethnographic writing were not just use out of convenience but for a specific reason. Art history and its literary devices were known by most members of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* and, as such, the ethnographers could be certain that their readership would be familiar, and possibly more at ease with, then when they embarked on translating these foreign objects. Hence, art history was the common ground between the ethnographer as translator, and the viewer and/or reader as their audience; only by highlighting this connection does it become clear that design choices, such as the selection of the ornament discussed above, were made in order to convey the meaning of these foreign objects to a native German reader.

Verbal-visual syntagm

The use of Robert Neather's notion of verbal-visual syntagm ties in with the publishing conventions mentioned in the section above. However, instead of looking at the source for the literary and visual conventions it concentrates on the relationship of image and text and how this relationship may influence the reader. Neather (2008) uses this theory to analyse translations within museums, mainly museums of applied arts with references to other museums, but the adaption for ethnographic and art historical writing, especially historic writing, appears to be seamless and fruitful. In his article, he refers to Mieke Bal, whose notion of the synecdochic and metaphoric reading of the museum environment is crucial for his ideas. Objects are either seen as synecdoches, "as part of a greater whole," or as metaphors, "standing for a particular aesthetic." (222) For example objects in an ethnographic museum are, as a symptom of their role as representative of a particular culture, only part of a greater whole and are thus a synecdoche for culture. Objects in art museums, in contrast, are

usually regarded for their aesthetic values and thus do not require the beholder to see them as part of the culture in which they were made.

Neather goes on to refer to Bal and her account of visiting a Czech ethnographic museum. Due to the lack of English translations of labels, Bal relied on a metaphoric reading of the exhibition, “resulting in a different response to that intended” (Neather 2008, 222). Applying these two modes and Bal’s experiences in the Czech museum to German ethnographic museums at the end of the 19th century it becomes clear that classification, translation and the transmission of ideas was not carried out in the exhibition space, which was overcrowded, highly unorganized and unlabelled (Penny 2002, 5). The museum exhibitions at this time could only result in metaphoric readings of the objects, leaving the synecdochic indexicalisation² to ethnographic writings in books and journals.

Furthermore, Neather (2008, 232) looks at the verbal-visual interaction of wall text and object/image within the museum space. He exemplifies this interaction on a set of photographs showing someone making a specific tea, only in connection to the text does the actual meaning of the photographs become apparent and the viewer is able to follow the process described in the images. Without the text, the viewer would be forced to read the photographs metaphorically, as explained by Bal. In terms of the historiography of writing about African art, this verbal-visual syntagm becomes increasingly interesting in texts published in the popular press.

When the *Illustrierte Zeitung* ("Die Bronzeschätze" 1897) published an article on the Benin Bronzes they reproduced several groups of objects that were captioned with very brief descriptions of the objects like “relief plaque with soldiers in full armour, on both sides bronze figures” (bottom right of Figure 3). However, the text accompanying these images mainly recounted the events of the Benin Massacre and the following Punitive Expedition of 1897. The descriptions of the reproduced bronzes are a little bit more detailed but do not give any explanation to the context in which these objects were made or their importance within the visuaculture of Benin. Although this article classifies the bronzes as objects from Benin, and hence they can be read synecdochically as belonging to a group, the affiliation with the Benin wars and their presence as war loot is stronger. Thus, underlying the metaphorical reading of the images and the weak verbal-visual syntagm, indexing is only partly possible as information like time of production; maker and medium are only incompletely given; with colonial political judgement.

In Neathers original work on museums, the application of verbal-visual syntagm permitted him to establish whether an exhibition and the used wall texts (original and translation) is

able to convey the message it set out to (for either language group). Utilizing the same method for historical European writing on non-European art enables one to reflect on similar points. As was demonstrated in the examples above, the information given in the text and its relation to the accompanying image can alter the reading of the image drastically. While the images themselves show the objects as culture by showing them in groups and, hence, minimize their aesthetic values, the text indexicalize them rather as war loot than as products of visual culture. Before giving another example of the way verbal-visual syntagm might be applied to writings on the Benin Bronzes another theory will be introduced that is equally important for the analysis of said example.

Foreignization and domestication

The last theory to be contemplated for its use in the analysis of the historiography of African art is Lawrence Venuti's (1995) notion of Foreignization and Domestication. The reception of the Benin Bronzes by application of this theory has already been discussed (Husemann 2013). However, the present paper does not focus on the reception itself but on the application of the theory, and is thus a useful addition to the existing paper. In accordance with the German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher, Venuti points out that Foreignization "leaves the author in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader towards him," Domestication, on the other hand "leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him." Hence, the translator can either chose to "register the linguistic and cultural difference" of the source and make this visible in his translation or he reduces the "foreign text to target-language cultural values" and, thus, heightens the intelligibility of the translation for his readers (19-20).

Nevertheless, Foreignization and Domestication are no binary opposites but "heuristic concepts [...] designed to promote thinking and research." "They possess a contingent variability, such that they can only be defined in the specific cultural situation in which a translation is made and works its effects." This, according to Venuti, means that the terms may change meaning across time and location. What does not change, however, is that Domestication and Foreignization deal with "the question of how much a translation assimilates a foreign text to the translating language and culture, and how much it rather signals the differences of that text" (Venuti 1995, 19). By analysing the shifting treatment of objects and their makers in publications, these two methods of translation make it possible to trace the development of the historiography of African art.

In particular, Venuti's notion aids to analyze the difference between the disciplinary conventions, of ethnography and art history, that the translations of the Benin Bronzes were

tied to and how the reception of the bronzes developed from popular, over ethnographic, to art historic publications. The knowledge of these changes makes it possible to connect the historical attitude towards the bronzes to further the development of their reception up to today's understanding of them and their collection history. In order to give an understanding of the application of these notions in praxis the following example will show how the different theories inform each other and build a comprehensive analysis of the historiography.

