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Caroline Rooney

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Introduction

> I believe that we should most faithfully render the Bantu thought in European language by saying that Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces.
>
> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*

> The Igbo world is an arena for the interplay of forces. It is a dynamic world of movement and of flux … *Ike*, energy, is the essence of all things human, spiritual, animate and inanimate. Everything has its own unique energy which must be acknowledged and be given its due.
>
> Chinua Achebe, 'The Igbo World and its Art'

> *Ashé*, often translated as 'power', is a concept that designates the dynamism of being and the very vitality of life. *Ashé* is the creative source of all that is; it is the power-to-be, the principle in things that enables them to be.
>
> Emmanuelle Chukwudi Eze, 'The Problem of Knowledge in "Divination": The Example of *Ifa*'

> $E = mc^2$
>
> Einstein

Step, this begins with a step. Or have I lost you already? Animism, it is a question of movement. In order to advance this, let us consider the following three excerpts that have been selected for a repeated scene of exposition. This scene is one of being in the dark and thence of divining something beyond what can be immediately sensed. The following extracts are taken from Aristotle's *Physics*, and two African novels, Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974) and Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1913). The advantage of this unusual juxtaposition is that it dislodges the centrality given to colonialism in approaching African thought and culture as that which has the definitive power to separate 'primitive' African philosophies from the modernity of Western thought, a modernity that nonetheless extends back to classical Greek philosophy, at least. Here are the excerpts for consideration:

> It is evident, then, that time is neither movement nor independent of movement.

> We must take this as our starting point and try to discover – since we wish to know what time is – what exactly it has to do with movement.
>
> Now we perceive movement and time together: for *even when it is dark and we are not being affected through the body*, if any movement takes place in the mind *we at once suppose that some time also has elapsed*; and not only that but also, when some time is thought to have passed, some movement also along with it seems to have taken place. Hence time is either movement or something that belongs to movement. Since then it is not movement, it must be the other.
>
> Aristotle, *Physics*, Book IV, 219a (my emphasis)[1]

> After a while she became more accustomed to the extreme dark and quite enjoyed blowing out the light and *being swallowed up by the billowing darkness*. One night she had just blown out the light when *she had the sudden feeling* that someone had entered the room. The full impact of it seemed to come from the roof, and was so strong that she jerked up in bed. There was *a swift flow of air* through the room, and whatever it was moved and sat down on the chair. The chair creaked slightly. Alarmed, she swung around and lit the candle. The chair was empty. She had never seen a ghost in her life. She was not given to 'seeing' things.
>
> Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (my emphasis)[2]

> It was very early in the morning, *long, long before the sun was due*, and he was bathing in an ugly place, where it was most fearsome ... In this pool the water was *pitch dark*, intensely black. On the opposite bank, directly across from where he was, but inside the water, was a yawning cave, a dark black tunnel which stretched *beyond one's vision* ... a place fit to be inhabited only by the *tikoloshe* ...
>
> Chaka once again splashed himself vigorously with the water, and at once the water of that wide river billowed and then levelled off. Then it swelled higher and higher till he was sure it was going to cover him, and he walked towards the bank. No sooner was he there than *a warm wind began to blow with amazing force*. The reeds on the banks of the river swayed violently to and fro, and shook in a mad frenzy; and just as suddenly as they began, they quickly stopped moving and were dead still, and they just stood erect as if no wind had ever blown ... In the centre of that wide dark green pool the water began to ripple gently ... where the water was rippling he saw the head of an enormous snake suddenly break surface.
>
> Thomas Mofolo, *Chaka* (my emphasis)[3]

In all three passages, we have the same starting point: someone is placed in the dark and discerns or divines a movement. What Aristotle gives to us as 'time', 'not movement', is far from being so swiftly concluded in the texts of Head and Mofolo. In the novels of Mofolo and Head we do come to a consideration of time but through a certain comprehension of being that Aristotle may be said to

elide in the swiftness of the decision: 'time, not movement'. In order to argue this more fully, I should like to discuss each of the extracts one by one.

