Sixty years ago, American Museum of Natural History anthropologist Clark Wissler began an important treatise on masks with the phrase quoted in this title.¹ His goal was to inform the museum’s general audience about a genre of artifact that in “our own civilization and time” might be seen as “something childish, something scarcely to be considered respectable,” or “a frivolous object of entertainment used by “infantile” and “benighted” “savages” (1950:1-15). Wissler noted the broad spectrum of the world’s peoples who have made and used masks over the ages. He urged his readers to recognize the donning of masks as a religious “impersonation” of “mythical human beings or their animal counterparts,” and masked performance as a reenactment of the acquisition of critical ritual and technological information (1950:22-23). Wissler’s reference to masks as an “old trick” is not to a deception from a cultural insider’s point of view, then, but to a truly felt if ironic event—that is, one of “deliberate contrast of apparent and intended meaning” (Morris 1969:692).

More recently, anthropologists and art historians have reiterated, improved upon, and extended the discussion of masks to include data and theoretical positions unavailable to Wissler and other earlier writers. Herbert Cole and his colleagues organized the exhibition “African Arts of Transformation,” for instance, for which they wrote of the way the person wearing a mask often “becomes an animated but hidden vehicle for meta-human, spiritual expression” (Cole et al. 1970:8). They asserted that “a transforming ‘costume’ is much more than a mere covering-up or disguise. The masker, like his followers and his audience, forgets his human personality, ... [as] his character and behavior fuse with those of the spirit he creates, the spirit he becomes” (1970:24).

Although Cole makes no reference to Wissler’s work, Wissler’s notion of impersonation lies at the heart of Cole’s position concerning masks. The etymology of the word makes this clear: the prefix im- indicates “causative func-

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1. TABWA BEADED MASK.
ZAIRE/ZAMIBA BORDER AREA
GLASS BEADS, RAFFIA, FEATHERS, CLOTH, SKIN.
40.6 x 30.5 x 7.6 cm.
The Minneapolis Institute of Art.

2. TABWA BEADED MASK COLLECTED IN THE MID-1970s IN THE ZAIRE/ZAMIBA BORDER AREA EAST OF LAKE MAVERI (SEE ALSO COVER), GLASS TRADE BEADS, VEGETABLE FIBERS, JUNGLE FOWL FEATHERS, BLUE MONKEY PELT, LEATHER THONGS: 89 x 30.5 x 26 cm.
The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Stanley Collection of African Art, EMS 656.
tion," with a "basic meaning of 'to cause to become'" (Morris 1969:663); and so in this case, donning a mask causes a person to assume the nature and being of some other person, spirit, animal, or even abstract quality. In the jargon of Western psychology, religion, and philosophy, the masked performer effects or experiences what might be called a catharsis, an epiphany, or an ontological shift. In so doing, the actor can be said to make tangible what is otherwise ineffable, and to "express the inexpressible without betraying it" (Heinzl Politzer in Crossan 1976:250).

David Napier has recently written that "throughout the anthropological literature, masks appear in conjunction with categorical change" (1986:xxii). Transformation occurs in a deliberately and dramatically created liminal period of ritual, when, as Victor Turner wrote (1970), performers are "betwixt and between" more ordinary states or categories of being. The masked person "is and is not a human being. So transformed, the new being is saying: 'I am not myself'" (Cole 1985:16). In this curious ambiguity, maskers are free to experiment with the definitions and constraints of their social life that they may take for granted in more usual circumstances (Turner 1970:105). Yet, as Napier observes (1986:xxiii), "the special efficacy of masks in transformation results, perhaps, not only from their ability to address the ambiguities of [particular, personal] point of view, but also from their capacity to elaborate what is paradoxical about appearances and perceptions in the context of a changing viewpoint" for society as a whole. It is paradox, "the acceptance of what empirically is not," that allows formulation of hypotheses and recognition of change: "we are aware that something is no longer what it was" (Napier 1986:1,3).

The contributions of Cole, Turner, Napier, and other writers aid our understanding of masks as objects and of masked performance as social process, as will be demonstrated in this study of Tabwa masks. There is a dimension that is either missing or given insufficient attention in most of this literature, however: the use of masks as "agents of ideology" (Layton 1981:43) during times of radical social change. The transformations that masked performances assist people to undergo are not limited to those of individual actors' changes of state and their assumption of spiritual form. Rather, all of society may be experiencing radical transformation, and this dynamic process may be conceptualized, dramatized, and made more broadly accessible through the use of masks. As Cole has written, "Masquerades are probably Africa's most resilient art form, continually evolving to meet new needs" (1985:16). I would suggest that this is because the irony and the recognition of paradox in masking, "old tricks of the human race" that they are, are adaptive mechanisms of critical importance to coping with change.

The use of masks for both personal and societal transformation will be illustrated by this study of beaded masks of Tabwa and related peoples of south-central Africa. Tabwa masks appear to be few in number and have yet to be the direct subject of field study (see the catalogue raisonné and entries of Roberts & Maurer 1986). Tabwa living along the southwestern shores of Lake Tanganyika, among whom I conducted four years of predoctoral anthropological research in the 1970s, knew very little about masks and nothing about their current use by other Tabwa well to their own southwest. Still, with the archival and field data that are at hand, a plausible discussion of mask iconography and use can be presented, and the argument can be made that Tabwa masks are evolving in form and function as people seek to adapt to a changing political economy.