From ethnography to art history

Unlike the popular press, in the first scientific paper on the Benin Bronzes (von Luschan 1898), von Luschan did not directly draw on British accounts of the Benin Wars, merely stating that when the British captured Benin they found “a number of most curious art work, cast in bronze” (146). In his introduction, he already speaks about the bronzes as art works pointing out that “it is clear right from the beginning that a highly developed art like this did not just appear” (146). In general, von Luschan calls the bronzes “works of art” or “old Benin-Art.” Only when he talks about the illustrations of musical instruments on the bronzes - and, thus, refers to their ethnographic value - does he choose a term like pictorial work, rather freer from value judgement. By doing so, von Luschan clearly separates the parts in which he cites the bronzes as ethnographica from those in which he refers to their artistic value and importance outside the newly established science of ethnography. Von Luschan makes sure that, as the first article on this topic, it can be quoted from either perspective - while in the process refraining from classifying it as belonging to either domain.

The drawings of carvings from the tusks are only reproduced in outline within the text. The verbal-visual syntagm in this case is very strong, as the text directly refers to them and adds further information. For example, von Luschan points out that Fig. 3, the second from the right in the image shown here (Figure 4), shows a European leaning on “a badly misconceived sword” (von Luschan 1898, 157). Moreover, the images are used as synecdoches, as von Luschan points out that the “similar and more irregular misconceptions of arms and clothing of Europeans can be detected in many more carved tusks and single bronzes from Benin; they are especially noteworthy as they are very reliable proofs that these objects are the works of Negroes and not the works of Europeans” (157). Using the drawings in this particular way makes the originals stand as examples for the whole culture, they become a symptom of the culture and their aesthetic qualities become less important.

The reproductions of the bronzes, on the other hand, are separated from the text by several other articles as they can be found about 100 pages earlier in the volume (Figures 5 and 6). The text only refers to them in brackets right underneath the title and in a footnote to the

statement that most bronze plaques from Benin “depict Negroes” (von Luschan 1898, 146). The verbal-visual syntagm in this case is very weak as the only times the text actually refers to the existence of the plates, it does not even refer to all of them individually and also gives no explanation about them. Furthermore, the plates themselves do not refer back to the text, neither giving page numbers on where to find the accompanying text, nor citing the title of the accompanying text. The choice to reproduce photographs, of one page each, of these bronzes already implies that they were seen to be of a higher value than the tusks that were only reproduced in the drawings of outlines. While the reader/viewer can see these images in a synecdochic mode when he actively connects them to the descriptions of Benin culture in the text, the probability to read/see these images in a metaphoric mode is far more likely than with the tusks. Here, their cultural connection is limited by the editorial choices; instead these images can be more easily understood as standing for a particular aesthetic.

Moreover, von Luschan stresses that “the style of the artwork is just African, definitely and absolutely just African,” and that “in the majority of objects, the engraving is evenly executed which demonstrates a sophisticated sense of art.” He stresses the “African style” of the bronzes and highlights their real importance as being in the fact “that we discovered a native and monumental art for Benin of the 16th and 17th century at all.” He gives the credit of the style of the art as well as its production to the Edo themselves and vehemently contradicts any other explanations. Thereby he positively foreignizes the bronzes. Yet, he likewise domesticates them by comparing the work to European art, concluding that “at least single pieces are equal to contemporary European art and are executed with a technique that generally stands at the top of the accessible” (158). By adding that “especially opposed to the, in some colonial circle prevailing contempt against Negroes, this evidence also seems to have some kind of general and moral impact,” (153) he emphasises that in the light of discovering highly executed art works, like the Benin Bronzes, Europeans should reconsider their perspectives on other peoples, specifically those in Africa.

By calling the bronzes “works of art,” pointing to their “African style” and speaking of the “sense of art” of the producer, von Luschan uses art historical language as a lingua franca to explain the bronzes to his readers. As mentioned above, this way his article can be used by members from both disciplines but it also affects the non-academic reader in a particular way. Perpetuated by the weak verbal-visual syntagm of the text and the plates of the bronzes, this familiarity of the language paired with the unfamiliarity with the objects results in a domestication of their aesthetic and style. The source culture loses its power over the interpretation of its visual cultural which are translated to fit German cultural values on art.

Subsequently this initial translation resulted in the sparking interest in these objects by art historians. The first one to integrate the Benin Bronzes in a survey book on art was Karl Woermann (1900). He states that “of all the works of artistic castings amongst Negros, Benin stands at the top” (72). He goes on to analyse Benin commemorative heads saying that “The best of them especially the best one in the Museum in Berlin, show [...] an excellence of the casting that only the mature art of the cultural peoples can produce something of a similar kind” (72). This way, Woermann elevates the artistic quality of the bronzes while at the same time being able to imply that art from Benin is immature in contrast to art that is produced by the cultural peoples, ie Europeans.

When he indicates that it is not implausible that the bronze art came to Benin through the Portuguese in the 16th century, and continues: “But every glance at their produce shows that the Negroes appropriated and Africanized this art. [...] This bronze and brass casting technique then seems to have spread from Benin in the whole of Guinea, where it is still thriving, though, in a modified form.” (73) Woermann compiled his study on *the History of Art of All Times and Peoples* by referring to several ethnographic papers that would have mostly dealt with the bronzes within a similar art historical set up as himself. What is interesting however, is that Woermann is very careful to weaken the domestication he put in place, by integrating the bronzes in the volume, by emphasizing their foreignness as an “Africanized” (73) continuation of a European tradition of art.