Aristotle's task is to propose a concept of time in a refutation of other theories of time holding sway in his day. He is scathingly critical of the idea of time as a sphere, as that within which we are all included and, although he does not say so at this point of critical rejection, the objection might be that this idea constitutes a spatialisation of time, a figuring of time in terms of space. He is also critical, albeit less so, of the idea of time as movement. In both these cases, we could say that the weakness is that time is not established as time: it is space or movement. Thus, there is the need to re-pose the question: what is time? In the above extract, Aristotle says that if we are in a darkened room, thus being deprived of the sense of sight by which we would register movement, we are still able to feel a passage of time. We would sense this without or beyond our senses (this being, in philosophical terms, what is spoken of as the 'non-sensuous sensuous'). The important point here is that, by this, Aristotle is able to affirm that we are able to discern time as something not reducible to movement. The move that effects this perception can be further analysed.

It would seem that to concentrate on a sense of time as purely time, a death-like paralysis, a playing dead, needs be assumed. That is, we would need to lose touch with the physical world that billows all around us and flows through us as we breathe in and out, and in doing so we would come to assume a virtual disembodiment. Only in this imagined disembodied state, or in a repression of the body-world, could we claim to sense movement beyond the senses. Given this, what we could be said to sense is what goes on being, what continues to move, without (our) being in the world. Now as to what continues here in a ghostly movement-without-body, what would we suppose this to be? The supposition Aristotle gives us is time: it must be time. Moreover, with the repression of the moving body-world, movement is that which is perceived only by the mind. The thought of movement as time would thus seem to depend on a withdrawal from the on-going living world and so would seem to be the thought of what goes on being without (living) being. This is suggestive of a somewhat vampiric logic: life drained of life in order for the movement that is then the on-going of time, the movement that belongs to time. Having strayed a little from what Aristotle says, let us turn to *A Question of Power*.

In the above extract, we have a comparable starting point: in the dark – *swallowed up* by the dark – the protagonist has the feeling, without senses, of an entrance, a movement. Here, this movement, which in its inception cannot be detected by the senses but yet is 'felt', supposed, is not then supposed to be time. If it were a case of a sense of time, without the protagonist diagnosing this as such, it swiftly becomes a case of movement: 'swift flow of air'. It is as yet disembodied movement, airy and eerie, which suggests, briefly, the thought of a ghost – suppose it is a ghost? – which is quickly rejected on the grounds of not 'seeing' anything. There is nothing there, nothing that presents itself to the senses, apart from a flow of air and the feeling of a certain 'whatever'. At this point, the text goes on to give us this development: 'whatever it was wanted to introduce itself

at some stage, because one night she was lying staring at the dark when it seemed as though her head simply filled out into a large horizon.'[4] Aristotle's philosopher-in-the-dark seems to enter his/her own head, in the deprivation of the senses, but so as to have the world 'die', go away, or so as to 'die' from the world. In Head's account there would seem to be a reversal of this. Instead of the mind or consciousness losing sensory awareness of or contact with the world, withdrawing from the affective, moving, touch of the world, in Head's text the dividing line between the mind and the physical world dissolves, which produces the sense or sensation of being absolutely co-extensive with the being of the world, not transcendentally detached from it. What we might have here is an extreme experience of the real: being at one with life. It is at this point that the *flow* of air in the *billowing* dark begins to take on form, in a manner suggestive to me of foetal development in that what we are given is an evolution of increasingly precise formation that culminates in an independent living creation. We are told, after the 'flow', of the 'form of man' which rapidly becomes affirmed as indeed a 'he' in the *flowing* robes of a monk or prisoner. From 'air' to 'it' to 'form of a man' to a man, 'he', to robes of a 'monk', the protagonist comes to the point of supposing a name: 'He was … He was …' (ellipses in text). Then further definition is attempted in saying that the name associated with him is that of an almost universally adored God. He must be? We are not told, but it gets us guessing: he must be: Mandela or Sobukwe (thinking of the prison garment)?; Ghandi?; Krishna?; Christ?; Buddha? Who-or-whatever: 'Yet, he was intensely alive.' This living numinous flow is said to become part of 'the *flow* of her life'. In short, instead of supposing an 'it must be time', we are to suppose some force of animation, a living genesis, coming into being in a near borderless continuity of self with the natural world. What comes to be here is a creation that is given the name of Sello. The spirit-creations in *A Question of Power* are usually read in terms of the insane hallucinations of a case of paranoia or, if not to be rationally dismissed, as mystical or supernatural phenomena.[5] However, in the terms of the text itself, it may be that we are being offered something closer to a philosophy of nature, a physics, as Aristotle offers us his philosophy of nature, where these philosophies of nature would differ. It is necessary to cite at some length to show this:

> It was the kind of language she understood, that no one was the be-all and end-all of creation, that no one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life. It was almost a suppressed argument she was to work with all the time; that people, in their souls, were *forces*, *energies*, stars, planets, universes and all kinds of swirling magic and mystery; that at a time when this was openly perceived, the insight into their own powers had driven them mad, and they had robbed themselves of the natural grandeur of life. As Darwin had perceived in the patterns of nature: 'There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally *breathed into a few forms* or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning

> endless forms most beautiful and wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (my emphasis)[6]

Thus, Head says via her protagonist, in the language she understands, that it is not a case of religious mysticism – godlike creators as the be-all and end-all of creation – nor is it ultimately a case of madness (whilst there would be important debates to consider here, not least Jacqueline Rose's extremely thoughtful reading of *A Question of Power*);[7] it is a matter of the natural magic of creative evolution, the science of life, biology. Placing the first excerpt cited from *A Question of Power* alongside the above excerpt, it could be said that what we have in the first excerpt is a particular instance of, precisely, a creative evolution: from the 'flow of air', 'originally breathed' into a form which results in a creature that is intensely alive. We may be reading a poetic allegory of material genesis, or an amateur scientific allegory of a creative process. Interestingly, Head claimed that her other vocation, her vocation aside from writing, was that of biology. Like a certain Freud and like Ferenczi, she declares a great admiration for biology. In a letter to Randolph Vigne she writes: 'I read a bit of Darwin because in my next incarnation I hope to be a biologist'.[8] The description given of the materialisation of Sello recalls an earlier description of Head's of the creative process, in which a certain sense of an African spirit comes to take on the form of a man. In a letter to Patrick Cullinan in which Head discusses the creation of the main male character of her first novel, *The Cardinals*, Head writes:

> You know – that funny book I sent – 'The Cardinals' – I started to create a mythical man there and he has since appeared everywhere. I write about him all the time – yet he is not a flesh and blood reality … Imagination is something that I distrust profoundly and the way I have *created this man out of air*, shocks me in a terrible way, in my reasonable moments (my emphasis).[9]

That Head's text intuits a certain link between a biological evolution of life forms and a creative evolution of forms that take on a life in the mind is an intuition that modern science can confirm. Enrico Coen, in *The Art of Genes*, explains how the making of organisms is akin to a creative process. He writes:

> Genes do not provide an instruction manual that is interpreted by a separate entity; they are part and parcel of the process of interpretation and elaboration … This is very similar to what happens when humans create something.[10]

Coen refers primarily to the creation of paintings to explain the makings of organisms, whilst Head's writings may be seen to lend support to his argument in using the evolution of an organism as an analogy for the creative process. Let us now turn to the passage from Mofolo's *Chaka*, for which the second excerpt cited from *A Question of Power* happens to serve as a useful co-text.

This passage from *Chaka* marks a crucial moment of election in Chaka's

destiny. It is comparable to the scene in *Macbeth* where Macbeth is singled out for greatness by the witches. What could be said to happen to Chaka in this bathing scene is that he comes into contact with the living power of nature itself, which flows into form in the body of a huge snake. In having the experience of being recognised or singled out by the snake, Chaka may be said to wish to arrogate the power of the vital or generative forces of nature to himself. In short, in Mofolo's novel, he seeks to make himself, in Head's terms, the be-all and end-all of creation. As in the passages from Aristotle and Head, we are first placed in total darkness, and this gives rise to a feeling of eerieness, of a something invisible yet there, beyond what can immediately be sensed. As with Head, but not with Aristotle, this affect or feeling becomes a movement of nature but beyond the particular natural phenomenon. The water that billows and the strong wind that blows are movements of nature but intensely so, so that we become aware of not just the pool or the wind in the reeds but of a moving force as an animating power. It is this intensive life force or invisible energy that comes to be embodied in the majestic and frightening body of the snake.