When Evan Maurer and I conducted research in 1984 in preparation for our 1986 exhibition and catalogue, "The Rising of a New Moon: A Century of Tabwa Art," we found examples of three types of Tabwa mask. All were of wood. One type, known through only two examples, is a helmet form that depicts a human female (Fig. 3). Pierre Darvelle was told when he collected one of these masks that it is the female counterpart to a "male" buffalo mask. Another type is an anthropomorphomorphic face mask of indeterminate gender known through three examples, one of which is in the Stanley Collection at the University of Iowa (Fig. 4); another has been seen in the field (Fig. 5). Last is the buffalo mask (Fig. 8), of which we published a dozen examples in 1986. Yet a fourth type of Tabwa mask has come to our full attention only in the last two years, but eight examples are already known. These are multicolored beaded facial masks. It is this last category that will be of primary interest here.

In the spring of 1988, Mrs. Elizabeth Stanley offered a Tabwa beaded mask (Cover, Fig. 2) to the University of Iowa Museum of Art to commemorate the Fourth Stanley Conference on African Art. The mask was field-collected in the mid-1970s by Marc Félix in the area along the border between Zambia and Zaire, toward and perhaps slightly northeast of Lake Mweru. This is an area of intermingling for Tabwa, eastern Luba, eastern Lunda, Bemba, Shilu, and
forces of evil hold sway. The appearance of the new crescent and the possibility of perceiving and thus taking action against evil, then, are cause for celebration. The contrast between darkness and light provides a ready metaphor for obscurity, ignorance, danger, and destruction versus perception, wisdom, safety, and hope. Yet the moon subsumes both terms in this opposition, and the resultant ambiguity helps people to understand and cope with the ultimate triumph of misfortune and death, despite their every attempt to live righteously. As Father Theuwis has written with regard to related beliefs among neighboring Luba, “The moon is as ambiguous as life itself.... To be and become, to live and to die are but two faces of the same reality” (1968:11).8

Wyatt MacGaffey recently suggested with regard to Kongo art that “metaphorical elements [such as balamwezi triangles for Tabwa] earn their places in an assemblage on one or perhaps both of two principles, verbal and visual” (1988:192). The reason why an isosceles triangle should be chosen to represent the balamwezi concept is suggested in a number of narratives. For instance, reference may be made to a male moon torn between his loyalties to his first wife, the Morning Star, or Venus rising in the east, and his second wife, the Evening Star, or Venus in the west. Such conjugal politics place the moon at an apex between the two cardinal directions (the basal points of the triangle) associated with beginnings and birth (east) and endings and death (west). The vertical axis defined by the moon at this equidistant apex falls directly upon ego, whoever she or he may be, as any individual strives to define and articulate his or her place in both physical and social universes (Roberts 1980:103-13).

MacGaffey’s verbal principle is that of punning or rebus, “by which an element, by its name, is made to evoke a particular concept” (1988:192-93). The name balamwezi is composed of an adverbial root bala-, from the verb meaning “to begin, to open, to appear, or to rise,” and the noun mwezi, “moon.” Kutentama is the verb used by Tabwa more frequently these days to refer to “the rising of a new moon” and related phenomena. Kutentama is the action of something rising and perching on top of something else, as the moon does as it ascends to the zenith. A noun derived from this same verb, for instance, refers to an epiphytic plant like an orchid or a fern that takes root high up in the branches of a tree. The same verb in both Tabwa and Luba languages is commonly used to describe the event of spirit possession, when a spirit “mounts” to “take over” the head of a supplicant. It is this latter usage that is most pertinent to an understanding of the Stanley mask’s iconography and probable use.

My Tabwa informants living along the southwestern shores of Lake

7. TABWA BEADED HEADDRESS OF BULUMBU DIVINER SEEN IN 1977 AT MIPALA, SOUTHEASTERN ZAIRE. GLASS BEADS, FEATHERS, LEATHER, COTTON THREAD. 18 x 12 cm.

6. TABWA BEADED HEADDRESS OF BULUMBU DIVINER SEEN IN 1976 NEAR ZONGWE, SOUTHEASTERN ZAIRE. GLASS BEADS, PORCELAIN BEADS, GOAT HAIR, LEATHER, COTTON THREAD. SERIAL PELT. 20 x 8 cm.
Tanganyika knew nothing of beaded masks, but they were very familiar with the related art form of beaded headdresses called *nkaka*, worn by adepts of the Bulumbu possession cult. Those wearing such headdresses cover their faces with white chalk (*mpembu*), an act completing the mask-like transformation. It is my hypothesis that Tabwa beaded masks serve the same purpose as, or one that is closely related to, that of *nkaka* headdresses of possession cult adepts.

The beadwork of the *nkaka* headdresses I have seen shows a great deal of variation. The configuration of an *nkaka* seen near Chief Zongwe’s (Fig. 6), for instance, is strikingly similar to the second register of the Stanley mask: a spiral directly over the middle of the bearer’s forehead is flanked by divided rhombi. A more complex headdress seen at Chief Mpala’s (Fig. 7) has three registers of *balamwezi* triangles, but the central motif looks something like a pinwheel rather than a tight spiral. Another *nkaka* from Mpala (Fig. 10) substitutes a house form for the central spiral. A third *nkaka* from Mpala (Fig. 11) replaces the abstract central motif with what the owner explained was a human skull, which seems to have a long headdress. A beaded rooster stands to the left, facing the skull. A fourth headdress from Mpala, worn in Figure 12 by a Bulumbu medium, has five spirals across the forehead.