Part of Woermanns discussion of the Benin Bronzes is the reproduction of a photograph of a bronze plaque from the collection of the books publisher, Hans Meyer (Figure 7). The plaque is shown on a neutral background – all the images, whether non-European, classic or European, are either in front of a white or a black background – with a single piece being chosen to represent the whole group of objects. While this particular plaque may well have been chosen because it was in the collection of the publisher, the fact that the non-European objects are presented in the same way as the European ones, and not in groups as was done in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*, organizes them to be of equal importance for the study of art.

The caption reads “bronze plaque from Benin. After photography. Accompanying text, p. 72” (73) while the text refers back to the image by adding the page number in brackets. Moreover, he describes the subject of the different plaques (of which about 300 reached Europe in 1897) and relates his general account to the reproduction; “the humans, short legged and long bodied [...] depict partly Europeans [...] partly negroes, these most fully clothed and armoured, as the pictured piece [...] shows” (72). The verbal-visual syntagm is very strong and the descriptive tone of the text itself emphasizes the scientific interest of the

author. Although, the text might indexalize the bronzes as part of the history of art, he makes sure not to use terms like *Kunstwerk* [artwork] but chose to apply the less value laden term of *Bildwerk* [pictorial work] to refer to all non-European objects. This shows, that while the ethnographers used art historical language as a lingua franca to make their work accessible, the first art historian to analyze the same objects was very careful to avoid using the same terms he did for European art.

As can be seen in this short example, the way the source culture is presented in the text affects whether their material and visual products are regarded as barbaric fetishes –shown in the example of the article in the *Illustrierte Zeitung* – as ethnographica – shown in the drawings taken from carved ivory tusks in von Luschans article – as important pieces of non-European art to be contemplated as single objects rather than as a whole – shown in the treatment of the bronzes in von Luschans text – or as a type of (pre)historical art that can inform art historical studies. While early popular accounts of the ‘discovery’ of the Benin Bronzes indexicalised them as war loot of the colonial struggle for Africa, ethnographers, like Felix von Luschan, slowly introduced the term ‘art,’ first to the Benin Bronzes and then to the wider context of ethnographic objects of artistic value. Their inclusion in an art survey text then fully integrated them as part of the history of art as the domesticated translations of (pre)historic art practice.

Conclusion

This paper set out to show that the term translation cannot only be used to express disciplinary development in German ethnography at the end of the nineteenth century, as was done by Stelzig (2004, 19), from the description of non-European objects to their translation is not just a metaphoric way to illustrate the new importance that was laid on explaining the foreign objects to a native German readership. Instead, translation and, more importantly, theories surrounding translation give an additional insight into the way scholars of ethnography and art history have dealt with these objects.

Only by applying the notion of a lingua franca, which has been used by ethnographers to make the foreign objects accessible to a German public, is it possible to explain the use of art historical conventions and the terms ‘works of art’ or ‘old Benin art’ in German ethnographic writing of the time. Only by applying the notion of verbal-visual syntagm and synecdochic and metaphoric readings of visual culture does it become apparent that the ethnographers had to change the perception of the public who had previously been familiar with the indexicalization of the bronzes as war loot and fetishes. The ethnographer, thus, reindexicalizing the bronzes as part of the culture they were made in, by using art historical

processes and terms in order to be able to convey their message successfully. And only by applying the notion of foreignization and domestication does it become apparent how the negative foreignization of the popular press had to be actively moderated by the ethnographers by overly domesticating the objects into a European pictorial programme. This over-familiarisation of the ethnographers was then contrasted by the art historians who did see the value of researching these bronzes but were more cautious in their assimilation in the canon of art history and instead acknowledged their position as a sort of (pre)history of art.

While it was only possible to concentrate on three specific theories, this study is meant to open the discussion on the application of these methodologies and their usefulness to the field of the historiography of visual culture communication. The possibilities for new enquiries are extensive and the research would be fruitful and revealing.

Notes

1. The term visuaculture is appropriated from Michael Agar's use of the term languaculture (2010) meaning the established conventions that arise from the literary output of a people.
2. Indexicalisation can be understood as placing something into a concrete or theoretical framework, either consciously or unconsciously. The synecdochic indexicalisation, referred to here, means that it is only the ethnographic writings that allow the viewer to perceive the displayed object as representative of the culture that produced it.

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Figures

Figure 1. Ornament heading articles on art in *Westermann's Monatshefte*.

Figure 2. Front page of *Die Kunst der Naturvölker* by Leo Frobenius.

Figure 3. Article on the Benin Bronzes in *Illustrierte Zeitung*.

Figure 4. Illustrations of ivory carvings as they appear in von Luschan's article on the Benin Bronzes.

Figure 5. Illustration of two bronze leopards as they appears on a single page.

Figure 6. Illustration of a bronze plaque as it appears on a single page.

Figure 7. Illustration of a Bronze Plaque taken from *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller Zeiten und Völker* by Karl Woermann.

Golf in the City of Blood: the Translation of the Benin Bronzes in 19th Century Britain and Germany

Manuela Husemann

Sir,—Foreigners have often been known to state that wherever an Englishman wanders in distant parts of the globe, the safety-valve to his excessive vitality must be appealed by knocking about a ball in some form or other. Now, few people reading their morning papers three months ago at home, with the horrors of city so graphically depicted, would have conjectured that within four weeks of the final charge on the city walls, the ringing sound of the cleek and the call of "Fore!" would be heard resounding in the same sanguinary vicinity. Such was the case, however, a good nine-hole course (which would compare very favourably with many British inland courses) being at that time in full swing and working order.

[...]

The chief drawback we found on first starting was the huge quantity of human skulls and bones which littered the course ; and, sad as it is to state, our best green happens to have been made on the turf immediately beneath a tree known as the "crucifixion tree," on which many a poor slave breathed his last.

