

# Re-Inventing Totemism

## Iconoclastic Traditions in Léopold Sédar Senghor's Concept of the *image idéogramme*

(. . .) le travail d'organisation n'était pourtant que l'arrêt lui-même, acte simple, analogue à l'enfoncement du pied qui détermine instantanément des milliers de grains à s'entendre pour donner un dessin. (Bergson 2012: 281)

When we consider the prohibition of images and its religious anchoring in Western monotheistic thought, we actually have to admit to taking note of only one of many image-magical traditions in a global present. Resulting from a transcultural opening of the discourse on iconoclasm art history is getting new insights in recent decades. However, religious thought itself has multiplied, demanding an examination of phenomena of the sacred, of profanation, and of all those inherent conditions and practices of the pictorial and its presence or absence that had previously only been implicitly negotiated. Phenomena of the non-figural image and concepts of abstraction appear in a new light; they become part of comprehensive frames of epistemology and knowledge. We may find their elder traditions in an iconoclastic preference advanced in Franco-German ethnology and anthropology,<sup>1</sup> which gathered broader popularity by Wilhelm Worringer's thesis of a "primitive" "will to abstraction" that would adhere to ornament and decoration to avoid the presence of the figural. In the context of post-structuralism, these approaches were accompanied by a revaluation of writing, which acquired aesthetic significance as a medium preceding language.<sup>2</sup> In their wake are newer negotiations of "*Schriftbildlichkeit*", "*Schriftikonik*", or "*Linienwissen*", which take up the connections between image and writing, as well as their material forms in graphism, ornament, drawing, and line.<sup>3</sup> The phenomena addressed here not only expand established notions of a sacred interdiction of images. They are the result of an ongoing and universal image theory and image practice. Their actors in the Global South, however, are only belatedly perceived in the current debate, since they have long been among the representatives of a "*pensée sauvage*" excluded from an academic discourse.

The Senegalese author, intellectual and later president Léopold Sédar Senghor occupies a significant position in this respect. His extensive writings on African-American culture, philosophy and history, as well as their global political interconnections in the context of *Négritude*, have been widely received, especially in the course of the postcolonialism debate, and are

currently gaining renewed attention (Genge 2021, 2015; Headly 2019; Wilder 2015; Murphy 2016; Diagne 2011). To date, however, his participation in the genesis of anti-modernist and poststructuralist thought has hardly been investigated.<sup>4</sup> The revolution of an African concept of the image, which can be grasped in outline in his concept of an *image idéogramme* from 1952 on, also points in this respect to Jacques Derrida's *Grammatology* published in 1967 and its critical confrontation with logocentric concepts of rationality and phonocentric concepts of orality and language. Senghor developed a broad theory of the image whose transdisciplinary permeability continues to challenge the thinking of art history today. His early writings on the aesthetic perception of African sculpture already indicate that Senghor preferred a refraining from its figural presence undertaking instead a philosophical reading of the matter (Diagne 2011: 45 f.). African poetry, writing, ornamentation and drawing traditions are called upon to establish an anti-mimetic and even iconoclastic understanding of the image and its cognitive power. Senghor's statements have often been criticized as seemingly essentialist readings of an African concept of the image, but they are at the same time dissolving the metaphysical tradition of religious iconoclasm prevailing in Western Modernism. He established a new reading of the sculpture as "philosophy", as an ontological concept of thought and knowledge. In doing so he opposed the Western interpretation of the "*art nègre*" as precursor of a universal abstract art.<sup>5</sup>