Despite such differences, all these Bulumbu headdresses show a “constrained diversity” or “semantic equivalence” (Layton 1981:28-29; cf. Roberts 1988a:72). That is, they are variations on a basic theme or structure that follow some semantic or representation-al rules. Tabwa say that Bulumbu adepts can “read” and explain *nkaka* headdress-es. Use of the word “semantics” implies something else as well: “the study or science of meaning in language forms, particularly with regard to its historical change” (Morris 1969:1177). The equivalence of the motifs found on *nkaka* headdresses and, I would assert, on beaded masks, is a basic structure, a “visual vocabulary” (MacGaffey 1988), and a message that endures despite individual artistic interpretation, despite the need to convey particular messages in the beadwork of this or that individual’s headdress or mask, and despite social change.9

The principal message of the headdress lies in its central motif, which is most often in the form of a spiral framed, flanked, or set off by *balamwezi* triangles. Before explaining the particular reference of this central motif on beaded headdresses and masks, I would like to present a more general discussion of the spiral as a “dominant symbol” (Turner 1970) for Tabwa.

Precolonial Tabwa conceptualized time as a spiral, an idea they shared with other central Bantu peoples. MacGaffey suggests that nineteenth-century Kongo, for instance, conceived of the universe as having “a non-reversible time dimension and thus . . . a spiral form” marked by “a sense of the dead as moving, by a series of transformation[s] in the after-life, through a hierarchy of increasingly remote but also more powerful and functionally less specific positions in the other world” (1983:128-29). In a somewhat similar manner, Tabwa origin myths tell of the first sentient beings emerging from a seemingly endless tunnel in the earth, or from a deep pool of water. People moved outward from this point in concentric waves to populate the earth (Roberts 1980:35-68).10

The spiral temporal concept is given tangible form in Tabwa inheritance rit-
Analysis of a number of Tabwa myths permits one to place the mpande disk in a conceptual set or paradigm with other significant members. In the structure of one myth, an mpande shell and the moon are interchangeable (Roberts 1980:417-24). The moon itself is said to be “the eye of Kibawa” (Kalunga Mwela-Ubi, pers. com., 1986), the great chthonic spirit to be discussed shortly. In another myth, an mpande may be equated with a clan culture heroine’s vagina and her “spiral” of descent (Roberts 1980:377-79). In still another, death originates at the center of a spiral-shaped building. Such a building is analogous to both an mpande shell and to the cavern of Kibawa, the great chthonic spirit that is the keeper of Tabwa dead (1980:353-82). In this latter regard, Aylward Shorter has discussed the symbolism of cone shell disks among the Kimbu of central Tanzania, suggesting that “concentric circles and other circular designs signify the penetration of a labyrinth to its center” (1972:104). Reference to Kibawa’s cavern brings us back to the particular use of spiral motifs in the beading of Tabwa headdresses and masks.

Kibawa is an especially important ngulu, or earth spirit. Earth spirits, especially during precolonial times, were the focus of territorial or ecological cults organized to provide rationale and structure for the corporate exploitation of local natural resources (Binsbergen 1981:97; Roberts 1984). Tabwa living along Lake Tanganyika say that they first recognized Kibawa in the mid-1890s, through prophesy. This was a period of extreme duress, when politico-economic turmoil caused by slave-raiding and colonial conquest was exacerbated by natural disasters such as famine, flooding, epidemics, and plagues of locusts. Kibawa announced his desire to help Tabwa through an epizoogetic of rinderpest: the scores of dead animals that Tabwa found on the high moorlands of the Marungu Massif allowed them to survive the famine. Kibawa informed Tabwa through a prophet (ksesema) that he would continue to assist them on condition that they desist from speaking Swahili, the newly introduced language of intrusive slavers, missionaries, and colonial officials. Reverence paid to Kibawa, then, constituted nativistic resistance to change.

The advent of Kibawa was more than just the discovery of another earth spirit. It marked an important ontological shift for the Tabwa, from a precolonial community focus for religious and politico-economic activities to a new individualistic strategy for coping with social change. With the introduction of colonial capitalism, the focus of Tabwa religion shifted from the community to individual initiative, reward, power, and success. As an invention of distressed and concerned Tabwa actors, Kibawa’s role was to facilitate adaptation to the rigors of a new social universe by introducing the highly personal, cathartic triumph of spirit possession. Here, as in other domains of capitalist social life, the individual, “irrespective of kinship and local background, ... can gain ... a reputation as a medium far away from his home” (Binsbergen 1981:97-98). The spirit medium would become responsible for his or her own salvation to an extent that would have been unthinkable in precolonial times. At the same time, as a medium, the possessed person would communicate about and comment upon society itself (Firth 1969:xi).

At first, Kibawa was an oracle. People from far and wide, including Tabwa, eastern Luba, Zela, and many others, visited Kibawa’s cavern hidden deep in a bamboo thicket in Chief Penge’s lands, near the eastern bank of the Luvua River. A kitobo, or guide, would lead them through the tangle of bamboo to the cavern in a process that made metaphoric allusion to the supplicants’ desire to solve perplexing problems of their own (Roberts 1988c). Once at the mouth of the cavern, the kitobo would lead the supplicants deep into the dark recesses, where the gurgling of Kibawa’s huge water pipe, the voices of recently departed kin, and other domestic sounds could be heard. The supplicants would be so comforted by these sounds, and especially by the proximity
to deceased loved ones, that they would not want to leave the cavern. The *kitobo* would present the supplicant’s problem to Kibawa, and advice or judgment would be rendered.¹³