I am, Sir, &c,

Benin City, West Africa,

C. H. P. C.

April 18th. 1897.¹

This letter, originally headed *Golf in 'the City of Blood,'* was written by an officer stationed in Benin City. It does not just provide an interesting title for this paper, but it additionally gives

¹ Friday June the 18th 1897 *Golf: A Weekly Record of Ye Royal and Ancient Game*, p. 295; Issue 362.

an idea about the way Britain viewed its colonies at the end of the 19th century. After Britain took over Benin on the 18th of February 1897, the punitive expedition was not only regarded as a portrayal and success of British colonial power, but also as the justified punishment of ‘uncivilized savages’ that ‘cruelly slaughtered’ a British expedition only one month before.² Accordingly, the British press and public became increasingly interested in the Kingdom of Benin in West Africa. But the interest in the City of Benin and its culture did not subside after the events of the expeditions had been described and repeated extensively.³ The immediate press coverage of the expeditions in Britain has already been discussed by Coombes (1994), this paper will address the latter period of Benin's public and academic reception which has not been done before.

After months of accounts of the savageness of the Edo, the people of Benin, the arrival of the so-called Benin bronzes⁴ puzzled ethnographic museums scientific publications and the public press in Europe. This paper examines the reception history of the bronzes in Britain and Germany between 1897 and 1901. In just these few years the reputation of the Benin bronzes was changed from war booty, to scientific objects, and finally to works of primitive art.⁵ Furthermore, it presents translation studies as a means to examine how ethnographers

² A British expedition which was supposed to renegotiate trading commitments was struck down on their advance to Benin City. After what came to be known as the Benin Massacre, the British Foreign Office quickly send a punitive expedition to take over the City and dispossess their leader. For more detailed accounts on these expeditions, see (Igbofe 1982; Collings 1982; Ryder 1969; Barley 2010).

³ For a thorough analysis of Benin history, social life and customs, see (Bradbury 1973).

⁴ Throughout this study the castings from Benin are referred to by the generic term ‘bronzes,’ though it needs to be said that a variety of different alloys, including copper, tin and lead, had been used in different quantities. This use of different alloys is important for the dating of single bronze pieces, see Picton (2012).

⁵ A good example of the popular imagination with regard to the ‘primitive’ and the discrepancies to the qualities of their artistic works is Fry (1937).

and art historians represented the other by describing their visual culture. By doing so, this study assesses the importance of the ethnographers' writings and the extent of their international collaboration on the development of the notion of 'primitive art.'⁶

Cultural translation studies

In *Representing Others*, Sturge mentions the 'metaphorical uses of the word "translation," which sometimes proliferates as a general label for any kind of mediation, change, or confrontation with difference' (2007: 13). While the benefits of the use of translation theory in the contemporary ethnographic museum practice is widely acknowledged (Neather 2008; Sturge 2007), this paper extends the metaphorical use of translation in order to use its theories as methodological tools in the approach of historic ethnographic and art historical writing.

By studying and mediating a people, including not only their language but also their customs, as well as their material and visual culture and their relationships to other peoples, the contemporary anthropologist makes a culture accessible, through his or her translation, to another culture that inhabits a different space and sometimes even a different time.⁷ This was similar in the 19th century, though fieldwork was not as commonly exercised and the study of 'primitive' peoples was more concentrated on their material culture than their language.⁸

⁶ Several studies have been published that mention this development in other contexts, see for example Caygill and Cherry (1997).

⁷ Fabian (1983) discusses the notion of the ethnographic present and the problems it conjures for the histories in anthropological research.

⁸ None of the ethnographers featured in this study had been to Benin their knowledge of the City and its inhabitants was acquired from eye-witness accounts of officers, traders and other officials, and from the study of material that their museums acquired after the punitive expedition.

Nevertheless, it was the ethnographer's task to explain the frequently used, and mostly unfamiliar, signs featured in the objects, sufficiently for his readership to understand the message. To do so, he had to be able to or, in the case of the 19th century ethnographer, try to decode the message of these visual signs and mediate their meaning verbally. As part of this action he could select which objects of his collection to concentrate on and how much information to give. Moreover, it was his descriptions and choice of words that would determine whether a piece of non-European visual culture was seen in a positive or negative light by his readers.

Today, cultural translation studies are more concerned with the translation as it happens within the space of the ethnographic museum (for example House 2005; Neather 2008; Ravelli 2006). Scholarly articles in specialised journals are written for academics as part of an intellectual discourse, while museum displays, and in most cases their associated catalogues, are mainly constructed for the public. But ethnographers in the 19th century were largely unconcerned about the public; museums were not a place for a general public to be educated, but a place for an already Educated public to be able to study a collection and arrive at their own judgements and associations.⁹

One of the theories of translation studies that can be of use for this kind of historical study is Venuti's translation strategies of domestication and foreignization, a theory that further engages with the role of the translator in the reception of a foreign culture in the European coloniser's home country. In his 1995 book, *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti states that the invisible translator is an illusion created, as a result of the Western reviewers and readers expectation of reading a fluent version of a text without any, for them cultural, stylistic and linguistic peculiarities. Venuti emphasizes that 'a fluent translation is

⁹ For example, see Penny's (2002: 147-148) discussion on the introduction of *Schausammlungen* and the ethnographers reactions to it.

immediately recognizable and intelligible, "familiarised," domesticated, not "disconcerting(ly)" foreign' (Venuti 1995: 5).

The meaning of a text, as well as of an image, is firmly rooted in the culture that envisioned it. As Derrida argues, 'meaning is an effect of relations and differences among signifiers along a potentially endless chain,' as in a text or in an image, 'it is always differential and deferred, never present as an original unity' (quoted by Venuti 1995: 17). These relations and differences are original to the culture and historical period in which the text or image was produced. By replacing the chain of signifiers with a different chain of signifiers, whether linguistically or visually, the translator determines the meaning of the foreign text or image as he or she understands it, under their specific social circumstances and in their historical period. Like any other interpretation, this process is governed by pre-existing notions of superiority and inferiority, which, especially within the relationship between coloniser and colonised, determine its outcome. The translator provides his audience with a text or image that is intelligible in their culture, by interchanging the unique cultural, linguistic, and visual features of the source, but 'risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text' (Venuti 1995: 18).

