

Art and the anthropologists¹

I saw among them wonderful works of art and marvelled at the subtle ingenuity of people in strange lands (Albrecht Dürer)²

To recognise another's material culture as worthy of the highest treatment our society accords artifacts—that is, to consider them art and display them in art museums—is to honour and esteem not just the artifacts but also their makers.³

We are familiar with the idea that a cow may be a work of art—when preserved in formaldehyde. What about living cows? Not those that might be herded into the Tate Gallery in search of prizes, but uncurated cows, grazing peacefully in places with few institutions to constitute an art world, no prizes to be had, and no general term in use that translates naturally as “art”. The Dinka people, along with other Nilitic groups with whom they share a common history, are cattle breeders. They are highly appreciative, apparently, of the colours, patterns and shapes their cattle provide them with. And this is not wholly a matter of the appreciation of nature rather than artefact, though it may be that there is a higher degree of recognition of the natural in their responses to cattle than we associate with old master paintings. Breeds of cattle are, surely, artefacts. They are things we make, in the sense that we govern, to a considerable extent, both their production and their characteristics. We do not make them in the ways that we make stone tools or computers; we exploit natural patterns of reproduction to do the post-selection work for us. But a dependence on natural processes of causation does not generally compromise our claim to make art; think of the action of acid in etching.

Anthropologists say that the Dinka do not breed for the prized colours and patterns--the patterns not being predictable--and that a bull with the right kinds of markings is often castrated. But they do ensure that plain black and red are used as stud bulls, trusting that this will result occasionally in the piebald form. Other aspects of the cattle's appearance are aesthetically important and are more obviously a result of intentional manipulation: horns are cut in distinctive ways so as to encourage increased size as well as regrowth in desirable patterns, for which there is a special set of terms; they are further emphasised by hanging buffalo-tail hair tassles from them⁴ The castration of piebald bulls makes salient their non-functional status and

results in increased size and a more glossy coat, rendering these animals even more aesthetically desirable.⁵ It is stressed that “bigness and fatness are not appreciated because they will lead to a better price at market, or to a larger meal on the death or sacrifice of the animal: cattle are primarily a feast for the eyes, and only secondarily a feast for the stomach.”⁶ Evans-Pritchard tells us that a large hump which wobbles when the animal walks is much admired, and to exaggerate this feature owners often manipulate the hump shortly after birth.⁷ While cattle are vital commodities for these people, a great deal of attention seems to be paid to their aesthetic refinement, and not merely as a byproduct of other concerns.

That attention is reflected in a complex critical vocabulary. Jeremy Coote quotes a slightly earlier opinion on the connoisseur-like reflection of Nilitic people on their biological artefacts:

When discussing the colour pattern of an animal—as they do for hours—the Dinka sound more like art critics than stockbreeders. For instance, when does *mathiang*—dark brown—become *malual*—reddish brown? If the animal has brown patches, are they large enough to make it *mading* or are they the smaller mottling that identifies *malek*?⁸

Appreciation of the cattle helps to enrich the aesthetic and imaginative activity of these people in other ways: their cattle’s appearance is celebrated in song; they delight in, and elaborate on, connections between the cattle and the owner-maker in ways that involve complex patterns of metonymic transfer wherein makers are ascribed characteristics in virtue of the quality of their products:

...amongst the Western Dinka... a man with a black display ox may be known not only as *macar* ‘black ox’, but also as, for example, ‘*tim atiep*, “the shade of a tree”; or *kor acom*, “seeks for snails”, after the black ibis which seeks for snails’.⁹

Personal ornaments imitate the shape of horns, while certain bodily attitudes regarded as graceful are imitations of the rearing horns or slow gallop. Clay

models of their cattle, sometimes quite abstractly fashioned, serve in the pretend play of children.

