Aesthetics

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Within social theory, aesthetics has generally been used to discuss four main theoretical concerns. The first, follows closely upon the philosophical tradition of Emanuel Kant and takes aesthetics as an ancillary to rational cognition, or as the mediating interchange between the internal cognition and the external world. The second puts a more phenomenological emphasis on this, and takes aesthetics as relating to the somatic experience of sensual forms in the world. The third takes aesthetics as the domain of the formal constituting elements of these external sensual forms, the style the harmony of relations within art-like, or quotidian, artefacts and social practice. The fourth takes aesthetics as akin to beauty or ornamentation, often using it as an adjective used to mark the main noun as somehow analytically complex, a mix of beauty, elaborate, and ethically or cosmologically weighted.

In many cases, the use of 'aesthetics' reads as an almost intentionally indeterminate term, as if the author wishes to sidestep the hazy quagmire that is 'aesthetics' with its many meanings and complex array of implications. Even in contexts where an author provides a clear analytical frame for the term's use, there is often slippage in its specific meanings. This complexity is no doubt our inheritance passed down through the generations of philosophical, art critical, and social theoretical developments, critiques, and adaptation of 'aesthetics'. There is also the clear problem – at least from the perspective of intellectual coherence – of the collapse of the clarity and coherence offered by the grand narrative of European scholasticism. The deeply Eurocentric elitism that was indistinguishable from the development of aesthetics as a philosophical concept has left a bad taste in the mouth of subsequent generations, and the inherently subjective nature of the subject of study (in at

least the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th sense of aesthetics) also makes difficult any attempt at maintaining aesthetics as a coherent overarching theoretical project.

In this chapter, I advance an argument in favour of Aesthetics (in the capital) as an area of comparative study, which examines the role of aesthetics (in the lower case) as means to access the internal, intuitive geometries of logic and society. This is an attempt to bring the first three definitions offered above into a mutually informed model. If we accept, as I argue below, that there is necessarily correlation between the interior of the mind and the exterior forms in the world, and that the rational capacity of mind relies on the somatic perception of being-in-world, and that the formal elements of artefactual and performative forms trigger intuitive cognitive function, then we can take aesthetics as a phenomenon linking the interior mind and the exterior concretizations of society, and Aesthetics as a comparative anthropological science of understanding how these internal, intuitive geometries of logic are concretised in the exterior forms of human experience.

I do not review the breadth and variety of uses, but rather sculpt a specific trajectory in order to offer a way forward[2]. There have at various points been very well articulated reasons to abandon the term entirely, and scholars who have sought to do so. However, the term remains, and it is almost seductively profitable. It is therefore my proposal that the project be harnessed for specific aims needed most by those – namely scholars in material culture and the social sciences of sensible forms – tempted to reach for this specific analytical tool. I start with a brief history – highlighting key aspect of aesthetics in philosophical and cross-cultural studies – and then move to examine Gregory Bateson's ecological understanding of mind and nature, and specifically the role of abduction, or intuitive inferential thinking, in the relationship between the interior mind and the exterior artefactual domain.

From Baumgarten

In 1750, Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten proposed aesthetics as a way to address the role that the senses play in judgement – that is, the perception and valuation – of sensation. In this sense, 'aesthetics' was opposed to rational cognition. Baumgarten was interested in the perception of beauty itself, and argued that whereas objects of thought, like mathematics and the physical sciences, were the rightful subjects of the discipline of Logic, objects of the senses, which cannot be understood by reason alone, should be studied by the discipline of Aesthetics. Aesthetics, he defined, as 'the science of sensible cognition.' Baumgarten took the term from the Greek for 'sensitive' or 'relating to sense perception'. However, up to that point, the word *aisthetikos* had been used to discuss the bodily response to stimulation. In the new coinage, Baumgarten gave the term important new analytical weight.

As a science, it is methodological, and invites systematic study. He argues that "the purpose of aesthetics is the perfection of sensible cognition, that is beauty; the imperfect is avoided, however, as it is deformity"[3]. In framing 'aesthetics' as being purposive toward the perfection of beauty, and to the resistance of deformity, he gives aesthetics a moral valence within a context where the classical virtues of Goodness, Truth and Beauty were indelibly united. Being beautiful, and being able to correctly identify beauty, was indicative of moral superiority and veracity.

For generations of philosophers following Baumgarten, the debate was therefore *how*, not *if*, exposure to beauty helped in people's moral formation. Immanuel Kant, in his late 18th-century treatise *The Critique of Judgement*[4], addressed the nature of objects of the senses, arguing that aesthetics is the cognitive capacity for judging or evaluating things, for the

purpose of determining if that thing is truly Beautiful[5]. If Beautiful, then it is consequently also True and Good. This aesthetic judgement, however, is – in Kant's understanding – only possible when the viewer is neutral, unbiased, and therefore able to offer a disinterested and objective evaluation. If one can evaluate the thing in question with such a passionless gaze, then recognition of Beauty can bring about the sensation of pleasure because of the beautiful or sublime aspect. This assessment, done from a 'disinterested' position, worked, it was reasoned, because Beauty was an essential – that is true and inherent – quality of the object[6], not a subjective assessment of preference.

Aesthetics, then, as a faculty of cognition, is a process of assessing the qualities of an object without assigning it into any logical categorization. So, instead of seeing light in the sky and saying 'that is a sunset' (which would be an act of rational cognition), the act of aesthetic judgement is to appraise without assumption, and thereby the viewer is able to appreciate the beauty of the luminescent drama which far surpasses the typological marker of 'sunset'. There is an excess, a true beauty, that can be appreciated only via the disinterested act of just, simply, looking. This is what Kant meant by his famous suggestion that aesthetics is "purposive without purpose"[7]; aesthetics pursues cognitive exploration without finding a rational explanation. In its ancillary role, aesthetics acts like reason (it is purposive), but instead of facilitating cognitive comprehension (purpose), it brings pleasure via the appreciation of Beauty.

The possibility of seeing and appreciating Beauty, and the moral (and moralizing) implications it shares via its connection to Goodness and Truth, meant that aesthetics became instrumentalized in the subsequent centuries. Projects throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, aimed at educating the masses through public collections, rested on the understanding that

moral betterment – the formation of good citizens and good souls – could be facilitated via exposure to beautiful things. In debating 'how' to best achieve this end, philosophical and art critical discussions revolved around articulating how to form beautiful works of art and how to appreciate that art[8].