Venuti's notion of the invisibility of the translator is an important part of two differing strategies of translation; foreignization and domestication. In the words of Schleiermacher, foreignization 'leaves the author in peace, as much as possible and moves the reader towards him,' domestication, on the other hand 'leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him' (Venuti 1995: 19-20) Hence, the translator can either chose to 'register the linguistic and cultural difference' of the source and make this visible in his translation or he reduces the 'foreign text to target-language cultural values' and, thus, heightens the intelligibility of the translation for his readers (Venuti 1995: 19-20).

Domesticating the foreign

With regard to the reception of the Benin bronzes it is possible to trace the development of their introduction into art historical research by applying Venuti's method. Even though there are no strict limits between the two aspects it is still possible to trace foreignization and domestication efforts in the discourse on the Benin bronzes in the first years after their arrival in Europe. Ethnographers as well as authors of popular texts, like the letter published in *Golf*, first foreignized the culture of the Edo. In a particularly violent form they stressed the differences to present the Edo as savages (for examples see Coombes 1994). Once the Benin bronzes came to Europe, and their artistic value was determined, ethnographers and art historians started to lay emphasis on influences from, and similarities to, European art, thus, domesticating the casting technique and the visual qualities in order to elevate the bronzes to the discussion of art.

While *Golf in 'the City of Blood'* does not mention the Benin bronzes, its topic and language are a part of the ambivalent reception of Edo people and culture. On the one hand, the author argues that 'the chief drawback [...] was the huge quantity of human skulls and bones which littered the course,' (*Golf* 1897: 295) and thus foreignizes the Edo as savages. On the other hand, by describing this 'good nine-hole course [...] (which would compare very favourably with many British inland courses)' (*Golf* 1897: 295) it is also possible to trace the domestication of the space of the city itself. In this case, the domestication was not used to promote Edo culture as worthy of contemplation, but to promote British colonialism and its civilising mission.

Generally, the publications of the first few months after the Benin Expedition struggled between highlighting the Edo as savages and pointing out the differences between Edo and European culture, and admiring the highly developed bronze art, which in the 19th century

was regarded as an index of civilisation.¹⁰ This is why the foreignization efforts, prior to the admittance that the bronzes and their design were indeed made by the Edo, are torn between the highlighting of the excellence of the work and the connection of the bronzes to so-called primitive rites.¹¹ At this time, foreignization is not used, as intended by Venuti, to promote cultural differences that are unique to the source culture and might enrich the target culture. Instead, various examples show that it is rather used to stress the savageness of Edo culture.¹²

Alan Boisragon, a survivor of the so-called Benin Massacre as well as a part of the Benin Expedition, gives his account of the Benin Wars and the horrors he had seen in his book *The Benin Massacre* (1897). By stating that in the City of Benin were 'sacrificial altars, on which were placed the gods - carved ivory tusks, standing upright, on hideous bronze heads,' (1897: 186-187) he irrevocably connects the bronzes and ivories with 'primitive beliefs,' stressing their difference from European religious art and civilised beliefs. This foreignization is even further increased when he explains that 'in front of each ivory god was a small earthen mound on which the wretched victim's forehead was placed' and that 'when the expedition took Benin City they found these altars covered with streams of dried human blood, the stench of which was too awful, the whole grass portion of the Compounds simply reeking with it' (Boisragon 1897: 186-87).¹³

¹⁰ Darwin (1871) and Haeckel (1868) both refer to the arts as a part of cultural evolution.

¹¹ Newspapers where this struggle is noticeable are for example *St. Paul's* (24, 31 July 1897), *Illustrierte Zeitung* (26 May 1898).

¹² Newspapers and books where this kind of negative foreignization is visible are for example Bacon (1897), Boisragon (1897), *The Illustrated London News* (17 March 1897).

¹³ This find of hundreds of dead bodies is in fact due to two distinct reasons. On the one hand, less important people and slaves were not given a proper burial, but laid to rest in the 'bad-bush' outside of the city (Igbofe 1979: 71) and on the other hand, a mass sacrifice of people captured during the 'massacre' is thought to have been a last desperate attempt to ward off the imminent invasion (Collings 1982: 103). Indeed, the sight of post-war Benin

By February 1898 Henry Ogg Forbes, a botanist and consulting director of the Mayer Museum in Liverpool, published his paper *On a Collection of Cast-Metal Work of High Artistic Value From Benin*. In this essay he focuses on ‘the wonderful technical art displayed in [the bronzes] construction, their profuse ornamentation, and the high artistic excellence of nearly all of them, [which] quite astonished students of west African ethnology, as the product of that, now, at all events, more, than less barbarous region in the Niger Delta’ (Forbes 1898: 49). He introduces his article by giving a report of ‘the barbarous massacre,’ and the subsequent ‘Punitive Expedition [...] to bring to account the perpetrators of this terrible outrage’ (Forbes 1898: 49).

In his title Forbes calls the bronzes cast-metal work, but the termination bronzes which stands for a certain nobility and value, and already highlights them as important, has been used from a very early date onwards. Forbes’ title juxtaposes the more neutral ‘cast-metal work’ and the judgement that they are of ‘high artistic value.’ At the same time he opens the article with the events of the Benin Wars which emphasizes the bronzes presence in Europe as the spoils of war. This contrast of different significances foreignizes the bronzes by implying that the artistic value is only imminent because of their status as war booty.