2 Universal art

So, are the Dinka cattle works of art? There are choices open to us in answering that question and I'll consider them later. But it's worth noting that those around in the early days of systematic anthropology were struck by the apparently universal impetus to aesthetic activity in human kind, and took a very inclusive view of what counts as art. Once they had been convinced that biological things can also be artefacts, it would not have been much of a stretch to include the Dinka cattle.¹⁰ Franz Boas, a founder of social anthropology, is sometimes cited as an advocate---indeed, as the inventor--of cultural relativism. Yet his book *Primitive Art* (1927) sounds a strongly universalistic note:

In one way or another esthetic pleasure is felt by all members of mankind. No matter how diverse the ideals of beauty may be, the general character of the enjoyment of beauty is of the same order everywhere...¹¹

Nor was Boas a relativist about aesthetic merit, content to say that the works of art of all communities are good in their own ways; while he praised the work of most "uncontaminated primitive manufacturers" to the extent that "most objects of everyday use must be considered as works of art" he remarked on the lack of skill shown by painters in Tierra del Fuego and the "imperfect control" exhibited in Melanesian painting and carving (1927: 23-4). Boas felt able, it seems, to apply his own taste to the products of diverse cultures, delivering judgements, at least in broad terms, of their quality. And that, despite the warnings of more recent anthropologists, is what large numbers of people interested in the artefacts of other cultures do, and have done at least since Roger Fry's admiring commentary on African sculpture.¹² We might treat this as evidence of our own uneducable crassness, our insatiable appetite for cultural appropriation, our insensitivity to cultural difference--or as an indication that there is, after all, something genuinely universal to the aesthetic values and interests of human kind. The latter view (I'll call it *Universalism*) is suggested by the philosopher John McDowell, when he says that

“...it is remarkable, and heartening, to what extent, without loosing hold of the sensitivities from which we begin, we can learn to find worth in what at first seems too alien to appreciate”.¹³ Art, we may say, is not merely universal, it is *open*: appreciating the art of societies radically different from our own does require effort, sympathy and a desire to know how other people live; it does not require a fundamental shift in our vision or values.

The doctrine of Openness is not concerned only with our efforts to comprehend the art of alien societies; it's a general claim about the passage from untutored looking to moderately or highly appreciative engagement. As Chis Jannaway puts it: “The untutored judge and the expert critic are on a continuum. The elaborations of critical discourse enable one to see and judge beauty more finely and in more challenging material, but should not be mistaken for an acquisition of the capacity to apprehend beauty.”¹⁴ Just as a young person in our own society, knowing nothing yet of western art history but struck by the beauty of an early renaissance painting, may be drawn in to the world of art, learning more and appreciating better as time goes by, so someone who knows nothing of the culture of a contemporary society very different from our own, is not thereby precluded from beginning a journey of aesthetic discovery. That's the view I want to defend.

Before I do, I should make some clarificatory points. On the formulation I just gave, there seem to be two components to the view: one (Universalism) says that art is everywhere, while the other (Openness) says that we are able, in principle, to appreciate it anywhere we find it. Is there really a difference between them? One reason or doubting that there is a difference would be the belief that each entails the other, making them logically equivalent. In fact, neither entails the other. Openness does not entail Universalism; Openness means simply that people have some capacity to appreciate art from where ever it may come; Universalism claims additionally that it may come from any culture. Does Universalism entail Openness? Some people, touched, perhaps, by the philosophical doctrine called verificationism, will argue that the truth of Universalism requires the truth of Openness. For it makes no sense, they say, to claim that there is art in that culture over there of which I have no artistic appreciation whatever. For what then would support my claim that the stuff in question is art? I reject this argument, claiming that we might have good reasons

for thinking that something is art without being able to bring to it any of our art-relevant responses. We might, for example, identify it as art on functional grounds, noting that the stuff in question functions in that society much as art functions in ours: it gets displayed and discussed, prizes are awarded, the people of that society claim to get pleasure from its contemplation, etc. That said, I'll be arguing mostly for Openness; that seems to me to be the idea that has caused the most controversy in anthropology.