The Kantian notion, or various derivations of his principal ideas, has become the basic presupposition (both academic and popular) in Euro-America[9], with emphasis on the ancillary (*ancilla*, handmaid) nature of aesthetics as subordinate to rational cognition. Particularly when coupled with a Cartesian preference to the purity of the conceptual realm, this ancillary role means that as a sort of handmaid to reason, aesthetics fills an intermediate role between the purity of the higher intellect and the messy quagmire of the world out there. Kant's philosophy is, better or worse, fundamental to the anthropological and wider social scientific enquiry, and the modern coinage of 'anthropology' is, in fact, also part of the Kantian legacy. He framed anthropology – "the philosophical study of society" – with reference to the cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic[10]. "For Kant," writes Keith Hart, "community and common sense were generated through social interaction; the aesthetic was primarily social, having its roots in good food, good talk and good company"[11]. In the popular derivations of this Kantian norm, beauty is rendered nice and pleasing, but without function – a related, but distinctly different, notion of "purposive without purpose."

Power and contest

As the grand narrative of European ideals began to slip, the debates about 'how' aesthetics was formative of persons also became 'what', in terms of what notions of beauty were legitimate. The ability (and power) to establish which aesthetic regime would prevail became increasingly important. As Terry Eagleton highlights in the use of aesthetics within European

political history[12], and Susan Buck-Morss elaborates in her discussion of Nazi aesthetics, the capacity to capture the imagination and drive forward a group of people via the actions to "create art—destroy the world" instrumentalizes, and weaponizes, aesthetics[13].

Even outside the explicitly political world of governance, the politics of art production and aesthetic appreciation is, as many authors have noted, deeply entrenched and causes far-reaching effect in various social spheres[14]. Rather than being inherent in objects, the specific aesthetic qualities – and particularly the evaluative schema for valuing certain aesthetic forms – is, as Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates in his study of taste in France, the product of socioeconomic elite privilege[15]. In each society, and within the variety of subgroups and economic brackets, taste and valuation is part of the habituation of society.

Complementary to Bourdieu's argument concerning variation and the socioeconomic stratification seen in aesthetic valuation in a European society, the evaluative framework of aesthetics as deployed in non-European society proved deeply fraught and problematic. Work by those like Eric Michaels, in an Aboriginal Australian context, highlighted the problem of using aesthetic valuation as a schema for appreciating and interpreting indigenous 'art'[16]. Others –also called for moving away from using indigenous notions of beauty as the basis for a comparative anthropology of, or critical evaluation of, art[17]. The intellectual burden that 'aesthetics' as a concept owes to Kantian notions of cognition was, as the anthropologist Fred Myers points out in his work on Australian Aboriginal art production, overly ethnocentric in their valuation of the judgement of beauty alongside logic and utility[18].

Myers' argument, however, raises the point that there is no need to hold strictly to a rigid definition and that in discursive traditions – such as art and anthropology and we might add

material culture studies – there is good reason to shift the analytical framing of key terms. His specific concern is with elaborating the notion of criticism, a project he articulates thoroughly in his later work *Painting Culture*, outlining in detail the move between the source communities and the gallery settings in terms of what the art object is and why it generates the attention it does[19]. In examining why acrylic paintings sell in the gallery, Myers quotes the gallerist and critic Christopher Hodges, saying: "The best pictures, they hit you. That ability to hit, even though there's no cultural records. It really makes the difference"[20]. This demand for 'stronger' art echoes earlier art critical re-evaluation of aesthetics along the lines of impact, rather than strictly beauty.

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Aesthetics across genres

In her work on Oaxacan woodcarvers in San Martín Tilcajete, Alanna Cant highlights how one pair of artisans – Miguel and Catalina García – are able to position their work not as Mexican craft, but as indigenous art[21]. Even though the Garcías are using the same materials, working in the same village, and within the same established style, they are considerably more successful at attracting international attention from the art market, rather than solely the tourist trade. Some of this is marketing, and the neighbours admit that Miguel is a very good salesman. His shop is open for demonstrations, and in talking to his guests he highlights the importance of indigenous animals within the ancient Zapotec calendar, and the use of wood from specific trees that likewise are situated in the long history of regional myth and religion. However, the specific histories, and especially the discontinuities, between the recently invented practice of Oaxacan carving and the increasingly tangential connections to Zapotec language and cultural heritage are quietly passed over.

However, while some of the Garcías' success can be credited to good salesmanship and an entrepreneurial spirit, that does not account for everything. Cant offers a contrasting example of Lázaro Ramos who, in a spirit of enterprise and creativity, uses fluorescent paint on some carvings, in order for them to glow under a black light. 'Like the conquistadors and Cortez, who were enchanted by the gold of the Aztecs, these will enchant the tourists', Ramos explained[22]. Tourists, however, were not enchanted by the glow, and the fluorescent paints were eventually discarded. By contrast, Cant explains, the Garcías were 'able to satisfy the deires of consumers of ethnic art for objects that are locally produced by authentic indigenous people' by 'connecting their aesthetics of indigeneity to … local indications of Zapotecness'[23].

To claim that one kind of indigenous art is more authentic than another is deeply fraught. On one level, there is nothing more indigenous than the Tilcajete woodcarver Ramos using fluorescent paint to make his carvings more enchanting. As a local artist his work is, definitionally, indigenous. However, his innovation strikes outside the anticipated registers of what a global market (of tourists and art collectors) expect of indigeneity. As Charlotte Townsend-Gault observes in the context of the art of the First Nations Peoples in British Columbia, the non-native is drawn to the object because it contains 'some coveted fragment of sacro-animist imagery that they do not understand, something aboriginal'[24]. This quality works as 'evidence' of the 'aesthetic credentials' of what is indigenous[25]. In this way, while the work of the Garcías are clearly within the same aesthetic register shared by their neighbours in San Martín Tilcajete, their unique success is due in large to their ability to match two aesthetic registers. Not only are they beautiful and aesthetically

masterful artefacts in terms of Oaxacan sensibilities, they also ‘evidence’ the credentials of indigeneity in a way that is intuitively recognisable by those in the global art market.