Authors addressing the history of religious change among central African peoples have noted that “in times of stress when secular authority was being undermined, or when chieftains could not stand alone against invaders, then links within and between the spiritual realms were activated to provide a framework for political and, sometimes, military activity on a wide scale” (Garrett 1969:113; cf. Oger 1972:1). The best-studied and most celebrated case of this is the role assumed by Shona spirit mediums in the guerrilla movement of preindependence Zimbabwe (Lan 1985). For Tabwa, the 1930s were marked by intense social stress caused by the collapse of the colonial economy in the Great Depression and the politico-economic upheaval resulting from the introduction of a Belgian version of Indirect Rule.¹⁴ Tabwa shifted their religious forms to accommodate such change by adopting a form of the Bulumbu possession cult from neighboring eastern Luba (cf. Werner 1971:21). In particular, Kibawa’s cavern began to be seen as the source from which possessing spirits might emanate. These are *ngulu* earth spirits sent forth by recently deceased kin to afflict and so gain the attention of those surviving them, as indicated through divination. Adepts of the Bulumbu cult then assist supplicants to become possessed, so that the spirits may “rise up” and “take” the person to announce their identity and desires. Like “the rising of a new moon,” this “enlightenment” (and Tabwa use the word metaphorically in the same way we do in English) allows supplicants to see things anew, and so to construct a happier future. Once recognition and reverence are offered to the spirit, it will continue to offer critical assistance to the person.

Bulumbu adepts wear *nkaka* beaded headdresses during their performances (Fig. 12). The central beaded spiral is “the eye of Kibawa,” and so represents the entire paradigm of the moon, contact with the ancestors, and fertility. The placement of this third “eye” over the center of the adept’s forehead is significant. Tabwa practitioners of divination and magic are said to have “eyes,” and whenever someone states this, she or he invariably taps the center of the forehead with an index finger. “The face of the cross,” a common scarification pattern of Tabwa in precolonial as well as present times, emphasizes this same central point with a vertical line of keloids or tattooing following the body midline intersected by a horizontal line across the forehead (or, sometimes, as in the Tabwa face mask in Fig. 4, from the temples across the eyes to meet at the bridge of the nose; see Roberts 1988b:46-47). The “eye” at this central point allows the practitioner to “see” beyond that which can be known to ordinary people. The center of the forehead is deemed the seat of wisdom, prophecies, and dreams.

The metaphors of the central spiral of beads on the *nkaka* are made instrumental by sewing a magic bundle into the headdress, behind the spiral. The *virimba* activating agents of such a bundle include tiny fragments of the following: *nzima*, the melanistic serval cat (*Felis serval*) that is “cool” and dark and renders the adept “invisible” to evil sorcerers; *radii*, or a piece of wood from a tree struck by lightning, which lends the power of lightning itself to the practitioner seeking to solve problems without evil interference; the head or brain of a domestic jungle fowl cock and of a *kasebu*, or honey guide bird (probably *Indicator indicator*), to lend the capacity to see what ordinary people cannot; the brain of a spotted hyena and a wild dog (*Crocuta crocuta* and *Lycaon pictus*), members of a small set of animals felt to have *malosi*, or an extraordinary vision allowing them to “see” and seek out prey or carrion at a great distance; *mazombwe*, the giant walking stick (*Palopus leopoldii*), to make the adept tremble and quake like this insect, as a sign of impending possession; and *kichi-mankunka*, a kind of woody fungus, which because of its pure white interior
is considered an auspicious sign when it pops up out of the earth and is discovered while farming.

These magical elements do two things: they protect the Bulumbu adept so that she or he can resolve a supplicant’s misfortune without interference from the very sorcerers or other evil agents who may be the source of the problem; and they project the adept’s vision beyond that of an ordinary mortal, enabling perception of a solution to an obscure and troubling difficulty and to provide a plan of action for resolution. The third eye of the Bulumbu adept provides an ambivalent yet arresting vision: it is both inwardly protective and outwardly aggressive (see Napier 1986 for a discussion of similar symbolism elsewhere in the world). As such, it is a dramatic reflection of the paradox of social life as recognized by Tabwa and their Luba neighbors. The “two faces” of their social reality, represented by the natural symbol of the moon, are a recognition that good and evil exist in the same persons and circumstances, as situationally interpreted by the different parties in local-level politics.

A final activating agent that some Bulumbu adepts place in their headdresses is a scale of a pangolin (either the Cape, Manis temminckii, or the tree, M. tricuspis). Pangolin scales are burned by Tabwa and other people in central Africa to cause lions and other dangerous animals to flee. Tabwa say that “the king of beasts is not the lion” but the pangolin. Use of the pangolin as an activating agent for the magical bundle of a diviner’s headdress keeps sorcerers at bay during a seance. There is more to the pangolin metaphor than this, however. The Tabwa word for “pangolin” is nkaka, the very name of the possession-cult adept’s headdress. At a superficial level, this is probably due to the visual analogy between the balamaezi triangles of the headdress and a pangolin’s roughly triangular, trilobed scales (G. Nagant, pers. com., 1977). Other associations are possible, drawing upon the taxonomic preposterousness of the pangolin, a generic equivalence between the scales of a pangolin and the shell of a tortoise, and other factors too complex to present here in detail (see Roberts 1980). What is clear is that when Tabwa call a beaded headdress “pangolin,” they propose a rebus (“a riddle . . . depicted by symbols or pictures that suggest . . . the words or syllables they represent” [Morris 1969:1087]) or intellectual game of the sort from which Tabwa,


On many nkaka headdresses, two spirals, isocoles triangles, or other figures on either side of the central motif represent the winds (pepo) from the cardinal directions. The word pepo refers both to “wind” and to “possessing spirits,” which, “like the wind, [are] invisible, mysterious, [and] free to move from place to place.” Reference is also made to “the suddenness of the happening” of possession: “it is coming like the wind, unseen, from nowhere, [like] a sudden gust ‘creeping into a human being’ . . . like the wind penetrating a house” (Oger 1972:2). The four motifs are the eyes or doors of the most important spirits, the wives of Kibawa (Roberts 1980:366). The “pinwheel” within the central motif of the nkaka in Figure 7 was explained by a Tabwa informant to be the four triangular doors of these same spirits from which they emerge to possess people.