### Senghor's Theses on the "ideogrammatic" Concept of the Image

The starting points of Senghor's evocations of the image shaped by textuality or linearity owe much to his preoccupation with the beginnings of a history of the image on the African continent. In his book *Ce que je crois* (1988), Senghor himself refers to the special role of palaeontological research and Neolithic African rock painting, which he had possibly become acquainted with as a student of ethnology in Paris in the 1930s (Senghor 1988: 25, 29), but certainly in 1936 through the illustrated cultural history of Africa by Leo Frobenius (Senghor 1939 (1964): 22; Senghor (1973) 1977: 401 f.). The self-taught and self-proclaimed ethnologist Frobenius, in rejecting the usual primitivist readings that referred exclusively to the fetish character of African sculpture, had not only established the origin of the image, or the "silhouette image" in Africa (Frobenius 1929; Genge 2003: 246 f.). Equally momentous was his description of an African hunting magic that had been initiated by a linear hand drawing and a subsequent "exposure" in the sand and thus had to seem like a present continuation of the outline-like rock painting (Frobenius 1933: 127–131).<sup>6</sup> In both cases, it is especially the impressions gained from a linear silhouette that Frobenius emphasises, probably not coincidentally in the context of Wilhelm Worringer's assertion of Neolithic painting's achievement of abstraction. (Genge 2003: 190).

If in these ethnological readings Senghor has already encountered a way of looking at things that grasps the pictorial more as "line knowledge" and a form of cognition, i. e. in its non-mimetic quality, he reinforces this view once again. Starting from early evocations of the concept of rhythm in the description of African sculpture (Diagne 2007: 37 f.), he subsequently

turned to a linear conception of the image. In his early writings, he initially still circumscribes above all poetic procedures of surrealism, which gradually integrate pictorial concepts. According to Senghor, it was only with the Surrealist revolution that it became possible “d’exprimer la Négritude en français”, in forms of disintegration and dissolution of the legible and visible.<sup>7</sup> He cites African and Asian script cultures as models that were received by European intellectuals from orientalist and ethnological collections.<sup>8</sup> Here, the first considerations that bring together image and drawing, or image and writing, become discernible.

These early theoretical approaches to the African image reveal limitations, revisions and tentative attempts. They were consolidated in the formulation of an independent Black African aesthetics, which Senghor finally defined in 1956 with the concept of the ideogrammatic image, as a pictorial writing that was “not an image” but had to be understood as a “surrealist image” and “symbol, ideogram”.<sup>9</sup> However, these enigmatic formulations of a written pictorial concept are illuminated in the context of Guillaume Apollinaire’s surrealist grammar of writing and subsequent pictorial concepts of totemism that can be traced in Senghor’s poetic texts.

### Guillaume Apollinaire and his Ideogrammatic Concepts of Thought

There is much to suggest that Guillaume Apollinaire’s collection of poems *Calligrammes—poèmes de la paix et de la guerre*, written between 1912 and 1917 and originally entitled *Idéogrammes lyriques* (Papst 1980: 2 f.), was of particular influence on the elaboration of Senghor’s concept of the *image idéogramme*. It was precisely those poetic drawings by Apollinaire which, with the term “idéogramme”, evoked a specific “sign” which, according to the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* of 1873, did not express a letter or sound, but an idea which was to be understood as an “abstraction” of writing and language. Numbers are mentioned as an example, or hieroglyphic writing, in which ideograms represented the “image” of ideas or things. The “idéographie” in turn is named “Terme de philosophie. Peinture des idées par des signes qui sont l’image figurée de l’objet” and thus located in the context of a metaphorical painting of ideas. Especially in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the *Dictionnaire* continues, an equation of “idéogramme” and “idéographique” is possible, thus underlining the philosophical character of Egyptian pictorial writing.<sup>10</sup> The “idéogramme” only became a formative written pictorial medium of surrealism in the wake of Apollinaire, as Laurent Bazin explains. Based on a special interest in Chinese characters, the ideograms are not understood as a means of grasping a reality visible in objects. Rather, they provide insights into modes of thought functioning through the retrieval of mental images. With Apollinaire, according to Bazin, an ideographic consciousness is established that can visualise contexts of meaning (Bazin 2008: 120 f.), because, according to Apollinaire, “lorsque nous parlons, nous transcrivons en images mentales car notre cerveau ne peut guère se représenter les choses composées autrement qu’en allégories” (Apollinaire 1913: 286).