Significant form & affect

Clive Bell, in his 1914 work *Art*, advanced the idea of ‘significant form’ as key to the value and purpose of art, over and against any value attributed to the representational subject present in the piece[26]. He says that “lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our aesthetic emotions. These relations and combinations of lines and colours, these aesthetically moving forms, I call “Significant Form”; and “Significant Form” is the one quality common to all works of visual art”[27]. Significant form, present in all art (Bell was interested in visual, but for our argument let us expand it), stirs ‘aesthetic emotion’. This emotion, for Bell, was not felt by everyone, but was felt by everyone in their appreciation of the significant form of art. Speaking of a friend who, though interested in aesthetics and art, had “no faculty for distinguishing a work of art from a handsaw”, Bell suggested that he had “never during a life of almost forty years been guilty of an aesthetic emotion”[28]. This emotion, which artists may experience in response to significant forms in the world, is then communicated via the art to others[29]. It is the role of the critic to help the audience appreciate significant form, and thereby experience the aesthetic emotion in response to the art[30]. While admitting the role of taste – such that some people will feel emotion in response to an art object while others may not –, Bell paints a picture of art appreciation not dissimilar to William James’ views on ‘religious experience.’ James argued that some are more naturally skilled toward, and the views of those most skilled in the experience give shape to genre for others – including those who appear to have natural capacity for it, and struggle to acquire it.

One of the interesting aspects of Bell's discussion of aesthetic emotion is that he admits that while most experience it only for crafted objects (cathedrals, pictures, etc.) a few people appear to have it sometimes for 'natural' phenomena (such as butterflies, birds, flowers). I would venture that the distinction between the two classes is what Gell would subsequently call the 'abduction of agency'[31], in marking a class of objects as intentionally significant in form, versus those simply existing in the 'causal milieu'. In placing the distinction along lines of intentional craft, and not in the presence of beauty, Bell also dislodges the discussion of aesthetics as the judgement of beauty, and instead positions it as an affective realm of social relation. It is recognition of intelligent production of significant form that arouses aesthetic emotion.

Bell's separation from of aesthetics from beauty, moving in favour of 'significant form' and 'aesthetic emotion' – particularly in the indefinite ambiguity of what, exactly, the defining quality of that emotion is, poses a question best answered by a psychological approach to affect. This approach, taken by the art historian Susan Best, applies the theory of affect, as advanced by Silvan Tomkins, to illuminate the variability of aesthetic response. As she explains, "while the affective system is relatively fixed—there are nine and only nine affects, and these are clearly anchored in the subject … the range of objects that elicit or provoke affect is not fixed or prescribed"[32]. Best focuses most on the affect of 'interest-excitement' in relation to art appreciation; however, if we move away from the strict canonical context of 'art', and move to a wider distinction between, as suggested above, abducted agency and the causal milieu, any of the nine affective states[33] could – I venture – give rise to an aesthetic emotion. This would, however, place us in danger of collapsing aesthetics and affect, were in not for another aspect that Bell emphasises, namely rhythm.

In an important limiting manner, Bell marries the idea of aesthetics to rhythm. In a rhetorical move, he admits that 'significant form' could also be 'significant relations of form', and the aesthetic and the metaphysical worlds can be united "by calling these relations "rhythm"'[34]. This notion of rhythm, or elsewise called 'harmony', within an object is important in shaping the kind of significant form and the subsequent aesthetic emotions. As such, the role of aesthetic appreciation (more than strictly judgement) is one that maps the distance between the interiority of the person and the material qualities of the exterior object. However, rather than being articulated in the cognitive faculties of rational categorization (*a la* Kant), here it is a passion play of the emotional arousal in recognizing the intention of design in the work. In a move not dissimilar to Franz Boas' arguments on virtuosity in the indigenous artisan's manipulation of materials[35], Bell links the importance of intention to the presence of precision[36], which as Boas argues, manifests in the rhythmic regularity of the object's physical form.

This more affective, emotional response to the crafted world has found resonance more recently, as some scholars have sought to avoid the problematic legacy of Kant by working with a phenomenological approach, most notably shaped by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty[37]. While still rooted in the European philosophical tradition, Merleau-Ponty's collapse of interiority and exteriority, which blends the lines between the self and the world ("Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself"[38]), offers a radical reframing of the role of aesthetics as the ancillary handmaiden to reason, which mediates the distance between pure, clean cognition and the mess of the outside world.

At one level, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology returned to Baumgarten's interest in the senses as a way to escape the dominant European discourse concerning beauty as an ideal

type, and sense as ancillary to rationality. In taking aesthetics as embodied knowledge, the phenomenological approach offered social scientists of material a way to sidestep some of the more problematic aspects of the ethnocentric and highly normative notions held in a Kantian sense of aesthetics.

Thought, comparison, and modelling

In the latter half of the 20th century, and into the turn of the present one, as aesthetics became increasingly loosed from its role in the European project of judgement and beauty, a plethora of new approaches sprang up. Significant contributions on indigenous notions of aesthetics – such as by Shirley Campbell[39], Jennifer Deger[40], Diane Losche[41], Nancy Munn[42], Marilyn Strathern[43], among others – pushed the analytical framework forward, demonstrating the importance of aesthetics (maybe in this period best defined as the perceivable and intelligible form of objects and practices) as part of the negotiation of social relations, and, thereby, a means for anthropological study of social relations[44]. They drew on the intellectual capital and affective certainty of 'the aesthetic', but wrestled with the problem of its utility as an analytical concept and with its acceptability in a postmodern global context. The possibility of aesthetics as a cross-cultural category forced many scholars to work toward an articulation of aesthetics removed from the Eurocentric and colonial heritage of art evaluation[45]. In our present concern, interested in what aesthetics is – or better might be – for the study of material culture, a few of these are worthy of extended meditation.

The art historian Robert Farris Thompson, with a long and productive career working across multiple culture groups in Africa and in the diaspora in the New World, argued in favor of the legitimacy of a local practice of critical judgement and evaluation of art in the Yoruba context. He used 'the aesthetic' to indicate the "deeply and complexly motivated, consciously

artistic, interweaving of elements serious and pleasurable, of responsibility and of play"[46]. In Yorubaland, Farris Thompson sought the insight of 88 'critics' – people who either self-acknowledged expertise, or were socially recognized as experts in their ability to identify good pieces of Yoruba art[47]. He gathered from these critics a list of 18 contributing factors that were shared across the collections he studied. While not universally acknowledged (i.e., all 88 critics did not identify the same 18 qualities, nor did every object demonstrate all factors), these contributing factors were recurrent across the sample set.