Two spirals appear on either side of Kibawa’s spiral in the headdress seen in Figure 12. One on the left is said to represent Katambalele, the spirit that opens a path through the bamboo thicket surrounding Kibawa’s cavern so that a supplicant can find spiritual aid. The other is Mulenga, the spirit guide within Kibawa’s cavern and a figure that is Kibawa’s structural equivalent for southern Tabwa and Bemba. On the right are Kaliba, the spirit that possesses the particular adept wearing this headdress, and Kisimba, a spirit associated with the legitimacy of certain Tabwa chiefs. Each of these four spirits has three more associated with it, making a total of thirteen major spirits when Kibawa himself is included. Thirteen is the number of lunar months in a year as well as the number of scutes, or large scales, on a tortoise’s carapace. These associations are important to the discussion of beaded masks that may be used in Mbudye society performances.

The Mbudye society exists among Luba, Luba-related, and Luba-influenced peoples. Mbudye has among its principal purposes the recounting of the mythical charter for sacred kingship and the glorification of the political status quo (Reeve 1981). While some say that Mbidi Kiliwe, the culture hero who established sacred royalty among the Luba (Heusch 1982a), also introduced the Mbudye society, others assert that it was “a certain Ngiya ya Nkongolo” (Gerber 1932). The same man, according to the Luba informants of W. F. P. Burton, originated the Butwa society found among Tabwa and other groups east and southeast of the Luba (Burton 1966:157). From a structuralist perspective, this indicates that the two societies share basic metaphors. It appears, however, that Mbudye and Butwa were “in competition” (Gerber 1934a) and did not exist in the same territories: Mbudye served and continues to serve the needs of people with a centralized, state political economy (or at least its remnants), while Butwa flourished among decentralized, stateless peoples like most Tabwa, but has been defunct since early this century because of the imposition of colonial capitalism (see Roberts 1980). Many Tabwa ancestral figures bear the V-shaped scarification emblem of Butwa initiation (Roberts 1988b), indicating the society’s importance as a source of “help in sickness and need, with the prospects of a respectable funeral and worship after death” (Gerber 1934b:62-63), for precolonial people engaged in a community-oriented political economy. That some northern and southwestern Tabwa have adopted the Mbudye society indicates their borrowing from a Luba idiom.

12. TABWA BULUMBU MEDIUM WEARING A BEADED HEADRESS, SINGING WITH TWO SPIRIT “CHILDREN” DURING A SEANCE IN 1976. NEAR MPALA, SOUTHERN ZAIRE.
as they accommodated a change in political economy toward the sort of centralization of power for which the Luba are locally famous (see Roberts 1986a for other examples of this same process).

According to W.F.P. Burton, at least for turn-of-the-century Luba, the "presiding spirit" of Mbudy was Lolo Inang’ombe, who oversaw initiation into the society and punished any who might subvert its principles. "For the practical purposes of the society," Lolo Inang’ombe was represented as a land tortoise. Mbudy members were said to "show an extreme respect for" the tortoise, and "to know whether a person is well inclined to the 'Bumbu' a tortoise is put into his hut." How the person reacted to the animal was taken as a sign of willingness and suitability for Mbudy membership (Burton 1961:159-60, 164). The form of a tortoise was given to the Lukasa mnemonic device recording the charter for Luba royalty and other lore. The back of the Lukasa "bears a stylized tortoise shell design" of "striated triangles or squares," each of which "symbolizes an esoteric piece of information" (Reefe 1977:49). The Lukasa, then, was "the Bible of the Bumbu" and the dictionary of signs that could be "read" by Mbudy members (Henroteaux 1945:104).

Lolo Inang’ombe herself is said to have been the offspring of a woman and a buffalo, a woman married to a buffalo, or, as in an Mbudy wall painting Burton once saw, a dichotomous being that had the body of an animal (a buffalo?) and the torso and head of a woman (Burton 1961:159-60). Tabwa masks may portray this couple or at least refer to the same play of metaphors, for the wooden helmet mask field collected by Pierre Dartevelle (Fig. 3) was said to be female and paired with the male buffalo mask in the Stanley Collection (Fig. 8), which he also collected. The inset cowry-shell eyes that Tabwa anthropomorphic masks possess or reflect in their carving are like those of Tabwa buffalo masks (Roberts & Maurer 1986:252-53). The figure represented is said to be a clan ancestress named Musangue (Dartevelle, pers. com., 1984). The root of this name is the verb kusangue, "to be found, to desire," with a nuance of sexual promiscuity. Perhaps the mask was danced to dramatize the bestial excess of the earliest humans, who, like Lolo Inang’ombe, coupled with buffaloes. As Burton suggested, "within the sect [of Mbudy] promiscuity is practiced" and there are "sensual displays of dancing, where every sexual action and gesture is exploited to the full" (1961:163, 167), probably for the same symbolic purposes.

Buffaloes (Syncerus caffer) are still found in Tabwa lands, although they are far less common than they were prior to the introduction of gun-hunting (IAAPB 1892:11). The strength and violent nature of the buffalo are played upon in Tabwa metaphor, ritual, and magic. Magical whisks made from buffalo tails are used to keep at bay smallpox, lion-men (visangaka), sorcerers, or other agents of destruction. The name of such a whisk, mpunga, derives from a verb meaning "to stay awake and vigilant all night" (Roberts & Maurer 1986:176-77). These whisks are often made with sculpted wooden handles, some of which are inset with copper wire filigree; they are still used as signs of political status, as they were by earlier Tabwa chiefs (Giraud 1890:522).