Guillaume Apollinaire breaks with the certainties of written interpretation and uses his calligrammes in such a way that the very object designated, or even an idea associated with it, fall into an irresolvable ambiguity. The shattering of sense and the renouncement of a metaphysical compensation play an important role here. Thus Sacks-Galey refers to the special character of these figure-poems, which are to be understood as “idea-signs” and thus graphic

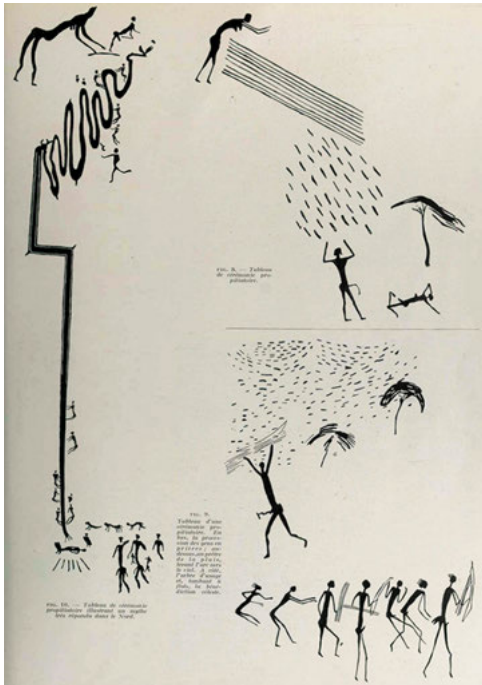


1 Guillaume Apollinaire, *Il pleut*, 1916

representations, but also forms of knowledge and cognition. Text and image appear here in heterogeneous constellations as “script-pictorial” (*schriftbildliche*) (Krämer 2012) utterances:

L'éclatement de la linéarité formelle du poème, le bouleversement de l'équilibre conventionnel de la page écrite et la mise en œuvre de rapports linguistiques inhabituels, compliquent la lecture des textes et, au lieu d'inviter ou d'inciter à la confrontation, provoquent souvent le rejet, l'abandon, la condamnation même. Le poème n'arrive pas à nous comme un objet tout fait don't l'existence est bien définie, réglée une fois part toutes, mais plutôt comme un projet don't le devenir s'établit à chaque nouvelle lecture par la participation active du lecteur. (Sacks-Galey 1988: 7).

The described uncertainties and postponing, processual effects of this specific poetic form can be briefly described using the example of Apollinaire's well-known figure poem *Il pleut* (Fig. 1). In this poem, five awkward and displaced slanting lineations take up a page in the shape of a fan and appear as clusters of dripping letters. The natural phenomenon of a falling downpour thus determines the direction of reading and the meaning of what is read. The letters appear in irregularly arranged typography, while the signature is placed vertically in the right margin as a reference to authorship. By reading the individual letters, a poetic structure of meaning of temporal transgression emerges. The drops can be interpreted as an image veil or shielding of a



2 Illustration from Leo Frobenius' *L'art de la silhouette* (1929)

lyrical self that melancholically abandons itself to heard and imagined memories in the form of voices, sounds and tears and at the same time moves into the present and future in an act of liberation from these "liens" (Sacks-Galey, 1988: 27).

A few years after the publication of Apollinaire's poetic drawing, the art and literary journal *Cahiers d'Art* published a depiction of an African rain myth (Fig. 2), which must seem like a visual correspondence to Apollinaire's poem. With contributions by the author Tristan Tzara, whose son later married a niece of Senghor, and the artist Wolfgang Paaelen, the journal was not only a publication organ of Surrealism. It also made decisive contributions to the rock art exhibitions of Leo Frobenius in Paris.<sup>11</sup> Frobenius had exhibited the rock paintings he had painted mainly by women painters on site in numerous museums with considerable success, in the USA together with works by Surrealist painters. The rock painting shown here is taken from Frobenius' contribution entitled "L'art de la silhouette" from 1929 on the occasion of its exhibition in Paris, in which the author undertakes an appreciation of African silhouette painting.<sup>12</sup>