His set of 18 qualities included: Midpoint mimesis; Hypermimesis; Excessive abstruction; Visibility; Shining smoothness; Emotional proportions; Positioning; Composition; Delicacy; Roundness; Protrusions; Nonpleasing protrusions; Sinister bulges; Pleasing angularity; Straightness; Symmetry; Skill; and Ephebism[48]. Apart from ephebism—having the quality of youthfulness—, the qualities are all about ratio, harmony, and proportion of form. It is strength or significance of form that appears to be the general guiding principle across the catalogue. This strength of form allows, in Farris Thompson's understanding, the object to facilitate "aesthetic activation, turning ancient objects of thought into fresh sources of guidance and illumination"[49]. The artifact is capable of provoking new understanding and insight through its contemplation. It, as a static object, is generative of new thought.

As an advocate for studying indigenous notions of aesthetics, Farris Thompson also saw the need to refute the functionalist interpretations of 'ethnographic' art. Social scientific study of material culture has had a long tradition of giving artifacts a functionalist role in their interpretation of sociocultural practice. In recognizing the importance of aesthetic objects as 'fresh sources' for ongoing guidance and insight, Farris Thompson argues for something more abstract, almost philosophical, for the object, rather than its 'use' as a tool or ritual

representation. He argues that the functionalist predisposition to labelling an ethnographic object to be 'for' some specific purpose was born out of the mutual distrust between the local expert and the foreigner. It is, he suggests, a mutual distrust born of each's inability to believe in the other's capacity to truly appreciate art. The beauty of functionalism, then, is that it offers an easy common denominator – a reliable discourse that each side can use, and thereby avoid what is actually happening in and around the object.

In anthropology, Alfred Gell, in his *Art and Agency*, focused on exactly this issue of what happens in and around the object[50]. While Gell overtly rejects aesthetics, he does so because of the intellectual baggage the term carries, belonging as it does to the project of European philosophy. However, rather than completely doing away with the project of aesthetics (broadly conceived), he articulates an approach to art that, ultimately, recreates aesthetics from the ground up, composing a study of art in terms of style, abduction and enchantment.

The anesthetisation of ethnographic objects – exemplified most famously in Jacques Chirac's establishment of the Musée du Quai Branly and the Pavillon des Sessions in the Louvre[51] – went against Gell's core methodological ideal of philistinism. Rejecting the idea that aesthetic criticism should be reserved for 'art' objects, separate from a wider genre of mundane objects, Gell argued that a theory of objects must be coherently applicable to both canonical high art and any other kind of artifact.

In response to the 1984 exhibition on 'primitive art' and its influence on modernism in the Museum of Modern Art[52], Gell wrote his essay on the technology of enchantment[53] (written in 1985, published 1992). At the same time, he also wrote his first extended discussion of the

oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp[54] (published only later, in 2013). In these two works, Gell makes two very different, but complementary arguments.

The first is not unlike Bell's in that the work of art, because of the intentional and skilled precision of its making, is able to enchant, or captivate, the viewer, and thereby render the viewer subject to its power. Also like Bell, Gell's emphasis is not on the representational aspects of the work, however he does not dismiss them outright as Bell does in his arguments on significant form. Like with magic, the content is important, but is only fecund because of the incantational quality of the spell. Gell argues for art to be seen as a technical system, and in doing so blurs a boundary between what in a Kantian system would have been the realm of pure reason (and with 'purpose') and the realm of aesthetic judgement ('purposive without purpose'). As a technical system, it is an apparatus for moving thought along logical paths that can – at least by the skilled craftsperson, artist, magician and technician – be anticipated and molded. This purposeful movement of thought – designed by the artist, and achieved in the mind of the viewer – also carries forward Farris Thompson's suggestion that objects initiate 'aesthetic activation', and bring new insight and understanding. In this light, we see that the excess identified by Kant may better be seen as not a lack of purpose, but a surplus of purpose; objects with significant form are fertile, able to drive forward thought and society.

In the second paper that Gell was working on in 1985, he examines the work of Marcel Duchamp, focusing on the sequence of art works from 1911 to 1914 that mark the significant shift in Duchamp's *oeuvre*[55]. *Dulcinea* (1911) and *Nude Descending the Stairs* (1912) were both painted in a brief period where Duchamp was moving in cubist circles. Unlike the cubist interest in portraying a single object from multiple vantage points, Duchamp's cubist work showed a single perspective of a moving object. *Dulcinea* is composed of five stages of a

dancer moving in a circle, superimposed upon each other, and *Nude* is a highly stylized side view of a figure moving down stairs. These works offended the cubists, and Duchamp stopped painting; his subsequent two works, *The Three Standard Stoppages* (1913) and *Network of Stoppages* (1914), marked his move toward conceptual art and an earnest drive toward understanding what Gell later calls "the unrepresentable but very *conceptualizable* and by no means 'mystic' fourth dimension"[56]. In discussing Duchamp's works, Gell demonstrates how works of art function as objects of thought, and the virtuosity of an artist's style make concrete and external the mind in such a way as to be apprehended and contemplated by viewers.

In framing art as objects of thought, Gell is echoing the truly illuminating work of Nancy Munn. As she notes in her work on Walbiri iconography, the materual form – and specifically the use of repetition within the visual motif – is an element of the 'locigo-aesthetic function' of art. "Such [simple elemental] shapes are flexible," she argues, such that "their generality makes possible indefinite specific variation within a framework of standardized forms, and the inclusion of "new" meanings or content without destroying continuity and order. The experience of sameness and tradition can be maintained while at the same time the system is not fixed to a limited range of particulars in its expression of the phenomenal world." And she continues, saying: "Metaphoric meanings can be easily manipulated within this framework since it allows for a density of meanings in conjunction with a simplicity of form. This inverse relationship between semantic density and formal complexity is a general characteristic of visual symbol systems"[57]. The logico-aesthetic function of art (or indeed wider artefactual) objects here is the concretisation of the mind in material form.

Read with this insight, Gell's two papers frame the two sides of the object's relations. The first outlining the relation between the work of art and the recipient, the second focusing on the relation between the work of art and the artist. This basic framework, brought together in more detail in his paper on 'Vogel's Net'[58] and then culminating in *Art and Agency*, was the basis for his 'art nexus'. The nexus, holding together in relation the art object, the artist, the recipient and the prototype – that is the likeness or intention after which it was modelled – were held together in Gell's theory by abduction.