We seem to have moved a long way from Aristotle's *Physics*, Book IV. Ironically, what the thought of time represses is the time of the thought, the time in which the thinking occurs. What the thinking of time represses is the present continuous tense: I am thinking. This elision of the present continuous is not just true of this instance, but far more widely so of Western philosophy, thought and criticism: this is perhaps crucial, so I will return to it a little further on. We are told, 'some time has elapsed', and this formulation is suggestive of an hysterical absencing, a fainting fit. Coming to, so to speak, we can say, this lapse of time is the gestation of the thought in the time of its making, its thinking. Aristotle's little scene of the philosopher-in-the-dark, which unphilosophically I can't help picturing (a man seated at a table, elbows on the table and head in hands, eyes shut, door shut, window shuttered), could be sub-titled 'the origins of philosophy' or 'the beginnings of Western metaphysics'. That is, the living, moving, hurly-burly world, the world in fact, is shut out in order to have the time to think, and the starting point here is a removing of the self from existence to think of existence. This could be the auto-affective, self-moving, self-starting thought of 'what if I were to die?' or 'imagine me dead'. With a nod in the direction of Descartes, we might get, 'thinking myself dead, I yet find that I think, therefore I am'. Why not, 'I am thinking I am yet living'? We have the simple present of a metaphysical 'in general' because the on-going specificity of the present continuous has been shut out to begin with, foreclosed – and it is because of this that 'I' can return to myself in time and confirm that, in truth, 'I am', from a speculative loss of being.

Once Aristotle has supposed that time is not reducible to movement, he suggests that time is what is measured of movement. It is that which is counted not that which counts: numbers count, time is counted.[11] Rushing this, time is counted according to the 'now'. The 'now' is both 'the present' and that which is not, in that as soon as it is posited it is both past and to come. The now, the present, refers to what is absent – the before and after. Time is thus thought of in

terms of presence and absence, being and non-being. This problematic is one that Derrida inherits from Heidegger and traces back through Heidegger to Hegel, Kant and Aristotle, in order to assert that this thinking of time in terms of being and non-being is *the* philosophical conception of time.[12]

What Mofolo and Head may be said to draw attention to is what the thought of time forgets or represses. This is a matter of according value to what is yet living, the mattering of the aliveness of life rather than the counting of time. If what the measurement of time, time as measurement, occludes is the on-going life, a continuous coming-into-being, this is what of movement cannot be measured or counted. The only way to give a number to this is to arrest it, stop its flow, cut it short: a question of killing in order to count the now of the no longer now or no longer now of the now? Or what time cannot measure of movement is its animation, its vitality … that 'whatever it is', which is to say its measure is deadening, or if not, ghostly. In *A Question of Power*, Sello – he of the 'He was … He was …' – is ultimately, only in the closing pages, identified as Time:

> He had the long history of the human race in his heart, as he was Old Father Time. Whatever would happen next she could not say.[13]

In *Chaka*, Chaka is a would-be Father Time in that his ambition is to rule over all of creation for all time. Chaka's will to the universalisation of history involves the endless sacrifice of lives. While these other lives count for nothing as far as a would-be immortal Chaka is concerned, the narrator of the novel keeps constant track:

> In order to comprehend this fully, we should use the example that the number of people killed by him in the ways we have described, is equal to the number of the Basotho, counting every man, woman, and child, multiplied three or four-fold. Imagine them all being killed![14]

Chaka's/Time's reign is in this way measured by the number of lives sacrificed. Sello's case as Father Time is somewhat different. Early on in the novel, he shows Elizabeth, the protagonist, what he has on or in his mind or conscience:

> Then Sello seemed to put in the plugs all at the same time, and she found herself faced with a vast company of people. They had still, sad, fire-washed faces. The meaning of the stillness, the sadness and intensity of expression did not reach her till some time later, when Sello exposed a detail of his past. It was death. It was the expression of a people who had been killed and killed and killed again in one cause after another for the liberation of mankind.[15]

Unlike in the case of Chaka, Sello, with the history of the human race in his heart, is the memory of the costs of history which is associated with his working

for redemption, as realised by the protagonist who states with reference to the multitude of those killed: 'Why, an absolute title has been shared. There are several hundred thousand people who are God'.

The selective and condensed consideration of the texts concerned here yet serves as a means of introducing possible disjunctions between Western thought and, what I will call, animistic thought. Animism is not without a thinking of time; it perhaps rather concerns a different thinking of being in relation to time. What is at stake here, in this discussion, is the relation of time to the thought of being, how being is thought, and what is also at stake is the whole question of the status of philosophy, Western, in relation to thought not recognised as such, as philosophy or as thought. The question of whether it is possible, indeed permissible, to speak of animism as a philosophy has a long history, as I will come to give some indication of. First, a brief summary of the issues raised so far will be attempted.