Eastern Luba found the same metaphors apposite. A boy leaving the initiation camp was greeted with the cry, "Here is the buffalo, here is the buffalo!" (Colle 1913:275), while Mbidji Kiluwe, the Luba culture hero, was praised as being "shiningly black like the buffalo" (Womersley 1984:7). Dartevelle was told that a name for a Tabwa buffalo mask is Kiyunde; although the etymology of this term remains obscure, it may derive from a root that means "to heal" or that is associated with the smelting of iron, activities associated with Mbidji Kiluwe and other culture heroes. It is quite possible, then, that buffalo masks used by Tabwa living close to and among eastern Luba were either associated with Mbidji practices glorifying Mbidji Kiluwe or were made to celebrate the same idiom thatMbidi personifies for Luba.

This brings us back to beaded masks like that in the Stanley Collection, said to be associated with Mbudy. In the past, Mbudy spirit mediums and those known as Bulumbu were said to be one and the same. Mbudy members in the higher orders of their society were possessed by spirits and "allowed to wear the 'n'kaka' or diamond-decorated bead crown" (Burton 1961:50-52, 55, 154-67) (Fig. 9). These possessing spirits are associated with Luba heroes whose "spirits are believed to have taken up their abode in springs, fountains, waterfalls, and deep caves, where the water oozes from the roof." Among the most important possessing spirits for Luba (like Tabwa) is Kibawa, and the person so possessed "may scratch wildly at the ground with his finger- and toe-nails" to dig a "cave" like Kibawa’s (Burton 1961:50-52, 55, 154-67). A praise name for Mbidji Kiluwe is "Chief of Kibawa" (Colle 1913:337; Verhulpen 1936:95), and the "fetish" or magical investiture bundle as well as the principal mukishi (wooden figure) of the Luba "king of the sacred blood (mulopwe)" was called "Kibawa" (Verbeke 1937:55-58).

Mbudy and Bulumbu adopt among Luba show "reverence for the new moon" (Verbeke 1937:167) and in other ways share the basic metaphors made manifest in Tabwa beaded headaddresses and the possession cult séances in which they are used. The beaded headaddresses of Luba and Tabwa possession cult mediums are often strikingly similar (Figs. 9, 12), and are called nkaka in both languages, a word they both use to refer to the pangolin as well (Burton 1961:166; Van Avermaet & Mbuya 1954:216). It is likely that a conceptual association

13. AN MBUDYE SOCIETY MEMBER(? DANCING IN A VILLAGE IN THE ZAIRE/ZAMBIA BORDER AREA IN THE MID-1970S. HE WEARS A LARGE BEADED HEADRESS ON HIS FOREHEAD AND A BLUE MONKEY PELT DOWN HIS BACK.
exists among a pangolin’s scales, a tortoise’s scutes (the emblem of Lolo Inang’ombe, “presiding spirit” of Mbudye), the triangular tortoise shell motif found on the back of lukasa mnemonic devices of Mbudye members, and the triangular beading of both Luba and Tabwa headdresses and masks. The signs of Mbudye initiation, painted on the walls of the society lodge and sculpted or represented as clusters of beads tacked to the top surface of the lukasa device, were “so rigorously exact throughout the whole of Lubaland [that they] were originally intended to perpetuate some symbolic teaching, or history” (Burton 1961:163; cf. Reeve 1977).

The messages encoded in the motifs of a spirit medium’s headdress or mask can be read in a similar manner.

Tabwa beaded masks show “constrained diversity” of the same sort as do nkaka headdresses. All masks and most nkaka seen to date are surmounted by feathers, usually of domestic jungle fowl whose spectacular plumage makes the usual gloss, “chicken,” seem wholly inadequate (cf. Davis-Roberts 1980:5). The metaphorical reference is the uncanny ability of the jungle fowl cock to discern and crow at dawn, even before people are aware that daybreak has come; occasionally the feathers of other birds or the stiff mane of a goat are used in a similar fashion, to make different but complementary metaphorical references.

The Stanley mask has the pelt of a blue monkey attached in such a way that it hangs down over the back of the head and shoulders. Nkaka headdresses often have blue monkey pelts attached to them in this same manner (Figs. 10, 12; see also Roberts 1988c:fig. 6), and other beaded masks now in museum and private collections may have had such pelts removed. The blue monkey (Cercopithecus mitis) is arboreal and rarely touches the ground. Tabwa see the animal’s high acrobatics as analogous to the way that a possessing spirit will “perch upon” and “take over” a person’s head and very being, as expressed in the verb for “to become possessed,” kutenatana, explained above. As shown in Figure 13, agile dancers can make the monkey pelt seem to leap onto or about the head, in imitation of the animal. The nkaka headdress in Figure 6 has the spotted pelt of a serval attached to it, whereas a beaded face mask in a field photograph by Marc Félix (Fig. 15) has the spotted skin of a genet (Genetta genetta). Spotted skins are (or were) worn in this way by certain high-ranking Mbudye members to “represent the heavens: the black spots stand for the stars” (Berger 1932:17); or it may be that the “mottled coat (light and dark) readily connotes the alternation of day and night” as subsumed in the powers and being of chiefs (Heusch 1982a:139-41).