Moreover, Forbes, as many other ethnographers at the time, was very rigorous in advocating the savageness of the Edo by quoting from a book by Reginald Hugh Spencer Bacon (1897), and his private letters, as trustworthy eye-witness accounts. He makes sure that his readers understand that the Edo are situated much lower on the evolutionary scale than

must have been horrific and the ways in which the officers and press reported about it might be interpreted as an attempt to distance the coloniser from the realisation that in the not so distant past, London, Paris and the like had themselves been the sight of public executions and that the River Thames was effectively a running sewer.

Europeans: 'I do not believe in any of the figures being gods of the Beni;¹⁴ nor do I believe they were far enough advanced to worship any person or figure' (Forbes 1898: 57). Forbes, further emphasizes his distrust of the idea that the Edo were capable of producing civilised art by suggesting that the bronzes might have been 'the spoils of some campaign,' or that 'the city may have been of Abyssinian or even Egyptian influences [...] but that, through intercourse with the low coast tribes, they became demoralised and gradually degenerated into their present low civilisation' (Forbes: 1898: 71).

The only time Forbes uses vocabulary traditionally used for European art, is when he suggests that the origins of the bronzes lay in Europe itself: 'The mystery that surrounds the makers of these wonderful art works [...] cannot be resolved by the data we as yet possess. The probability is that art may have been brought to the west coast hinterland by some European trader, prisoner, or resident, [...] and the art may have flourished only during the lifetime, or residence there, of these artificers, or for only a short time after their departure' (Forbes 1898: 69). In this passage Forbes attempts to domesticate the bronzes by indicating that they might be of European heritage, while portraying the Edo as the ultimate other to European civilisation.

C. H. Read and O. M. Dalton at the British Museum pointed out that they were 'puzzled to account for so highly developed an art among a race so entirely barbarous as were the Bini' (Read and Dalton 1898: 371). Their paper *Works of Art from Benin City*, given at the Royal Anthropological Institute at the 6th of November 1897, was later published as the first scientific article on the Benin bronzes. They stress the status of otherness of the Edo by declaring that they were 'cowards, and second-rate fighting-men' (Read and Dalton 1897: 369).

¹⁴ While Edo is the name of the wider language and culture of the people living in the area around the Benin Kingdom, the Beni, or Bini, are the people of Benin City itself.

But while Read and Dalton foreignize the Edo they also begin to domesticate their art by comparing its technique to those of the Italian Renaissance, which in the 19th century was still seen as the pinnacle of European art. According to them ‘this cire-perdue¹⁵ process is that by which many of the finest Italian bronzes of the best period were produced’ (Read and Dalton 1897: 372). However, at the same time they cannot escape pointing out the contradiction as ‘we thus find the Benin savages using with familiarity and success a complicated method which satisfied the fastidious eye of the best artists of the Italian Renaissance’ (Read and Dalton 1898: 372). What is most significant in this study is that they decided to title this article *Works of Art from Benin City*, and they constantly refer to the bronzes as works of art.¹⁶ They give the reason for calling the bronzes works of art themselves, by saying: ‘Men perhaps in some cases possessing mechanical skill, who, like [...] some Portuguese craftsmen in Dahomey two centuries later, would have been highly appreciated at the native court’ (Read and Dalton 1898: 364). They suggest that the bronzes might not have been made by the Edo, or at least that the technique might have come from Europe.

In Germany at this time, Felix von Luschan, keeper of the Department of Africa and Oceania at the Völkerkundemuseum in Berlin, published the first German scientific paper on the Benin bronzes. In *Antiquities from Benin* von Luschan generally calls the bronzes ‘works of art’ or ‘old Benin-Art’ (von Luschan: 1898). Only when he talks about the illustrations of musical instruments on the bronzes - and, thus, refers to their ethnographic value - does he choose a term like pictorial work, rather freer from value judgement. By doing so, von

¹⁵ This is also known as the lost wax process, recently it has been discussed in the exhibition *Bronze*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 15 September - 9 December 2012 (Ekserdjian 2012).

¹⁶ Only a few months later Dalton published an article titled *Booty from Benin* (1898) in which he painstakingly avoids to use the phrase ‘works of art’ in describing the bronzes, just as in any subsequent publication by these two employees of the British Museum.

Luschan clearly separates the parts in which he cites the bronzes as ethnographica from those in which he refers to their artistic value and importance outside of the newly established science of ethnography. Von Luschan makes sure that, as the first article on this topic, it can be quoted from either perspective - while in the process refraining from classifying it as belonging to either domain. It is important to note here that these domains were not as clearly defined as they are today and that most scholars worked in academia as a whole. Nevertheless, most scholars also affiliated themselves with a particular discipline, even if the boundaries were vague.¹⁷

Moreover, von Luschan stresses the 'African style' (von Luschan 1898: 149) of the bronzes and highlights their real importance as being in the fact 'that we discovered a native and monumental art for Benin of the 16th and 17th century at all' (1898: 153). He gives the credit of the style of the art as well as its production to the Edo themselves and vehemently contradicts any other explanations. Thereby he positively foreignizes the bronzes. Yet, he likewise domesticates them by comparing the work to European art, concluding that 'at least single pieces are equal to contemporary European art and are executed with a technique that generally stands at the top of the accessible' (von Luschan: 153). In von Luschan's opinion, it is 'already entirely obvious' that 'this is actually native art and that the now available Benin bronzes were designed and executed by African Negroes' (von Luschan: 153). He adds that 'especially opposed to the, in some colonial circles prevailing, contempt against Negroes, this evidence also seems to have some kind of general and moral impact' (von Luschan: 153). Thus von Luschan emphasizes that in the light of discovering a highly executed art work, like the Benin bronzes, Europeans should reconsider their perspectives on other peoples.

¹⁷ This holds especially true for German scholars, as the internal institutionalization of the circle of physical anthropologists was quite organized (Massin 1996: 84) and Karl Woermann constantly referred to himself as an art scientist (Woermann 1924).