The logico-aesthetic labour of abduction

Abduction is a type of thought process introduced into formal logic by the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. Like inductive and deductive reasoning, abductive reasoning is used to designate a kind of logical step, specifically one based on lateral or associative reasoning. In some contexts, Peirce also called abduction 'hypothesis'. Gell takes his definition of abduction from Umberto Eco, quoting Eco to say:

> Abduction ... is a tentative and hazardous tracing of a system of signification rules which allow the sign to acquire its meaning .... [it] occurs with those natural signs which the Stoics called indicative and which are thought to be signs, yet without knowing what they signify.[59]

Gell's interest in the work of art as action means he focuses on abduction as an intuitive inference of relation. As an act of cognitive processing, it is the way in which a person, when seeing a work of art (or broadly an object or even act of nature) is able to understand intuitively that the object in question was achieved with some intention behind it.

While Gell does not cite him in framing abduction, it is evident that he was influenced by the work of Gregory Bateson, for whom abduction holds a central role not only in art

appreciation, but in all manners of thought. Bateson, in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and *Mind and Nature*, outlines the way that the mind probes the world for 'patterns of relation'[60]. For Bateson, abduction moves the mind from what is seen and observable to what might otherwise be. Paired with deduction, it forms what Bateson calls 'double description' or 'binocular vision', where the two – in an intuitive fashion – map out the possibilities of similarity and difference. This partnership, between the modes of logical thought, are the basis for abstract modelling as well as predictive reasoning. It is pattern recognition and extension. As this extension has its root in the interplay of sameness and difference, it is also the means by which a system is able to make infinitely variable permutations of itself, wholly within a coherent style.

The possibility of coming to know an object, then, is based on the process of description, which Bateson identifies as an antecedent to explanation. In explanation there is meaning making, which is inherently an interpretive process of limitation. In deciding what is meaning and what is noise, the act of explanation limits the object (or, more broadly, the phenomenon). Description, however, can be complete and expansive. For Bateson, when the mind makes choices about what parts of the observational field should be ignored, it limits the range of possibilities that rest in the relation between the mind, the thing, and the range of lateral inferences available via abduction. Similar to Bourdieu's later work on taste[61], Bateson sees this interpretive process as linked to the inculcation via learning, whereby one's predispositions – and the pathways of possible abductive inferences – are shaped. For Bateson, it is abduction that undergirds rational thinking. This form of lateral and intuitive thought interprets the data not on a one-to-one correlation, but allows a single stimulus to call to mind a range of possible implications at any given moment. The same stimuli will evoke different lateral connections in different persons, and the same stimuli may evoke multiple

responses in a single person. In contexts like art or ritual, any specific aspect of the object or behavior may stimulate the person toward abductive inferences linked with any number of multiple possible relata. When perceiving the same phenomenon, some people will know intuitively how to interpret the data, making careful selection from within the noise, and some will be lost in the overwhelming availability of sensory input. Some may also be abducted to wrong – say, socially improper or ill-informed – interpretations.

The phenomenon, being a thing in relation, is demarcated as a distinct entity based on the recognition of difference. As such, it also articulates a distinction between those who have a specific kind of understanding and those whose knowledge is different or partial. Aesthetic perception is, then, for Bateson, a matter of epistemology, and "any change in our epistemology will involve shifting our whole system of abductions"[62]. However, even while being a matter of epistemology, it is important to note that 'aesthetic comprehension' is nonetheless non-discursive[63], or maybe better pre-discursive[64] or pre-hermeneutic[65], in that it shapes the very foundation of discourse itself[66]. Aesthetics is, for Bateson, ultimately about "recognition and empathy," being defined as a "responsive[ness] to the pattern which connects"[67].

Like for Farris Thompson, the art object is able to catalyze novel thought via the recognition of the patterns within the form. For Bateson, the project of art is primarily a quest for 'grace' – which he follows Aldous Huxley in defining as a naiveté, shared by God and the animals, but lost to mankind[68]. For Gell the cognitive response to art objects is also true of any sort of object that elicits abductive inferences – ultimately it does not matter if the object was actually 'caused' by an intentional artist, but only if the viewer *thinks* it was. This opening up of the framework is in large because Gell, as stated above, is consciously moving away from

the strictures of the philosophical debate of ‘aesthetics’ *qua* judgement of beauty. So, being more interested in social sequencing than aesthetic emotion, the frame is shifted from great works of ‘significant form’, or even the human attempt toward ‘grace’. However, the conceptual framework that guides the perception of external form is still at the heart of the matter.

The quotidian reality of aesthetics

One of the critical moves in wider aesthetic theory that guides this move away from a reified stricture of aesthetic objects is the movement, exemplified in the work of Jeremy Coote, toward everyday aesthetics[69]. Coote’s argument, based on Nilotic cattle-keeping peoples of East Africa, draws out similarity between the valued qualities of cattle and the wider artistic and ethical framework of the societies. Even in disagreeing with Coote, Gell acknowledges that he is “indebted to him for his basic methodological insight, which is, that if one wants to get to grips with art as an anthropological problem, it is precisely to societies which ostensibly ‘don’t have any art’ that one should turn one’s attention”[70]. Where Gell differs, is that while Coote argues the Dinka have aesthetics without having art, Gell argues that they have art[71], much like the Trobrian garden is a collective work of art[72]. This argument about ‘what is art’ is, I think futile, and no doubt part of the reason Gell moves to ‘index’ in his later work.

The possibility that there is a demarcation between aesthetic objects and non-aesthetic objects is, however, productive. And while the distinction made by Bell between the hand saw and the painting may not be useful[73], and likewise Arthur Danto’s argument about the hypothetical pot-people and the basket-people problematic[74], even Gell admits that some

indexes are more suitable to contemplation than others, serving as better "perches"[75], or being more centrally situated within the coherence of a style (and logic), than others.

One way to distinguish between the aesthetics of an object and an aesthetic object is to consider Eduardo de la Fuente's reading of Georg Simmel and the notion of the "aesthetic threshold". He says:

> A consistent theme in Simmel's [1896] writings on the aesthetics of social life is that 'aesthetic feelings' and 'aesthetic value' don't develop until "immediate utility has been cleared away in the course of historical development...[and] the materialistic motives on which our aesthetic sensibilities are based have been effaced in time." This model of aesthetics is based on a theory of form that holds that aesthetic sensation requires the transformation of content into something that transcends utility. There are strong echoes here of the Kantian maxim: "Beauty is the form of finality in an object so far as perceived in it apart from the representation of an end." [76]

The "aesthetic threshold" marks the stage when the form becomes more than simply operational, and this extra flourish of sociability is aesthetically pleasing because it holds within it a condensed form of reality[77].