These same spotted skins are associated with chiefship by peoples throughout central Africa, and usually it is the prerogative of chiefs to own or wear them. The association here, especially for Luba, is between possessing spirits and the culture heroes who established sacred chiefship.

The Stanley beaded mask has a spiral at the center of the forehead, just as most nkaka headdresses do. Other masks such as those in Figures 1 and 14 do not have this motif, but do have a similar register of isosceles triangles across the brow. On still others (Figs. 16, 17) that are flat panels rather than contoured surfaces that fit the curves of the face, this register of triangles is missing and the spiral is placed over the mouth. Unfortunately, nothing whatsoever is known of these masks’ provenance, other than that they are said and appear to be “Tabwa.” Still, several reasons for placing a spiral motif over the mouth come to mind, based on Tabwa ethnog-
raphy. An mpande disk was placed over the mouth of a precolonial Tabwa chief during funeral and succession proceedings. The death of a chief was hidden from ordinary people through a charade orchestrated by his grandchildren. A granddaughter would seclude herself with the moribund chief and, after he had died, cradle his cadaver, moaning as though she were the chief still alive and suffering. After four days, the corpse was placed in a great jar or bark receptacle, its knees tucked to its chest. It would be dressed in a “feathered headress” and an mpande disk would be placed over the mouth “to prevent rapid putrefaction.” Decomposition was allowed to continue until the skull fell from the spine. Then the skull would be kept as a revered relic, while the skull of the preceding chief that had been kept in the same way would be placed in a deep pool of water or beneath a streambed with the body of the chief just deceased (Roberts 1980:494-98).

Some time thereafter, the grandchildren would choose a successor from among the chief’s sisters’ sons. The successor was closed up in a house while the grandchildren circled it in dance. The new chief was then released from the house, given regalia, and an mpande disk was bound over his mouth. With the spiral disk sealing his lips, the chief was instructed to no longer commit “foolish acts,” often a reference to adultery, but sometimes to other disruptive behavior as well (Roberts 1980:499-500).

In both of these cases, the mpande disk sealed the mouth. The spiraled shell disk is of a cognitive set with the moon, the cavern of Kabawa, fertility, and the chief’s genealogy. At death, a person’s words and wisdom are said to go to the east, to appear as light; again the metaphor of “enlightenment” is the same as we would have it in English. Jungle fowl first perceive this light, and crow. Possessing spirits may emerge from Kabawa’s cavern to the west, of where most Tabwa live; but, somewhat paradoxically, they are said to come from the “place of beginnings” in the east when they possess people. In this they are like the new moon that is first noticed in the west but subsequently is seen to rise in the east. The enlightenment these spirits bring their supplicants is informed by the wisdom of chiefs, the “fathers of their people” who are of an idiom with Mbidi Kiliwe, the Luba hero and “Chief of Kabawa” who “came from the east” to conquer what would become the Luba heartland (Roberts, forthcoming A). The spiral of beads over the mouths of some masks is a reference to this richly complex cultural field: speech is to be controlled, carefully uttered, and consistent with the teachings of the ancestors kept by Kabawa.

A final use of beaded headdresses may be mentioned as an indication of how vitally important their messages and structure are, even in the context of the most stressful sorts of social change in contemporary central Africa. Mrs. Margret Carey, a guest curator at the Museum of Mankind in London, has been kind enough to send me photographs she recently took at the Moto Moto Museum in northeastern Zambia of objects seized in the early 1960s from one or more followers of Alice Lenshina’s nativistic Lumpa Church. These include beaded headdresses that are strikingly similar to the nkaka of Tabwa and Luba possession cult adepts: one has five tight spirals to be worn across the forehead; another, four spirals and a diamond of dazzling color combinations; and a third consists of triangles around a large central spiral (Fig. 18).

In 1953, Alice Lenshina became very ill and “died” four times, but was called back to life each time by Jesus, who taught her instructive songs and gave her a book “in a strange language that only she could read” (Oger 1962:129).

She began teaching these songs and writings and exhorting people to give up the sorcery that seemed to be condoned by the colonial government, since the administration had condemned use of the poison oracle to identify and eliminate evildoers. Lenshina baptized people and became alienated from local missionaries for doing so. She founded her own church, which by the late 1950s had a following of well over 100,000 among Bemba and Bemba-speaking people, including many southern Tabwa.

Lenshina was thought to be possessed by an ngulu earth spirit and “had her analogues among those to whom spirits revealed themselves through dreams and possession” (A.D. Roberts 1970:527). Father Louis Oger states that Lenshina was “‘possessed’ by the spirit of Christ” in a manner similar to, and explained using the vocabulary of, ngulu spirit possession (1962:132;
While "there does not seem to have been any ecstatic behavior or symptoms of spirit possession" during her church services (A.D. Roberts 1970:537), "Lenshina did nothing to dispel reports" of her connection with the ngulu spirit system (Werner 1971:23). Indeed, converts to the Lumpa Church said they were inspired to join through dreams and prophecies, during a time when ngulu spirit possession was dramatically on the rise among people in northeastern Zambia (Oger 1972:1). Through the ngulu idiom, Lenshina offered redemption to sorcerers and provided her own magical charms to protect church members and assure them of successful harvests (A.D. Roberts 1970:531, 542). It is probable that the beaded headdresses seized by the colonial government and now in the Moto Moto Museum were used by Lenshina's converts, perhaps outside of her direct supervision but within the idiom of spirit possession that was her implicit vehicle.

