without further probing by the author. Little or no information is given on the current relevance of the material: on which songs are still sung and transmitted, whether the dance competitions continue or are as lively as they used to be, or what the songs mean to people today. However, for such emic take on culture, conversations with privileged witnesses cannot suffice. Ethnographic studies, especially into belief systems and social structure, would have been extremely useful; for example, they would have helped Gunderson explain one conundrum he mentions: why his Sukuma informants rejected the causal link that historians such as Terrence Ranger see between competitive *Beni ngoma* dances and the annual dance festivals that oppose Gika and Galu sections of the Sukuma community. The informants seemed to understand the ritual antagonism as structural to their community and independent of historical circumstances: a situation of organized opposition inhering within their culture and mediated by a peace mechanism that takes effect before and after Beni or Gika/Galu competitions.

The book's main value is the exhaustive body of accurately rendered material, although there are some (minor) errors of translation or transcription in kiSukuma. More interpretation on the part of the author would have been welcome, such as his discussion in regard to the songs of Samike and the mustering power of metaphor typically employed by cult leaders and traditional healers. Perhaps we can expect such commentary in the author's next ethnomusicology collection, which, according to his announcements, will deal with the medicinal arts. Already in this first collection all comments on the part of local commentators sooner or later refer to *bugota*, the secret medicine known and applied by the artist during performance and which, according to Sukuma listeners, explains the extraordinary attraction of the singing. Really comprehending the meaning of medicine in a "Sukuma" way will definitely require a grand effort of collaborative translation, the result of which this reader is already looking forward to. Until then, I can scarcely imagine that any thorough ethnography among these seven million inhabitants of East Africa will not make use of *Sukuma Labor Songs*. But let us hope that Gunderson's next collection makes use of the Internet so that we can actually hear the songs and receive their medicine while reading the words. After all, a big chunk of music's medicine is in the melody.

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Moyo Okediji. *Western Frontiers of African Art*. Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2011. xi + 336 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $85.00. Cloth.

Western Frontiers of African Art is a collection of essays on the subject of African art, and in particular the development of new theories that might

enlighten us as to its particularity. The key word in the book is "triangulation," a term that the author has also explored elsewhere. Simply put, the word refers to the" in-betweeness" of art in the situation of modernity, resulting in the "hybrid logovisual reading" (179) of both "traditional" and modern societies. The innovation in this book resides in the moments when Okediji employs the concept of hybridity to analyze European artworks: an "African" reading of art that has mixed results.

The notion of "triangulation" is part of the author's theory of "semioptics," an alternative to "semiotics" as described by Roland Barthes. In a chapter dedicated to unpacking Barthes' theories of language—particularly the relationship of the spoken word and visual images—Okediji concludes that linguistics does not have the tools to interpret visual images. Although we might point to the many authors who already have agreed with this and elaborated on the problems of linguistics in the years since Barthes, Okediji uses Barthesian linguistics to launch into a chapter titled "Semioptic Equations: The Crossroads of Arrowhead Modernity," in which he uses Yoruba philosophy to claim art as a production in between word and image, art as "hybrid." Importantly for Okediji, this is not just true for African art, but for art generally. Unfortunately, I was left wishing that the basis of his discussion of semioptics had been more Yoruba philosophy or even phenomenology and less Barthes, more akin to his provocative chapter "Semioptics of Africana Art History" in Tejumola Olaniyan's edited volume *The African Diaspora and the Disciplines* (Indiana University Press, 2010). However, it is clear that in this text Okediji wanted to use Barthesian semiotics to be more precise about the relationships of word and image than has thus far been elaborated in romantic theories of hybridity and "third" spaces.

In chapters like "Homoerotic African Art," "Transgressive Pictures: Feminism, Pathology, and Poverty," and "Gendered Triangulation: Anger, Rage, and Dislocation" Okediji applies some of his theories to advance his interpretation of many artworks that have not been seen by the public. I was surprised and pleased that he included sections dedicated to feminism and queer art, two subjects that have been all but silenced in African art historiography. Sections of his analyses of individual artworks convinced me that they indeed require their own theory and must be taken on their own terms. But often it was unclear whether those theories are the author's or whether they are to be found within the work itself. This book is a complicated assemblage of art history and criticism. It should, I think, be understood mostly as a series of rhapsodies and responses to the art works.

That is to say, Okediji's analytical acts are at times intellectually exciting, but they can also be vexing. I will just mention two examples among many. In his discussion of Tinuomi Afilaka's pictographic paintings, which the artist herself refused to comment on, Okediji reads into the dots and lines that make up the three registers of the painting "a rabble of nondescript characters of various assortments, trades, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and ethnicities, all united by their lack of property" (83–84). Of the chevron line at the bottom of the painting, he said that the "pointed, sharp,

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zigzag side of reality is digging painfully into the softness of their flesh" (84). (To complicate things further, the painting to which he refers, if I followed his reading correctly, appeared to be printed upside down in the book—perhaps an error in editing.) I am not suggesting that the author should not be able to enter into flights of fancy with his writing, but these interpretations are often presented as commonsense readings of the works. None of these statements is presented as a quotation or followed by a citation, so I gathered that these rather large interpretive leaps are Okediji's own, especially given the information about Afilaka's refusal to comment.

In another instance, Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* becomes a "Jew fleeing from the searchlight of the mechanical hunts" who "cannot but petrify with fright" and "drop[s] the wrapper that covers her flesh as she flies downward to hide in the dark closets of the basement" (156). The statement that follows is that "Duchamp does not disclose whether the nude ever made it alive out of the ghettos"—and we are left with no indication of whether Duchamp ever made these assertions in the first place (according to my research, he did not) or whether Okediji is using Duchamp's name as shorthand for the painting itself and the narrative he (Okediji) assigns to it.

The Duchamp section encouraged me to revisit a classic volume edited by Umberto Eco in 1992, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. In it, Eco examines whether there are limits to the possible meanings of texts, a crisis felt particularly after the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 1970s. Eco argues, among other things, that although via semiotics the reader is afforded a great deal of freedom to determine meaning, this freedom can lead to overinterpretation and a "disdain towards apparent meaning" (empiricism) and a hermeticist belief in privileged knowledge and/or secret meaning" (9). Okediji seems in fact to align himself with an opposing argument—which is equally nonelitist—that cultural conditioning shapes both production and interpretation. He writes, "meaning can no longer be drawn on or elicited from the rigor of theoretical visual analysis. Such traditional tools are too inherently embedded in residues of genocidal gore . . ." (159). Elsewhere he argues, after Edward Said, that art criticism must maintain its "alterity." He argues that if we are to write a meaningful history of the West and Africa (which for Okediji are mutually sustaining constructions), there must be barrier crossings that defy what he and Said call "capitalist" readings.

Thus Okediji's reading of genocide into *Nude Descending a Staircase* is an ahistorical gesture, but one that argues (though only implicitly) that this painting has a pre- and post-existence. Such reading is a radical and lively departure from assumptions about the limitation not only of visual interpretation but also of historicism, and some readers might object vociferously to his methods.

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