This is a very helpful point, and brings into view a line of thought traced through Farris Thompson's resistance of functionalist interpretations and the elaboration of novel thought possible via the object – seen in various ways in Farris Thompson, Munn, Bateson and Gell. The "condensed and sublimated form" of reality held within the aesthetic form (object or behavior) is able to act as a model for that reality it holds. The consideration of the form – either in the brief intuitive abductive inferences of double description, or the more elaborated contemplation of masterpieces allows the experiencing subject to be situated within the

spatial, patterned, model of reality. In its condensed form, however, it – as a miniaturization of that reality, which "manages to synthesize these intrinsic properties [of a diagram] with properties which depend on a spatial and temporal context"[78] – allows it to be grasped (either physically or conceptually), and manipulated in a way that is pleasing[79].

<Insert Seremetakis case study text box roughly here.>

Antiphonal relations

Nadia Seremetakis, in examining how mourning songs work amongst the Greeks living on the Mani Peninsula, explains the importance of antiphonal singing. Antiphony, she says, 'possesses a social and juridical sense in addition to its aesthetic, musical, and dramaturgical uses'[80]. While in English, 'anti' generally has the connotation of oppositional antagonism, in Greek 'anti' can also connote reciprocity or equivalence. In mourning, Seremetakis explains, the reciprocal arrangement, such that the singer may position themselves within the song (or physically[81]) as if facing the dead so as to come and represent the dead. The word *antiprósopos*, meaning 'representative', uses the root *prósopo* (face or person) in such a way to position the singer face-to-face with the dead, giving voice to the silence of the un-speaking departed.

In the highly choreographed ritual setting of Greek Orthodox Liturgy, the hymnography of the service is sung in alternating antiphons between two sets of cantors, positioned at either end (north and south) of the church's transept. In large churches, such as the main church in a monastery like Vatopedi in Mount Athos, Greece, a pilgrim will stand facing east, toward a large icon screen (the iconostasis), behind which clergy are leading the service. In front of the iconostasis, is an open space with a group of cantors to the left and right. During extended periods of song, each set of cantors will take a stanza in turn, such that the

sound shifts from north to south, back and forth, as each group fill the church with their chanting voices and the *ison* (or drone) that sets the tone for the hymnody. In addition to these, an *archon* (leader) goes back and forth across the open space in front the iconostasis, calling out the first line of the next stanza to each group in turn. This choir of antiphonic chanting and the archon guiding the hymnography is layered atop each other, as the antiphon is begun before the voices of the previous stanza die out. In addition, the chamber of the stone church also is filled with the voices of the clergy behind the iconostasis. In this way, the antiphony is part of a larger polyphony, with multiple relations between those living and the saints and dead are given voice within the liturgical cycle of Orthodox Christianity[82].

Polyphony is, according to Seremetakis, the 'raw material' for antiphonic practice. This is most evident in the *kláma* (wake), which is characterised by a multiplicity of vocalised utterances of different kinds: spoken, sung, unintelligible, improvised or planned. As she explains: 'The antiphonic relation emerges as an articulation between these linguistic and extralinguistic media, between poetry and prose, music and screaming, and it is distributed and redistributed through this multi-dimensional polyphony.'[83] The capacity of the mourning to 'scream the dead' rests in this antiphonal positionality, whereby the singer, mimicking the local customary legal system, structures their witnessing of the event as a dramatization of the event, through ritualised gestures and discourse, to show themselves as a witness and guarantor[84].

In the two contexts – that of the *kláma* and the liturgy – the performance of antiphony and polyphony are markedly distinct, such that Seremetakis argues that the 'Byzantine chant sung by the priest and his choir is aesthetically, stylistically, and ideologically antithetical

to the *moirolói* (lament).'[85] However, it is worth considering this 'anti' of antithetical as having the connotation of reciprocity and equivalence, not opposition. While the texture of polyphony is different in the two settings, both afford the rich arrangement of sound, meaning, and performance for the antiphonal representationalism whereby the voice of the witness and the voice of the witnessed are heard in conversation. In both settings, the aesthetics of song and performance give materialisation to the internal logics of relation.

Following Bateson, it is metacognition, working with metapattern, which allows for thinking with models. The pattern connects the sameness and difference not only with and around the object, but across genre, and is recognized by abduction. As he says, "The *pattern which connects is a metapattern*. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that metapattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, *it is patterns which connect*"[86]. Bateson elaborates saying that, "Mind is empty; it is no-thing. It exists only in its ideas, and these again are no-things. Only the ideas are immanent, embodied in their examples. And the examples are, again, no-things"[87]; this erasure of distinct categories, like Merleau-Ponty's erasure of the self as separate from the world, is part of Bateson's argument that mind and nature are a "necessary unity"[88], and based on an ecological relation, drawing all relata into the same metapatternation of the world[89]. There is, for Bateson, contra Heidegger, no thing in itself, there is only thing as relation.

In this view, aesthetics is an essential aspect to the abductive work that facilitates the individual's movement within and understanding of the metapattern. It is aesthetics that allows the person to be able to contemplate the nature of relation itself, as it is condensed within the object's aesthetic excess.

Aesthetics as a methodological imperative

In this light, the question of what art 'does' remerges, and allows us to frame aesthetics as the point of access into the abstract, but intuitive and logical geometries of society. It is the means by which reality is made available to sensible apprehension. Having moved away from the Kantian notion of aesthetics as the perceptual judgement of beauty, we can now frame the concept in terms of what perception of the purposive capacity of an object do for the recipient – both the indigenous viewer and the social scientist.

Following Bateson, I argue that the process of abduction helps explains the mechanism by which aesthetics can provide access to the internal, intuitive geometries of the artifactual form. The object, as an agentive and polyvalent thing, emerges through design and the interartifactual sequentiality of each artifact as a condensation of reality within the ongoing metapattern of the world[90]. This invites a renewed engagement with aesthetics as a methodological imperative for the study of human practices of association and distinction.