Whilst Aristotle's philosopher senses something beyond the senses which is surmised to be time, in the extracts from Mofolo and Head, a feeling of something beyond the senses takes shape in the perception of movement and then form: a moving force takes on a form which may serve further to suggest an idea or ideal. Whilst Aristotle's perception presents a somewhat ghostly sensation, the sense of a presence in its absence, in its absence its presence, the texts of Head and Mofolo render the invisible, say, the energies or forces of life, visible in entities that give the sensation of being extremely alive. The emphasis is on the event of a coming into being. While what is initially presented in terms of the vital forces of life – that is, spirits – comes to be given in terms of an accumulation of time; it is of a time haunted by the absence of life. While movement is given in terms of creative evolution, the presence of time concerns an absence of being.

Why 'animism'?

'Animism' is a rather unfashionable term because of the ethnocentric, universalising and ill-informed ways in which it has been used. It belongs to the repertoire of terms that have aimed to distinguish between primitive and modern thought. Its use as an anthropological term was promoted by E.B. Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871) to designate a non-monotheistic primitive religion of spirits. James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, aligns animism with magic and schematises intellectual development (both he and Tylor were influenced by Herbert Spencer's evolutionism) according to three stages: that of animism or magical thought and practice; that of religion; and that of science. One principle line of objection to Frazer's positing of an animist world picture has been that it constitutes an armchair anthropology that fails to base itself rigorously on the specificities of fieldwork studies, this constituting the reaction to it on the part of Malinowski and his followers. Moreover, Paulin Hountondji has coined the term 'unanimism' as a critique of the synthesising gesture that lumps together the considerable diversity of African beliefs as but one unified belief: a unanimity of animism. He writes: 'there is a myth at work, the myth of a primitive unanimity,

with its suggestion that in "primitive" societies – that is, to say, non-Western societies – everybody always agrees with everybody else'.[16] Hountondji is certainly correct to challenge this imposition of a cultural homogeneity on quite different societies. However, what ought to be pointed out is that Hountondji's position serves to endorse Western philosophy, or philosophy with this as its disciplinary basis and model, as *the* generalisable mode of thought, whereby the thought of other cultures becomes implicitly an ethnic speciality, presumably best approached through the disciplines of anthropology and history.

What I need to stress at this outset is that this book is not and has not attempted to be an anthropological study, whatever tangents or moments of cross-over that there may be in terms of shared concerns, and that its interest is not in reviving an outmoded anthropological use of the term 'animism'. The work concerns rather a literature of animism, in both a broad and narrow sense. In fact, the term 'animism' is being retained precisely to open up both that which it has been used to fence in, cordon off and disallow, and that which a disallowance of the term serves also, in turn, to disallow. Changing just the terms of the debate can yet be a way of evading its on-going stakes. Whilst the unfashionable term 'animism' is to be retained in this work, as part of a discursive history, keeping this visible, the task will be one of challenging the prejudices that have been attached to it and working with it in such a way as to attempt the beginnings of conceiving anew the meanings that may be ascribed to it. In this, this work shares an impetus with Nicholas Royle's project to re-work the term 'telepathy', where Royle cites Derrida as follows:

> Every conceptual breakthrough amounts to transforming, that is to deforming, an accredited, authorized relationship between a word and a concept, between a trope and what one had every interest to consider to be an unshiftable primary sense, a proper, literal or current usage.[17]

While changing the terms can shift the debates, there is also a stigmatising of terms so that they may be used *to stigmatise* in the desire for 'proper' meanings. 'Animism' belongs to a vocabulary of stigmatised and stigmatising terms, alongside perhaps: 'primitivism', 'nativism'; re-stigmatised as 'neo-primitivism', 'neo-nativism', where the 'neo' tends to mean anything but. The criticism concerns a supposed desire for purity of origin on the part of others, but it often actually serves to discredit other origins in order to maintain a purity or singularity of origin, as will be explored in the following chapters. 'Primitivism' has been so equated with 'inferiority', that we forget it refers to 'the first': that which is in the first place or the first of its kind. At least with 'animism', it is possible to work with its improperness, in more ways than one. For a start, it never properly names the ideas or thought of particular cultures: it cannot, being but a vague and approximate translation (where this is appropriate for literature in its difference from anthropological factuality). Then, it is something of a boundary-hopping word, used not only by anthropologists and philosophers (for instance, Derrida uses it now and again due, no doubt, to its being part of an intellectual