Secondly, my ambition here is not to establish the truth of the doctrine of Openness in all its generality. Thus stated, it may well be false. My position will not collapse if that is so. My point is that Openness is much closer to the truth than alternative doctrines we hear much about, according to which art and aesthetics are concepts that do not travel beyond the boundaries of recent and contemporary western societies. It's not quite true that the Earth is spherical, but someone who believes it is has a much better grip on reality than someone who thinks it is a cube. The right way to proceed, once we have seen how attractive Openness is, is then to decide what adjustments we need to make to Openness in order to get to the truth. This will be no trivial undertaking (determining the exact shape of the earth wasn't easy either). And making the adjustments may tell us interesting things about the real limits of aesthetic generality. But I will not have space to attempt that task here.

Third, Universalism is a claim about all societies, not about all individuals. No doubt there is a good deal of variation among the individuals in any given society in terms of sensitivity to and interest in art. Perhaps some individuals have no such sensitivity or interest. Correspondingly, Openness is not the claim that all individuals are open to the art of other cultures—some may indeed not be open to the art of their own culture.¹⁵

Forth, the doctrine of Openness sounds like good news: there is a whole world of art out there, and we may look forward to enjoying it. But a sensible defence of Openness will insist that this optimism needs significant qualification, at some of which I have already hinted. We can't appreciate Yoruba sculpture or Inuit face masks or Nilitic cattle to the fullest, or even to a satisfactory extent without the training provided by substantial acquaintance with the works concerned, substantial

knowledge of the techniques involved, and a good deal of insight into the broader role of these activities in the societies which nurture them. That's true of the art of our own past and present, and it's a truth that puts severe practical limits on our capacities to appreciate that art. In thinking seriously about the relative merits of the plans of Ghiberti and Brunelleschi for the Florence Baptistery doors, we would not give weight to the opinion of someone with no knowledge of the work of either artist, no understanding of church architecture, and no acquaintance with biblical stories or Renaissance history.¹⁶ If we want help in tuning our own aesthetic responses we look to people who score highly on all these dimensions of expertise. But for all that, we don't insist that people take art history courses before they are allowed in to art galleries; we don't think that this kind of instruction is a precondition for *any* appreciation of art. We accept that there is a pathway to the appreciation of artworks that moves gently uphill from wholly untutored looking through to curatorial levels of expertise, with convenient stopping-off places along the way. The doctrine of Openness says that such pathways exist, connecting any culture with any other. There are no sheer aesthetic cliffs that require heroic endeavours before we can glimpse the riches above us.

The argument

What reasons are there for believing Openness? The primary reason I shall offer is a simple and perhaps naïve one: that it seems to be the case that people appreciate the art of other cultures, and the best explanation for this is that they do, in fact, appreciate those arts. I'll call this the argument from appearances. I admit that arguments like this need to be treated with care. We must be wary of endorsing widely held beliefs which are said to be "obviously true" and which their advocates claim to be verified in everyday experience; we need to look closely at what the supposed evidence actually is, at anything that looks like counter-evidence, and to consider how easily the view in question sits with the rest of our knowledge, especially that which has a high degree of systematic verification through experiment and reflective theory construction.¹⁷ But I believe one would have to work very hard to persuade a rational agent not to believe in Openness, given the extent to which it appears to be true. Simply attend at any of the many museums that display the artefacts of other cultures, and see large numbers of people, apparently,

appreciating the objects on display. You may have doubts about the motives of those attending; you may suspect that they are there because they feel somehow they ought to be; that they are merely faking an interest in and enjoyment concerning these objects. But you have, presumably, equal reason to doubt the sincerity of those attending a concert of western classical music at the Wigmore Hall or an exhibition at the Tate Modern. No doubt there are people in all these groups who attend without enjoyment. But is it plausible that most do? And if you acknowledge that there is some degree of genuine enthusiasm for Bach or Beuys at these events, are you able to give any reasons why we should not conclude the same about attendees at ethnographic exhibitions? Do they more obviously give off signs of boredom or bad faith? And what about your own case? Unless you exercise a good deal of willpower to suppress the tendency, you will very likely observe yourself appreciating the exhibits, admiring such things as simplicity of line, apt choice of materials, unity of parts, witty representations of facial expression, etc. All this, I say, is indicative of the extent to which it seems that we appreciate the art of other cultures.