Lenshina made promises of the Millennium, saying Jesus would visit her followers when the Lumpa cathedral was completed. She herself "claimed to provide an answer to the troubles, not just of individuals, but of society at large" (A.D. Roberts 1970:543). "Lumpa," the name of her church, is derived from a Bemba verb meaning "to be the most important," this in reference to missionary churches in the same part of Zambia that Lenshina felt were led by "her enemies" (Oger 1962:133). The Lumpa church attracted many who were hostile to the colonial government (including the brother and mother of soon-to-be-president Kenneth Kaunda), and became a locus of nationalism during the tense years of the late 1950s and early 1960s, prior to Zambian independence. Lumpa became "more and more specifically a peasant movement," however, which soon proved "quite incompatible with the nationalist emphasis on wider incorporation and on the state" (Binsbergen 1981:290-91). Shortly before and for some time after Independence, a violent split between conservative, nativistic church members and many nationalists resulted in the deaths of as many as 1,500 Lenshina followers, as President Kaunda banned the movement and arrested Lenshina (Binsbergen 1981:266; A.D. Roberts 1970:553-62).

Still, the symbols of Lenshina's movement, including reference to the ngulu earth-spirit idiom and use of beaded headbands as those now in the Moto Moto Museum, served a critical function in allowing people to redefine their social outlook as dissatisfaction with colonial living conditions rose.

For the last fifty or more years, beaded headdresses and masks have been used by possession cult adepts among Tabwa, eastern Luba, Bemba, and other closely related peoples of southeastern Zaire and northeastern Zambia. While the contexts for such use have varied, certain key metaphors remain vitally appropriate across time and ethnic difference. The two most significant of these are prominently represented in the beading: balamawezi triangles, a motif called "the rising of a new moon," refer to enlightenment, courage, and hope through spirit possession; and spirals of beading or cone-shell disks refer to the paradoxical nature of time and the advance of human generations, fertility, promise, and contact with divinity.

These and other motifs make beaded headdresses and masks "agents of ideology" for both performers and their audiences, as they reflect, make accessible, and inculcate values, social needs, and aspirations. Importantly though, while donning these masks "causes" the bearer to become a spirit or to assume an otherwise inefatable state, such transformation allows an audience to contemplate change of other sorts. As Raymond Firth has written: "In many societies spirit possession and spirit medium cults offer a field for some degree of individual self-expression, maybe of a fantasy order, going well beyond the conventions of tradition. Spirit mediumship may thus allow of flexibility in the conceptualization of the spirit universe, and presumably thereby offer some possibilities of change in belief" (1969:xi-xii). As is evident in the case of beaded headdress use by Alice Lenshina's followers, coping with and taking full advantage of turbulent, even revolutionary, social conditions can be facilitated by use of masks.

Yet there is irony and paradox in the wearing of a mask, for one is deliberately contrasting apparent with intended meaning, what empirically is with what might be. That is, the masker and the audience know that this is only a performance, but they willingly suspend their disbelief in order to participate in the intended drama. They want to witness, think about, and participate in transformation. They want to consider alternatives. They want to engage in "what-if" hypothesis. While this may sometimes be an entertaining process, maskers' impersonation of spirits, allowing the inefatable to become more accessible, can be a deadly serious business. Bulumbu and Mbudye adepts are possessed by spirits in a catharsis that brings insight, perception, and solutions to nagging dilemmas, sudden crises, and life-threatening circumstances. Lenshina's followers used headdresses similar to those of possession cult adepts as a means of political empowerment, when they reacted to colonial oppression through references to the vitality of indigenous culture and its potential for adaptation and transformation. The ambiguities and paradoxes of wearing masks, then, continue to be "useful, if old, 'tricks of the human race.'"
well-being; it may also be expressed in an image that encompasses the entire community, as is the case with Taninbar stone boats. By contrast, an artistic representation of social conflict is apparently not present in Taninbar, although it may be enacted in the society in other forms, even those related to the stone boats. In her discussion of carved Taninbar prows, McKinnon describes the hostile confrontation that is part of a confirmation of interisland alliances.

Several of the contributions emphasize social stratification. This subject is especially relevant to the discussions of Nias, Sumba, the Batak, and the Toraja. Nobility implies merit. It may be inherited, as in East Sumba or Nias. It may in addition need to be reinforced by acquired status, through headhunting and ceremonial feasting. Feldman and Barbour both concentrate on the theme of community leadership as mediators between the village and divinity, a role that is emphasized by their close iconographic link to a cosmic image. Hoskins interprets the presence of spiritual power in certain objects that combine female and male images; surprisingly, she is the only contributor to discuss the issue of gender in any detail.

Although some individual articles are disappointing, the volume as a whole provides new information and interpretations. However, one point of criticism has to be raised. Although "Indigenous Styles of Southeast Asia" is the book's subtitle, there is virtually no stylistic definition or analysis in the papers contributed. The exceptions are Newton's introduction and McKinnon's perceptive and concise discussion of Taninbar boat carvings. The social context of artistic production is, of course, essential, and all of the contributions try to tackle that issue. But in addition art is made by individuals in a specific way that is determined by their tradition and by their personal creativity. Neither the question of the particularity of style nor that of individual creativity is addressed here. These issues are central to the subject of ethnographic art history.
7. Some figures are said to have been acquired in a particular locale, but we cannot be certain that they originated there. If they were, in fact, discovered there, were they made there? Can it be shown that the figure did not originate in areas where it is not yet found? With only negative evidence as a hand, the answer, of course, is "no."

8. Twisted headbands and long, curly hair in the natural style of ivory statuettes (figs. 14, 15, 16), leading Dirix (1987) to suspect an influence from the Islamic north, and the presence of the Mandea is conjecture, assuming that the turban was a common Mandea costume, as it is not now. Reference cited.