The official publication of the British Museum, *Antiquities from the City of Benin*, denied the Benin bronzes a status as art in its title, but granted them the privilege of an extensive study published as an expensive book, including 32 tables printed in high quality on a canvas mix. Read and Dalton incorporated the Edo's own history and customs on the first couple of pages and did not start, as many others did at this time, with the beginning of European trading relations, or the massacre and the Punitive Expedition. While Read and Dalton did not use the term art and referred to the bronzes as primitive art, which can be argued as closer to the idea of 'primitive craft' than a western notion of art, they likewise granted them the connotation of antiquities. Although, antiquities are not as valued as art,¹⁸ an ambiguity but not a contradiction, this term still has positive associations and places the bronzes on a par with important ancient objects. All of the curatorial departments in the British Museum were and still are called the antiquities departments; thus, the Benin bronzes were classified as of a status with other collections in the museum but separated from European high art by calling them primitive.¹⁹

Nevertheless, when they are speaking about possible European influences they point out that 'it is strange that [...] no single piece has occurred that can be attributed to [the Edo's] European teachers. It was to be expected that the Portuguese brass founders, in teaching their native pupils, would have produced models of their own, and that these would have survived, if indeed they had not been among the most valued possessions of the king' (Read and Dalton 1899: 19). Stating that European models would most probably have been 'among the most valued possessions of the king' (Read and Dalton 1899: 19), points towards the

¹⁸ Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary defines antiquity as: 'A relic or monument of ancient times; as, a coin, a statue, etc.' (1913: 66) and art as: 'The application of skill to the production of the beautiful by imitation or design, or an occupation in which skill is so employed, as in painting and sculpture; one of the fine arts' (1913: 85).

¹⁹ As an example of similar conclusions, see Mack's book on Emil Torday (1990).

difference between European high art and native art: its value. By establishing the teacher - pupil relationship between the 'Portuguese brass founders' and the natives, Read and Dalton, assert the European civilising mission, yet they also domesticate Edo art practice by comparing it with European art academies. Dalton's remark that 'Benin enjoyed an artistic renaissance, of which these bronzes are the evidence' (Dalton 1898: 428), adds to the domestication of Edo art practice by applying the vocabulary of European historical tradition to it.

The tendency of the debate on the Benin bronzes to shift back-and-forth between attitudes of domestication and foreignization, whether positive or negative, slowly faded out as the new century beckoned. This is most visible in von Luschan's paper at the VII Congress of Geographers (von Luschan: 1899) which marks the beginning of a general domestication of Benin art fully promoting the artistic value of the bronzes. Von Luschan points out Benin's long standing trade relations with African and European countries and stresses that they cannot be seen as 'from every kind of foreign culture completely unsoiled children of nature' (von Luschan 1899: 611). In this way, he includes Benin art in a global history of traditions and influences. Moreover, by his efforts to promote the view that 'you cannot regard and treat Negros as 'savages'' and 'that the culture of the so-called 'savages' is not a worse one, but only a different one to ours,' he undermines the branding of 'primitive' (von Luschan 1899: 612) This can be seen as an act of domestication of the Benin bronzes, as in order to elevate the bronzes to art, the description of their makers as savages had to be negated.

Art historical interest

While ethnographers were actively translating the bronzes into a domesticated version of art, art historians in both countries became interested in their artistic value. However, as far as it is possible to distinguish the disciplinary affiliations, it is notable that while ethnographers justified calling the bronzes art, the art historians had to justify their interest in the bronzes. In

December 1898, *The Studio*, a magazine for fine and decorative art which though published in England had a European readership, included a paper on the Benin Bronzes. *Primitive Art from Benin* was written by the anthropologist and museologist Henry Ling Roth (1898a), whose book *Great Benin: Its Customs Art and Horrors* (1903) became one of the most popular books on Benin at the time, and remains a still widely consulted text by laymen and scholars alike.

How and why the collaboration between anthropologist and art magazine came about is not known, but the fact that it did implicates two very distinct features: The art historical interest in the bronzes shown by the article appearing in *The Studio*; and the fact that it is not written by a conventional art historian, but by an anthropologist indicates Roth's and the editors caution of not placing the bronzes too affirmatively into the art historical discourse as it existed at the time. Unlike most articles on the bronzes at this time, including his own *Notes on Benin Art* (Roth 1898b) from just five month earlier, Roth does not mention the Benin Wars in this study. Furthermore, he does not use other particularising features, like the discussion of Benin's geographical position, its culture or its customs. Nevertheless, while refraining from giving native accounts of Edo history, as Read and Dalton did, he does mention an account from 1746 by David van Nyendael, a Dutch traveller (Roth 1898: 174).

For the publication in *The Studio*, Roth also changed his approach to the bronzes from those of his other publications. This is evident in the terms he used for the bronzes: While in his earlier article as well as in his book, he used the term art on its own, in the title of *The Studio* commentary he refers to it as primitive art or decorative art throughout the article. Moreover, he frequently refers to the decorative qualities of the iconographic elements in the bronzes rather than their possible metaphoric or symbolic meanings. Thus, according to him 'animals such as catfishes, snakes, etc. are continually met with as decorative adjuncts apparently quite apart from their fetish or symbolic value' (1898a: 179).

When discussing an ivory armlet, which served as an example for various pieces of jewellery made in ivory and bronze, Roth notes that ‘the whole shows rather fertility on the part of the artist in planning a difficult piece, and consummate skill in the elaboration than any beauty in design; it is, nevertheless, a piece of work which, for the ingenuity displayed in its production, cannot fail to be admired’ (1898a: 181). But when discussing foreign elements, as he claims feature in many artworks, he adds that ‘part of these elements consist of European forms which the native mind, so prone to copy, has not failed to hand down to us’ (Roth 1898a: 184). He is, thus, acknowledging the Edo to be skilled craftsmen but at the same time indicating that they either copy European designs - or their art does not show any beauty in design at all. The fact that an art magazine, concerned with the European concept of fine and decorative art, decided to publish this article is a further step towards the domestication of the bronzes. But it is also anxious to point out that any similarities to European art and design stem from a common origin, a European origin.