I am calling for ethnographically grounded research into what aesthetics does. If we accept the concept of aesthetics as somatic apprehension, and with Bateson we see aesthetics as the intuitive and empathetic responsiveness to patterns that connect an entire ecology of relata, then we can frame aesthetics as a concrete thing coming out of the architectonics of the mind and brain within social and artifactual contexts. Consequently, we need (a) a new dedication to aesthetics as part of social scientific project; and (b) a recognition of aesthetics as an empirical, ethnographically grounded analytical sphere that must be articulated in the artifactual form and the phenomenological body. It is, in Baumgarten's sense, a science of sensible cognition, but one that must be grounded in the "material ecology"[91] which connects various relata – person and thing, mind and concept.

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[1] This chapter has been written at the same time as two other collaborative projects that have shaped my position significantly. The first, working with Alanna Cant, has been a panel at the RAI and a subsequent (forthcoming) co-authored paper on aesthetics and religious collectivities. The second, with Susanne Küchler, is the co-authored book, titled *A Return to the Object: Alfred Gell, Art and Social Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). I am deeply indebted to both Alanna and Susanne, whose genius and critical insight has heavily shaped my own understanding of this topic. Many key ideas, and no doubt some specific phrases, are credit to them. The errors, however, are all my own.

[2] Janet Wolff very convincingly shows that aesthetics has a distinct social history, fraught with 'terms, assumptions, and judgements' that are 'socially located and, in an important sense, ideological' (Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art: Second Edition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993), 105). While mindful of this larger interdisciplinary

and historically contextual movement, in this chapter I make a specific ideological choice to cut a line of argument that moves somewhat freely between disciplines and periods – a method very much born of Material Culture Studies (see Peter Ucko, 'Penis Sheaths: A comparative study' *Proceedings of the RAI*, No 1969 (1969), 24–67; Timothy Carroll, Antonia Walford and Shireen Walton, 'Introduction', in their (eds) *Lineages and Advancements in Material Culture Studies: Perspectives from UCL Anthropology* (Bloomsbury, 2020)) and its own historical context.

[3] Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, *Theoretische Ästhetik: die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der 'Aesthetica' (1750/58): Lateinisch-Deutsch*. Translated by Hans Rudolf Schweizer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983[1750]), 10, author's translation.

[4] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, Revised Edition, edited by Nicholas Walker and Translated by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1790]).

[5] For a good overview of Kant, see Elisabeth Schellekens, 'Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)', in Alessandro Giovannelli (ed) *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers* (Continuum, 2012), 61-74.

[6] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 51ff.

[7] Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 52.

[8] Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament: Illustrated by examples from various styles of ornament* (London: Published by Day and Son, 1856); Georg Simmel, *Rembrandt: An Essay in the Philosophy of Art*, translated by Alan Scott and Helmut Staubmann (London: Routledge, 2005 [1916]).

[9] Roger Sansi, *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[10] Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View,* edited by Robert B. Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1798]).

[11] Keith Hart, 'Forward', in Roy Rappaport, *Rituals and Religion in the making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), xix.

[12] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of an Aesthetic* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990).

[13] Susan Buck-Morss, 'Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered'. *October* 62 (1992), 4, quoting Walter Benjamin.

[14] Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Alanna Cant, *The Art of Indigeneity: Aesthetics and Competition in Mexican Economies of Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld'. *Journal of Philosophy* (1964) 61: 571-84; George Dickie, *Art and Aesthetic: An institutional analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Ruth Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 'Northwest Coast Art: The Culture of the Land Claims', *American Indian Quarterly* 18,4 (1994), 445-467 and 'Circulating Aboriginality', *Journal of Material Culture* 9,2 (2004), 183-202; Suzanne Vogel (ed) *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (New York: Center for African Art and Preston Verlog, 1988); Janet Wolff, *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art: Second Edition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1993).

[15] Bourdieu, *Distinction.*

[16] Eric Michaels, *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Vivian Johnson, 'Especially good aboriginal art', *Third Text* 56 (2001), 33-50. See also Jennifer Deger's review and critique, concerning the traditionalism in Michaels' approach, and her arguments demonstrating the ways 'indigenous Australians negotiate their Aboriginality across a mediascape where local meanings intersect with regional, nation (and international) discourses' (Jennifer Deger, 'Review: *Bad Aboriginal Art*', *Oceania* 66, 4 (1996), 333; and 'Thick Photography', *Journal of Material Culture* 21,1 (1996), 111-132.).

[17] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century ethnography, literature and art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Alfred Gell, 'The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology', in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (eds) *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 40–63; Hal Foster (ed), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983); Thomas McEvilley, 'Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief'. *Artforum* 23,3 (1984), 54-60.

[18] Fred Myers, 'Beyond the Intentional Fallacy: Art Criticism and the Ethnography of Aboriginal Acrylic Painting'. *Visual Anthropology Review* 10,1 (1994), 12.

[19] Fred Myers, *Painting Culture. The Making of an Aboriginal High Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[20] Myers, *Painting Culture*, 223.

[21] Alanna Cant, *Value of Aesthetics: Oaxacan Woodcarvers in Global Economies of Culture* (University of Texas Press, 2019), 85ff.

[22] In Cant, *Value of Aesthetics*, 30.

[23] Cant, *Value of Aesthetics*, 97.

[24] Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Circulating Aboriginality, *Journal of Material Culture*, 197.

[25] Townsend-Gault, Circulating Aboriginality, 188 & 197.

[26] Clive Bell, *Art* (New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1914).

[27] Bell, *Art*, 8.

[28] Bell, *Art*, 4.

[29] Bell, *Art*, 46; see also Susan Feagin, 'Roger Fry (1866-1934) and Clive Bell (1881-1964)', in Alessandro Giovannelli (ed) *Aesthetics: The Key Thinkers* (Continuum, 2012), 113-125.

[30] Feagin, 'Roger Fry', 119.