inheritance), but by poets (Yeats, Soyinka), and psychoanalysts (Freud, Ferenczi). Moreover, etymologically, it can be seen to refer to an improper, or supposedly so, combination of meanings, concerning what crosses over from life to death to life, and crosses species. Drawing only on *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, we have: **anima** as 'inner personality' and **animus** as 'animating spirit' [L = spirit, mind]; **animal** derived from *animalis* having breath [*anima* breath]; **animate** as living, lively [L *animatus* pp of *animare* give life to (*anima* life, soul)]; **animism** from *anima* life, soul. So, just consider: animal, mind, spirit, breath, life, soul.

In *The Invention of Africa*, V.Y. Mudimbe carefully and astutely traces the invention of Africa in anthropological and theological discourses together with the responses of African philosophers and scholars to this discursive production. With respect to the debates outlined, it could be said that possibly the major preoccupation of this Africanist counterpart to Orientalism has been the debate over whether what Tylor identifies as 'animism', Frazer as magical thought, Lévy-Bruhl as 'pre-logical thought' and Tempels as 'Bantu philosophy' can or cannot be given the status of a philosophy or of a system of thought. Whilst the term 'animism' was brought forward to identify a thinking of the primitive, even if the term 'animism' is not the one used in later debates, the question of how to think or place the thought of the so-called 'primitive' remains the hotly debated question. In a partial and broad survey of this, Lévy-Bruhl's thesis, that primitive thought is to be defined by its pre-logical nature, is offered as an explicit rebuttal of both Tylor and Frazer. In his critique of the English school of anthropology, which he characterises through its interest in animism, Lévy-Bruhl writes:

> Do the collective representations of the communities in question arise out of higher mental functions identical with our own, or must they be referred to a mentality which differs from ours to an extent yet to be determined? Such an alternative as the latter did not occur to their minds.[18]

That is, whilst Frazer and Tylor uphold a belief in 'mental functions identical with our own', Lévy-Bruhl attributes to the 'primitive' a different mental functioning, whereby the question of how to account for the differences of 'primitive' institutions and beliefs is supposedly resolved. The point is made that Tylor and Frazer err in trying to explain the difference between 'savage' and 'civilised' mentalities, an error in that the supposedly pre-logical nature of the former would not admit of such explanation: 'It is useless to try and explain the institutions and customs and beliefs of undeveloped peoples by starting from the psychological and intellectual analysis of "the human mind" as *we* know it.'[19]; 'The primitive's mind works along the lines that are peculiar to it.'[20] Lévy-Bruhl's institutional background is that of the École normale supérieure, where he began as a philosopher, with German philosophy as his speciality. His positing of a pre-logical mind, in which primitives are incapable of recognising their own contradictions, has something of a Hegelian cast to it, as will be made clearer in Chapter 2. For the moment, Abiola Irele's comment on Lévy-Bruhl's work may be put forward: 'His enterprise consisted in working out in the realm of

epistemology, and to its furthest limits, the antithesis between Western and non-Western man that is inherent in Hegel's philosophy of history.'[21] For all the ethnocentrisms of Tylor and Frazer, their assumption of the identity of the human mind is far more sane and, indeed, undeniably accurate. Tylor makes the point in his discussion of animism that aspects of it are to be found in Western culture, something denied by Lévy-Bruhl in his wider attempt to refute a theory of animism. In considering the ideas of Leibniz and Berkeley on force, Tylor writes:

> To go yet farther, I will venture to assert that the scientific conceptions current in my schoolboy days, of heat and electricity as invisible fluids passing in and out of solid bodies, are ideas which reproduce with extreme closeness the special doctrine of Fetishism.[22]

Lévy-Bruhl, in the face of many criticisms, eventually abandoned his term 'pre-logical', substituting for it 'mystical'. Tylor's intuition, that there may be grounds for comparing animism with natural science, is a line of enquiry that has been upheld by contemporary thinkers, for instance by the intellectualist anthropologist, Robin Horton, and the philosopher, Anthony Appiah.