Perhaps it will be said that, in the case of the ethnographic exhibition goers, the aesthetic delight is real enough, qua subjective experience, but that it is illusory: people think that they are responding to, making contact with, properties of the works themselves, but in fact are not. This is also implausible. People are able, to some admittedly limited degree, to say what it is they like about these objects, to point to particular features which they find interesting or pleasing, to make comparative judgements between particular objects and between particular styles of objects. I do not think that people untutored in art history behaving comparably in front of artworks from the western canon would be accused of undergoing purely illusory experiences of aesthetic appreciation. To think that would be a very obvious kind of art snobbery. A proper response would surely be to see the behaviour as a promising beginning: worthy of encouragement, along, no doubt, with the helpfully critical attitude we apply to any learning process. To repeat--the initial capacity of most people to appreciate the art of other cultures is limited, sometimes very limited. But, and this is another repetition, exactly the same can be said about the majority of attendees at the Tate Modern. The issue before us is not whether cultural and artistic neophytes could

appreciate these things better—that is true in virtually all cases—but whether they appreciate them at all.

A further response to Openness says that western appreciators of traditional art are suffering a different kind of illusion: they are finding things to be beautiful (or in some other way aesthetic) which are beautiful, but which were not intended to be so; they are admiring qualities which they think of as intentionally imposed by the objects' makers when they were not. I admit that it is possible that these objects are, as it were, merely accidentally fitted to appeal to western sensibilities, and that they were not intended to have the properties which people find appealing. But this, too, is extremely implausible. Who would suppose, in advance of the facts, that the artefacts of many non western societies would, just by accident, appeal to the aesthetic sensibilities of contemporary westerners? Did God arrange things so that objects not intended by their human makers for aesthetic delight just happen to delight us? There is something outrageously Eurocentric in the idea that we have been singled out for this special benevolence. Furthermore, the testimonial evidence we have—and I admit the inconclusiveness of such testimony—goes against the hypothesis. A number of careful and sensitive studies indicate that, while the aesthetic conversations of traditional, small-scale societies are carried on in ways very different from our own, respect for skill and attention to the aesthetic effects skill can achieve—effects, that is, which we recognize as aesthetic--are generally present.¹⁸

Of course there can be mistakes, especially when we start to move upwards towards a properly culturally informed appreciation of artefacts: we can miscategorise particular works, misunderstand the defining features of particular genres, think that an element is functional or meaningful when it isn't. These are all mistakes we have made and continue to make about art within the bounds of our own cultural history; it doesn't show that the project of trying to understand these things is hopeless or vicious.

Now I admit that, in one respect, the kind of aesthetic attention that artefacts of traditional societies are likely to get from a western audience is distorted, if by that we mean that it is a different kind of attention from that which these objects would