According to Leo Frobenius, the depiction shows different phases of a "cérémonie propitiatoire", which the author describes shortly. The pictorial narration begins at the bottom left with a reclining figure of a "princesse" buried in a termite mound; it shows the metamorphoses of a tree into a snake that emerges from it and finally ends with the desired rainfall. The rock painting, reproduced in black and white, shows both human and animal figures and plants, as well as references to natural phenomena (rain), which in the printed layout all seem like parts of

a monotonous repertoire of signs and letters: Their graphic uniformity, which differs only by angle of inclination, size and location, i. e. by texture and spatiality, lends them the character of a handwriting that can be perceived not only as visible imagery but also as an equivalent to typography.<sup>13</sup>

The typographic captions, on the other hand, form stabilising foundations and block-like, spatial enclosures for the graphic picture elements. They take up their alignment and create a unified typeface context. The rain myth, here part of a typographic composition of image and text, takes on the character of an *image idéogramme* that oscillates between image and script and merges pictorial and ethnological knowledge.

The combination of surrealist and ethnological written and pictorial positions is not far off, as already discussed at the beginning. Decisive here were the reflections on a pictorial or graphic practice that was oriented less towards the mimetic and more towards a dynamic negotiation of knowledge gained from drawing and line. However, it was above all the writings of the ethnologist Lévy-Bruhl that accompanied the surrealist dissociation of seeing with reflections on a “prelogical mentality” (Freeman 1990: 40).

Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of the image develops out of his interpretation of a “primitive” practice of linearity preceding language as can be seen from the following text passage:

De ces faits, et de beaucoup d’autres semblables que l’on pourrait citer, il résulte que les langues des sociétés inférieures ‘expriment toujours leurs idées des objets et des actions précisément de la façon qu’elles se présentent aux yeux et aux oreilles.’ Leur tendance commune est de décrire, non pas l’impression reçue par le sujet, mais la forme, les contours, la position, le mouvement, le mode d’action des objets dans l’espace, en un mot ce qui peut se percevoir et se dessiner. Elles cherchent à épouser les détails plastiques et graphiques de ce qu’elles veulent exprimer. (Lévy-Bruhl 1951: 175)<sup>14</sup>

The proximity of language, drawing and writing asserted here by Lévy-Bruhl can, from today’s perspective, provide arguments for a pictorial perception that affirms an antecedence of writing and drawing in the generation of knowledge.

Apollinaire’s exegeses of images and the applications of primitivist readings in the context of the *Cahier d’art* provide possible approaches to Senghor’s *image idéogramme*. At the same time, however, they also reveal the first approaches to a scriptural interpretation of rock painting that exposes models of totemic interpretation as we will see below.

### The Totem

Modern manifestations of iconoclastic ideas can probably be found in the most vehement form in the surrealist concept of the image, which Georges Bataille shaped with his radical appreciation of the formless as a deconstruction of the figurative (cf. Didi-Huberman 1995).

In this context, however, it may be no surprise, that even this author shows a stunning interest in African rock painting. To him we owe an exciting exegesis of rock images as evidence for a pictorial representation of totemism. Bataille had seen African rock painting at Leo Frobenius’ exhibition in Paris.<sup>15</sup> In his enthusiastic review, which was only published posthumously, he

spoke of the human bodies depicted, whose dynamism and material permeability fascinated him (Bataille 1970: 116 f.). However, he also recognises in them a dissolution of the human figures, that, negating their identity, rather seemed to connect with animals and trees in a collective imagination. Here he takes up the “law of participation” asserted by Lévy-Bruhl in his already mentioned publication, which speaks of a “mystical community” of beings in “primitive” thought:

Or il ya un element qui ne fait jamais défaut dans ces rapports. Sous des formes et à des degrés divers, tous impliquent une “participation” entre les êtres ou les objets liés dans une représentation collective. C’est pourquoi, faute d’un meilleur terme, j’appellerai loi de participation le principe propre de la mentalité “primitive” qui regit les liaisons et les préliations de ces représentations. (Lévy-Bruhl (1910) 1951: 76)<sup>16</sup>

Lévy-Bruhl is quite clear-sighted about the challenging radicality of this thinking, which seems to dissolve differences and confuse forms of being in a way that seems “absurd” to his own thinking.<sup>17</sup> His explanation provides an early examination of an anthropological and at the same time philosophical image concept that has circulated as “totemism” since the 19th century through numerous texts by ethnologists and finally been taken up by sociology and philosophy (Genge 2017). According to Bataille, totemism had for the first time been brought to life through African rock painting and previously been only accessible as scholarly knowledge or iconographic material.