As far as it is possible to distinguish between the different scholarly fields the first art historian to write about the Benin bronzes was Karl Woermann, the director of the Picture Gallery in Dresden. According to a review by Henry Thode (1900), Woermann was the first within his discipline to include the art of the *Ur- und Naturvölker* (primal and natural peoples) in an extensive study of art.²⁰ Peculiarly, while he was the first art historian to write about the Benin bronzes he was also one of the strongest representatives of Social Darwinism (Hawkins 1997) writing on this topic. The first volume of *Die Geschichte der Kunst aller*

²⁰ One very important earlier study on the Art of non-European peoples is Ernst Grosse’s *Die Anfänge der Kunst* (1894) However, Grosse was an anthropologist and the mere fact that, as the review (Thode, 1900: 485) suggests, that it was in the consciousness of the people at the time that it was in fact, Woermann, who was the first to publish such a study. I’m very sorry, but could you please add at the end of this footnote: For a study on Ernst Grosse’s work see van Damme (2010).

Zeiten und Völker -The History of art of all Times and Peoples-, is titled *Die Kunst der vor- und außerchristlichen Völker -The art of the pre- and non-Christian peoples-* (Woermann 1900). Here, Woermann distinguishes between *Naturvölker* (primal or natural people) and *Halbculturvölker* (half-cultural people), dedicating half of the section to each group of peoples. In the Social Darwinistic fashion he subdivides both of these two parts according to the three age system of Stone, Bronze and Iron Age. He first discusses prehistoric art, using chapter titles such as 'Early Stone Age' or 'Middle Bronze Age' and, in the second part, he uses the same terms to refer to the different styles of non-European art. By structuring both parts to fit the same titles he strengthens the Social Darwinistic perspective.

Woermann categorizes the Benin bronzes as being part of 'the art of the natural and half-cultural people with knowledge of metallurgy' (1900: 67). He begins this chapter by stating that 'the boundaries between natural peoples and cultural peoples are blurred' and that 'for us it does not depend on the name but on the stage of evolution.' He quotes Leo Frobenius, the foremost German ethnographer of the time saying that 'the Africans Africanised every matter' (Woermann 1900: 67-68) Furthermore, he says that 'of all the works of artistic castings amongst Negros, Benin stands at the top' (Woermann 1900: 72). He goes on to say that they were 'for some years the cause of the biggest stir in Europe' and briefly mentions the distribution of works sent back from Benin between the biggest museums in Europe. In a short account of the representational character of the bronze heads he states that 'the best of them, especially the best one in the Museum in Berlin, show a striking truth to nature in the creation and reproduction of the Negro type and the Negro individual, and at the same time an excellence of the casting that only the mature art of the cultural people can produce something of a similar kind.' He thus emphasizes the artistic importance of these pieces in a very factual manner before he goes on to describe the different figures and objects that can be seen on the bronze plaques.

Both of these examples show how art magazines and art historical books were conveying an ambivalent response to the Benin bronzes. *The Studio*'s editorial voice collaborating with an anthropologist, as well as Woermann, trying to consider a world history of art from the 'primitive' beginnings onwards, were both seeking to discuss non-European art while not granting it the same value and importance as European high art. To do so, in his article in *The Studio*, Roth avoids applying the word art without using preambles like primitive or decorative. Woermann, alternatively, fell back onto Social Darwinistic systems as a way to present prehistoric and non-European art as the predecessor of European art. Yet, the simple fact that the art world slowly started to recognize Benin visual culture as art and not just considered it as part of the scientific research of ethnography is the evidence of the beginning of a domestication of the Benin bronzes. This tendency of the domestication of the visual culture of the other in the art world grew steadily until it eventually peaked in the '80s, above all in the controversial, 1984, Museum of Modern Art exhibition *Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*. Since then, numerous studies have been engaging with a better way of exhibiting and working with non-European art, indicating a transition to a positive foreignization.²¹

Conclusion

In the first few months after the Benin Expedition and the final suppression of the Edo, stories like the building of an impromptu golf course in Benin became big news. However, as the excitement over the Benin bronzes grew, the sensationalism diminished. Instead, the scholarly - and to some extent also the popular - press started to negotiate the importance of the bronzes for different fields of study as far as these could be defined. The published writings, presented in this paper, have revealed a generally positive development of the

²¹ For more information on the MoMA exhibition see Ivan Karp 'Other Cultures in Museum Perspective' in Karp and Lavine, 1991.

reception of the Benin bronzes in both Britain and Germany. While popular newspaper articles on the Benin Wars openly expressed a strong disapproval of the Edo people and their customs and culture, a focus on the technical and aesthetic aspects of the bronzes and the ethnographer's 'translation' of them slowly changed the common attitude towards Edo visual culture and even compelled Europeans to reevaluate their views of the Edo themselves. In just four years, the reputation of the bronzes changed from the debris of a barbaric kingdom to the remains of a lost high culture.

Once established as genuine African work, the bronzes were regarded as works of art. Here, it has been shown that this early development was primarily led by ethnographers. The use of Visual Translation Studies as an edition to existing art historical methodologies in the approach to the material history of non-European visual culture, reveals that the ethnographers translation of the visual culture of other peoples is an integral part of our understanding of the reception of World Art in Europe. This translation of non-European culture is a product of power relationships and it is the translator, or in this case the ethnographer, who holds the power of determining how the colony is seen in Europe.

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