In 'Neo-Tylorianism: sound sense or sinister prejudice?', Horton defends the intellectualist approach of Tylor whilst criticising his failure to combine this with sociological knowledge. Horton writes:

> I started out with the intellectualist assumption that both the gods and spirits of traditional Africa and the ultimate particles and forces of the Western world-view were alternative means to what was basically the same explanatory end.[23]

Horton goes on to state that in order to account for the difference between the theoretical models, it was necessary to take into consideration differing social organisations. The basic point is that African religion may be read as an intellectual understanding of the world as opposed to an anti-Tylorian reception of it as, say, an atheoretical or non-logical symbolic practice. In 'Back to Frazer?', Horton defends Frazer's crediting of magical thought against the aestheticising readings of the Symbolist school. Whilst the latter are said to treat African religions in terms of the creation of images for their own sake, Horton proposes that this 'magical' thought and practice shares, to some extent, with science, and to a lesser extent with religion, in having an investment in explanation, prediction and control. This is too condensed to do justice to the arguments; nevertheless, Horton challenges the Symbolist grouping together of 'magic, religion and art', retaining rather a quasi-Frazerian grouping of 'magic, religion and science', whereby art is set to one side: 'Art would then be expressive, and the rest is instrumental'.[24] Without being able to go into the intricacies of the debate, a couple of points will be made. As regards the literature studied in this book (and beyond), spirits are mainly presented as realities and not as metaphors, symbols,

figurative devices, but where it yet becomes necessary to learn new languages of spirits. That is, Western preconceptions as to what 'spirit' is or 'spirits' are can be misleading. Horton, in needing to defend his line of enquiry against an aestheticisation, seems to somewhat bypass the symbolic nature – symbolic here in a broad sense, not the narrowly aesthetic one – of all languages of knowledge and belief. That said, the bracketing off of art seems to me to be problematic. Here art would be aligned with the imaginary and non-literal, the creation of images for their own sake. Apart from the fact that art – whilst not really a conceptual endeavour – also can convey ideas, what I wish to stress is that there is yet a creative practice and process to be taken into account. The importance of this is that this creative dynamic does seem to be implied in animism and animism in it, which raises the question of how we, in the West, may over-aestheticise creativity. Finally, Appiah, whilst partially agreeing with Horton's alignment of African religion with natural science – or, we could say further, possibly also a philosophy of nature – maintains that we are yet still dealing with what, in other respects, would need to be understood as a religion with its symbolic elements.

Returning to the question of the status of African thought, Tempels is a key figure because he argues, in *Bantu Philosophy*, against the primitivising of African thought and he endeavours to show how it can be read as a consistent philosophy.[25] Whilst Tempels has his followers amongst African intellectuals, it is perhaps Hountondji and Wiredu who are best known for refuting the case that Tempels tries to make. I will not go over all the arguments, which have already been expertly reconsidered and contextualised by Mudimbe, and where, of course, they can still be read in their original forms. Again, I will confine myself to a few selective remarks.

Wiredu states that the prevalence of misconceptions about traditional African thought means that 'many Westerners have gone about with an exaggerated notion of the differences in nature between Africans and the peoples of the West'.[26] Wiredu's proposition is that traditional thought lacks the critical argumentation, clarification and modern rationality to qualify as philosophy, and that it is better aligned with the spiritism of folk ideas in the West, prevalent in earlier ages but yet surviving today. While this is a possible route, we could also take art into consideration, and not just folk art. Freud maintains that the remnants of animism in the West survive in art, something that Tylor also argues for.[27] In order to consider how 'remnants' may be something of an understatement, let us consider a few of the canonical masterpieces of High Modernism. The 'Circe' episode in Joyce's *Ulysses* is highly animistic in many respects, not least with spirits returning from the dead. The 'Ithaca' episode can be seen as the counterpart of 'Circe': it treats in scientific and impersonal terms the energies and forces that 'Circe' treats in psychic and personal terms. Then, as Hillis Miller shows in his insightful reading of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, this novel is all about the living on of spirits, with a strange figure at its overlooked centre: a source of water that bubbles up from the ground who is also a witch-like crone.[28] Eliot's *The Waste Land*, of course, is famously a reworking of *The Golden Bough*, arguably assuming with Frazer (albeit with its own in-lays of ethnocentricism), an identity of the