Totemism, as Lévi-Strauss described many years later in his text *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui* (1962), pointing to Émile Durkheim and Henri Bergson, among others (Lévi-Strauss 1965: 120 f.), refers to a form of collective practice of thinking described by Western ethnography, in which a selected or assigned animal defines clan membership and also taboos of transgression. In the image of the clan animal, structures of kinship and thus collective social structures are named, as Durkheim already had emphasized in 1912. He speaks of a form of contagion that would be transmitted through images of the totem and would contribute to the social bond (Durkheim 2014: 326). Moreover Durkheim referred to the emblematic image character of the clan image that would be carved into the skin (Durkheim 2014: 345). In this way, he had indirectly named the image as a collective written expression, without, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, further questioning the scope of totemism as a cultural practice. He himself had operationalised totemic practices as a model of an affirmation and at the same time transgression of the borderlines of nature and culture, or of animal and human, as a classification system of “savage mind”.<sup>18</sup> But it is only with Jacques Derrida’s *Grammatology* that we arrive at the interpretation of classification itself as an “arche-writing” (*archi-écriture*) that inscribes itself by force and remains hidden until its violent disclosure.<sup>19</sup>

Here lie possible connections to a much earlier poem of Senghor, which figuratively evokes a collective, hidden thinking and thus the invisible presence of a documented totemic epistemological and social order. The title of the poem is *Le Totem* (1945), thus another eloquent testimony to totemism, published in the poetry collection *Chants d’Ombre* (Senghor 1964: 24).

### Le Totem

Il me faut cacher au plus intime de mes veines/  
L'Ancêtre à la peau d'orage sillonnée d'éclairs et de foudre/  
Mon animal gardien, il me faut le cacher/  
Que je ne rompe le barrage des scandales/  
Il est mon sang fidèle qui requiert fidélité/  
Protégeant mon orgueil nu contre/  
Moi-même et la superbe des races heureuses . . .

In a specific poetic and seemingly autoreflexive evocation, the poem deals with the magically charged phenomenon of totemism in the image of an affective ancestral figure. Unlike the surrealist authors and the ethnologists, Senghor positions himself not only outside, but even inside an ethnological system of knowledge. He describes as a “scandal” the violent transgression of a different, totemic way of thinking, but also the act of denunciation that results from becoming aware of alterity. Especially with the last line of verse, he evokes the (im)possibility of demarcation from a Western society constituted by racial concepts, which had grasped the human-animal connection as a characteristic of so-called “primitive” races. It is an enigmatic poem whose paratactic rhythm evokes the invisible presence of an ancestor and at the same time clan animal.

According to the Nigerian literary scholar Sunday O. Anozie in a comprehensive study, the poem practices a structuralist interpretation of totemism, which Claude Lévi-Strauss had pursued in an analogous manner. Anozie's analysis of the imaginary “animal gardien” and the equally scientific “barrage” it has experienced in Western discourse exposes the structure of an emblematic image in which a collective knowledge delimits and encloses the pictorial presence (Anozie 1981: 180). As recently as 1959, Senghor had furthermore affirmed his distance to Western knowledge in describing totemism with reference to Lévi-Strauss's concept of magic. He underlines totemism as a form of African familial social connection with the dead ancestors, which only seems to have monstrous aspects, and would be able to transgress Western thinking (cf. Senghor 1959: 268).

Today, totemism once again occupies a special place in art history,<sup>20</sup> but above all in Philippe Descola's anthropology (2005: 254 f.). Finally, it transcends cultural and biological borders that, according to the Western view, can only be imagined separately, in that the animal plays a decisive role in an “ecology of relationships” that examines cultural practices and epistemological orders of human and non-human beings (Därmann/Zandt 2017: 11 f.).