[31] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
[32] Susan Best, 'Rethinking visual pleasure: Aesthetics and affect'. *Theory & Psychology* 17,4 (2007), 506.
[33] The nine states are: Enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement, surprise, anger-rage, disgust, dissmell, distress-anguish, fear-terror, shame-humiliation. Silvan Tomkins, *Affect imagery consciousness: Vol. 1. The positive affects* (New York: Springer, 1962); *Affect imagery consciousness: Vol. 2. The negative affects* (New York: Springer, 1963); *Affect imagery consciousness: Vol. 3. The negative affects: Anger and fear* (New York: Springer, 1991).
[34] Bell, *Art*, 16.
[35] Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (Toronto: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955 [1927]).
[36] Bell, *Art*, 64.
[37] For example see: Frances Mascia-Lees, 'Aesthetics: Aesthetic Embodiment and Commodity Capitalism', in *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, edited by Frances Mascia-Lees (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 3–23; Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The printed image and political struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003); Alanna Cant, *The Value of Aesthetics: Oaxacan Woodcarvers in Global Economies of Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019); Susan Best, 'The trace and the body'. *1st Liverpool Biennial of International Contemporary Art: Trace* (Liverpool: Tate Gallery, 1999), 172–177.
[38] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2007 [1962]), 407.
[39] Shirley Campbell, *The Art of Kula* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
[40] Jennifer Deger, *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Aboriginal Community* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
[41] Diane Losche, 'The Sepik gaze: iconographic interpretation of Abelam form', Social Analysis 38 (1995), 47–60.
[42] Nancy Munn, *Walbiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in Central Australian Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973).
[43] Marilyn Strathern, 'The Aesthetics of Substance', in *Property, Substance and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things* (London: Athlone Press, 1999) and *The Gender of the Gift* (University of California Press, 1988).
[44] As Strathern notes, aesthetics is thus, in two distinct ways, 'purposive' in this genre of work, Marilyn Strathern, 'Reflections', in Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave-Mukherji (eds) *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalising World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 261.
[45] Charlotte Otten (ed), *Art and Aesthetics: Readings in Cross-cultural Aesthetics* (New York: Doubleday, 1971); James Weiner (ed), 'Aesthetics is a Cross-Cultural Category', Group for Debate in Anthropological Theory no. 6, Department of Social Anthropology (University of Manchester, 1996); Russell Sharman, 'The anthropology of aesthetics: A cross-cultural approach', *JASO* 28(2) (1997), 177-192.
[46] Robert Farris Thomson, 'The Aesthetics of the Cool'. *African Arts* (1973) 7(1): 41.
[47] Robert Farris Thomson, 'Yoruba Artistic Criticism', in Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (eds) *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 [1973]), 242-269.
[48] Farris Thomson, 'Yoruba Artistic Criticism'.
[49] Farris Thomson, 'Aesthetics of the Cool', 67.
[50] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency*.
[51] See James Clifford, 'Quai Branly in Process'. *October* (2007) 120, 3-23; Michael Kimmelman, 'A Heart of Darkness in the City of Light', *The New York Times* (2006), 2 July 2006; Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
[52] William Rubin, *Primitivism in Twentieth Century Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1984).
[53] Gell, 'Technology of enchantment'. I am indebted to Susanne Küchler for filling in some of the backstory on the timing and intention behind Gell's articles.
[54] Alfred Gell, 'The Network of Standard Stoppages (c.1985)' in Liana Chua and Mark Elliot (eds) *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 88–113.
[55] Gell, 'Network of Standard Stoppages'.
[56] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 250, emphasis original.
[57] Munn, *Walbiri Iconography*, 173.
[58] Alfred Gell, 'Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps'. *Journal of Material Culture* 1,1 (1996):15–38.
[59] Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan, 1984), in Gell, *Art and Agency*, 14.
[60] Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); and, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979).
[61] Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
[62] Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, 143.
[63] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 386.
[64] Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[65] Susanne Küchler, 'Threads of thought: Reflections on Art and Agency'. In Liana Chua and Mark Elliot (eds) *Distributed Objects: Meaning and Mattering after Alfred Gell* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 25–38; and, 'Materials: The story of use'. In Adam Drazin and Susanne Küchler (eds) *The Social Life of Materials* (London, Bloomsbury, 2015), 267-282.
[66] Don Ihde, *Expanding Hermeneutics: Visualism in Science* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998).
[67] Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, 8.
[68] Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 128-129.

[69] Jeremy Coote, 'Marvels of Everyday Vision: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle Keeping Nilotes'. In Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (eds) *Anthropology, Art & Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[70] Alfred Gell, 'On Coote's 'Marvels of Everyday Vision''. *Social Analysis* (1995) 38:18.
[71] Gell, 'On Coote's', 25.
[72] Gell, 'Technology of enchantment', 60.
[73] Bell, *Art*, 4.
[74] Arthur Danto, 'Artifact and Art', in Suzanne Vogel (ed), *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections* (New York: Center for African Art and Preston Verlog, 1988), 18-32; Gell, 'Vogel's Net'.
[75] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 250.
[76] Eduardo de la Fuente, 'On the Promise of a Sociological Aesthetics: From Georg Simmel to Michel Maffesoli'. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 8,2 (2007): 96-97, quoting Simmel 'Sociological Aesthetics' and Kant *Critique of Judgement*.
[77] de la Fuente, 'On the promise of sociological aesthetics', 95.
[78] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 25.
[79] See Jack Davy on miniaturisation in this regard, notably: John (Jack) Davy, 'Miniaturisation: a study of a material culture practice among the indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest'. Doctoral Thesis, Unpublished (2016). University College London; 'The "Idiot Sticks": Kwakwaka'wakw Carving and Cultural Resistance in Commercial Art Production on the Northwest Coast'. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (2018) 42(3): 27-46; and, Jack Davy and Charlotte Dixon (eds) *Worlds in Miniature: Contemplating Miniaturisation in Global Material Culture* (UCL Press, 2019).
[80] Nadia Seremetakis, *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 102.
[81] See also Loring Danforth and Alexander Tsiaras, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton University Press, 1982).
[82] For more on this, see Timothy Carroll, *Orthodox Christian Material Culture: Of People and Things in the Making of Heaven* (Routledge, 2018), especially Chapter 9.
[83] Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 106.
[84] Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 102.
[85] Seremetakis, *The Last Word*, 165.
[86] Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, 11, emphasis original.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Bateson, *Mind and Nature*.
[89] Bateson, *Ecology of Mind*.
[90] Susanne Küchler and Timothy Carroll, *A Return to the Object: Alfred Gell, Art, and Social Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Gell, *Art and Agency*.
[91] Timothy Carroll, *Orthodox Christian Material Culture: Of People and Things in the Making of Heaven* (London: Routledge, 2018) and 'Axis of Incoherence: Engagement and Failure Between Two Material Regimes of Christianity' in Timothy Carroll, David Jeevendrampillai, Aaron Parkhurst and Julie Shackelford (eds) *Material Culture of Failure: When Things Do Wrong* (Bloomsbury Press, 2018), 157–178.