The poem *Totem*, it can be concluded, provides a significant horizon for Senghor's theses on the *image idéogramme* and thus establishes the ambivalent character of his concept of image derived from deconstruction, which invokes animistic connotations and at the same time denies them. It remains in a persistent and ongoing ambivalence that Jean-Paul Sartre denounces three years later. In his famous preface *Orphée Nègre*, which he published to a collective edition of Senghor's African poems in 1948, there is an exoticistic—and by the way, almost word-for-word adopted—evocation of Black idolatry, the loss of which is just as inevitable as the end of the *Négritude*:





3 Pierre Soulages, 3 décembre 1956

Only through Poetry can the black men ( . . . ) communicate with each other in private. And since French lacks terms and concepts to define negritude, since negritude is silence, these poets will use “allusive words, never direct, reducing themselves to the same silence”, in order to evoke it. Short-circuits of language: behind the flaming fall of words, we glimpse a great black idol. (Sartre (1948) 1964: 26)

Finally, the *image idéogramme* received its material pictorial correlative some time later in the painting of the French artist Pierre Soulages. Senghor celebrated his first confrontation with a painting by the artist in 1958 like an awakening experience that reminded him of a confrontation with a Dan mask (Fig. 3). It is in particular the proximity of Soulages’ works to Chinese characters and Black African ideograms that he simultaneously brings together with rock painting.<sup>21</sup>

According to Senghor, the character of Pierre Soulages’ works in their ambivalence of blackened presence, iconoclastic allure of the script and abstract symbolism actually fulfils the specifications of the African ideogrammatic image in an “écriture-peinture” (cf. Mersmann 2015: 180 f.), whose totemic place of origin in art history has yet to be explored.

## Notes

The following text partly refers to the research context of the DFG Priority Programme 1688 *Aesthetic Temporalities. Time and Representation in a polychronic Modernity* and my subproject *The Achronic and the Present: Aesthetic perception and artistic concepts of temporality in the Black Atlantic* whose outcome will be a joint publication with Angela Stercken, appearing next year. There, even the role of a theory of the "ideographic picture" in the context of the New York School and Barnett Newman is getting specific attention, thus affirming the inner connections in the Black Atlantic.

- 1 "Das Interesse, das die frühe Anthropologie um 1900 an der Linie als einem spezifischen Zeichentypus artikuliert, steht in Zusammenhang mit ihren Bemühungen, das 'primitive Denken' als einen spezifischen Wissensmodus auszuweisen, der sich von den Erkenntnispraktiken der zivilisierten Entwicklungsstufe unterscheidet." (Moser 2017: 153).
- 2 Looking at ornament as a form of "primitive" iconoclasm in the writings of Wilhelm Worringer cf. Genge 2003: 189 f. For similar insights referring to a anti-mimetic understanding of line and drawing with Leo Frobenius and Alois Riegl, cf. Moser 2017, in the same anthology Heinrich Richard deals with a "linear knowledge" of Jaques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze cf. Richard 2017. For its reception in artistic contexts of the Black Atlantic cf. Genge 2015.
- 3 An important contribution to the understanding of writing as image is provided by Birgit Mersmann's description of writing as an "iconic medium of perception"; writing is thus understood as a "visual-graphic pictorial order", cf. Mersmann 2015: 14, 18. The here recognizable interpretation of writing phenomena refers to the older research on writing imagery, which emerged from the context of the interpretation of hieroglyphics (Koch/ Krämer 1997). Sabine Mainberger uses the term "Linienwissen" to describe a broad context of pictorial phenomena pointing to Tim Ingold's theses on drawing as a "participation in the world" (cf. Mainberger 2020: 10 and Mainberger 2017).
- 4 "Scholarship long promoted one-sided understandings of Césaire and Senghor as either essentialist nativists or naïve humanists. (...) Negritude, whether embraced or criticized, was treated as an affirmative theory of Africanity rather than a critical theory of modernity." (Wilder 2015: 8 f.)
- 5 As Regine Prange has rightly pointed out the iconoclastic positions of Western Modernism continued a metaphysical image tradition, cf. Prange 2007: 15, 233.
- 6 For the interpretation of the described hunting magic cf. Moser 2017: 278.
- 7 "La Révolution surréaliste, vous le devinez, aura seule permis à nos poètes d'exprimer la Négritude en français. En désintégrant la phrase, après la vision, par l'élimination des mots-outils, en achevant la révolution du dictionnaire par l'octroi de la citoyenneté aux mots techniques et 'barbares'." (Senghor 1952: 142).
- 8 "Voilà précisément que, par une chance inouïe, depuis le début du Siècle, des penseurs européens livraient bataille à la raison avec les 'armes miraculeuses' de l'Asie et de l'Afrique, qu'orientalistes et ethnologues avaient patiemment découvertes, collectionnées." (Senghor 1952: 134).
- 9 "L'image négro-africaine n'est donc pas image-équation, mais image-analogie, image surréaliste. (...) Toute représentation est image, et l'image, je le répète, n'est pas équation, mais symbole, idéogramme." (Senghor, 1956: 210). For further readings of this text cf. Genge 2015: 246; Genge 2014: 43 f.
- 10 "Idéogramme: 'Nom donné aux signes qui n'expriment ni une lettre ni un son quelconque, mais une idée abstraction faite du son par lequel cette idée est rendue dans telle ou telle langue. Les chiffres sont des idéogrammes. Dans les écritures hiéroglyphiques, signes représentant des images d'idées et des choses.' Idéographie: 'Terme de philosophie. Peinture des idées par des signes qui sont l'image figurée de l'objet.' Idéographique: 'Qui a rapport à l'idéographie. Dans l'écriture hiéroglyphique des anciens Égyptiens signes idéographiques synonymes d'idéogrammes. ( . . ) En général écriture idéo-

graphique, signe idéographique se dit par opposition à phonétique.” (Dictionnaire de la langue française 1873: 6).

- 11 On the contemporary reception of theses exhibitions cf. Kohl/Kuba/ Ivanoff 2016; Georget/ Ivanoff/ Kuba 2016.
- 12 “l’art du style des silhouettes s’affirma comme un art qui ayant dépassé de beaucoup le stade de peuples à l’état naturel s’est élevé au niveau d’une haute mythologie classique.” (Frobenius 1929: 400).
- 13 Cf. Krämer 2018: 23 f., dealing with “texture”, “spatiality” and “graphism”.
- 14 Lévy-Bruhl’s controversial theses are currently understood above all as a line of tradition of a “savage mind” that differs from usual traditional primitivisms, since it allows the “incomprehensibility” of a thinking after all, even if it affirms the colonial discourse (cf. Hahn 2011: 235).
- 15 On Bataille’s interest in cave painting cf. Stavrinaki 2019, 2020.
- 16 On the critique of a seemingly universal version of this dividing line in structural ethnology in Jacques Derrida and Philippe Descola cf. Därmann/Zandt 2017: 10.
- 17 “En d’autres termes, pour cette mentalité, l’opposition entre l’un et le plusieurs, le même et l’autre, etc., n’impose pas la nécessité d’affirmer l’un des termes si l’on nie l’autre, ou réciproquement. Elle n’a qu’un intérêt secondaire. Parfois, elle est aperçue; souvent aussi, elle ne l’est pas. Souvent elle s’efface devant une communauté mystique d’essence entre des êtres qui cependant, pour notre pensée, ne sauraient être confondus sans absurdité.” (Lévy-Bruhl (1910) 1951: 77).
- 18 On the question of the universal validity of Lévi-Strauss’s classification of nature and culture cf. Därmann/Zandt 2017: 10.
- 19 “To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique within the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arche-writing: arche-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of self-presence, in truth the loss of what has never taken place, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance.” (Derrida 1997: 112).
- 20 Cf. Mitchell 2005: 158. Referring to totemism in the context of African intellectual history cf. Genge 2017.
- 21 “La première fois que je vis un tableau de Pierre Soulages, ce fut un choc. Je reçus, au creux de l’estomac, un coup, qui me fit vaciller, comme le boxeur, touché, qui soudain s’abîme. C’est exactement l’impression que j’avais éprouvée à la première vue du masque dan.” (Senghor 1958: 232) For a further discursive interpretation of the passage see Genge 2021.

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