generally get as situated in their home communities. For it will be an attention which gives a concentrated and perhaps exclusive focus to the aesthetic properties of these things, and it may well be that they were not designed with the intention that their (intended) aesthetic properties would be attended to in so concentrated a fashion, and that may also not be the way in which people in the society which is home to these artefacts would normally or perhaps even ever attend to them. But this argument from the balance of attention, while probably correct in its factual claim, should not be allowed to unsettle our conviction that we western observers are thereby making genuine contact with these works. It is of the nature of connoisseurship to focus attention on elements within a work which, while having been placed there intentionally, were probably not placed there with the intention that they be focused on with that degree of attention. Critics draw attention to the aptness of a Shakespearean metaphor, the balance of a line, the precise ways in which a speech expresses the disordered mind of the speaker. When we learn about these things, we focus on them to a degree vastly greater than anyone in the audience of a production would have the opportunity to do; and if they did do that it would compromise their engagement with the play as a whole. We do this in a reflective mode which Shakespeare was not catering for and probably never foresaw. But in doing it, we are finding ways to engage more deeply with the work; why should it be different in the case of the artefact of the traditional society? Anyway the argument from the balance of attention, if it had any merit, would apply to all sorts of interests we might take in these artefacts, including the interests which anthropologists regularly do take. When Alfred Gell, a theorist much opposed to the idea of any role for aesthetic considerations in anthropology, asks us to reflect on the fear-inducing qualities of the Asmat shield he is not thrusting us into battle to face one: he is asking us to think about how fearful this *would be* in those circumstances, which is as alien as anything could be to the intended purpose of the artefact.¹⁹

Much of the weight of the distortion argument falls on the institution of museums and galleries, which are said to present their artefacts in inappropriate ways, wrenching them from their proper cultural contexts.²⁰ But this claim cannot be treated as an independent move in the argument; it works only for those already profoundly skeptical of Openness. Those of us who think that there is a universal aesthetic sense may endorse the practice of museum display on the grounds that it is well

suited to the bringing out of aesthetic qualities which, in other contexts, would be occluded or at least dampened by attention to factors such as practical use, religious ceremony, warlike intent, or competition for status. Museums can be more or less well suited to the display of these artefacts, their exhibitions more or less sympathetic to and informative concerning the symbolic, technical and historical situations of their making. But they cannot reasonably be criticized for promoting a selective attention to certain aspects of these artefacts; concentrated attention is always selective.²¹ In this connection it is worth quoting the reaction of Kwame Anthony Appiah to the exhibition *Africa: Art of a Continent* which appeared at the British Academy and at the Guggenheim, New York, in the mid 90s.

There was too much to see; the labels were too cryptic; some of them, I fear, were, as we happened to know, plain wrong. But the consensus over lunch was that the show was wonderful; and what made it wonderful was that the eye could linger with pleasure on the forms, the shapes, and the surfaces, the patination and the pigment, and engage each object with whatever we happened to know of its materials, its history, its origin. In short, we found ourselves responding naturally to these African artifacts as art.²²

Appiah, I think, is as aware as anyone of the distance between the museum display and the home culture of these objects, and as anxious as anyone that their cultural context be understood. But he also, and consistently, delights in the opportunity for the kind of selective focus, where “the eye could linger with pleasure on the forms”, which the exhibition provides. And, says Appiah, “to take these African artworks seriously does not require us to take them as their makers took them.”

4 Art and the philosophers

The argument from appearances is my first and primary argument for Openness. In developing it I have not appealed to any specialised philosophical theory about art and the aesthetic, of which there are many. But anthropologists opposed to the category of the aesthetic often object that talk of art and the aesthetic is embedded in the rarified and highly prescriptive theorising of modern western philosophy, the unrestricted application of which distorts our understanding of other cultures and their artefacts.²³ We ought to consider this claim, especially since the present essay comes, suspiciously, from someone who earns a living by the profession of philosophy.

Openness is the claim that there is a more or less universal sensitivity to the aesthetic properties of artefacts. It is not an attempt to characterise, in the manner of philosophical analysis, what aesthetic sensitivity is, whether it is principled or rule-governed, whether aesthetic judgment brings objects under concepts, or to settle any other outstanding philosophical issue. It is like the claim that cricket balls are apt to break windows—a claim we are all able to agree on without needing to analyse the notion of causation, or defeat Humean scepticism, or to take a view about whether causal transactions always involve energy transfer. Nor does practical skill generally improve with philosophical understanding. We don't hope to be better at causing things to happen by reading about the philosophy of causation, and few people are better appreciators of art through reading Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, a work often cited by opponents of Universalism as an indication of the narrowness and unportability of western conceptions of the aesthetic. At the level of abstraction Kant favoured, it is unlikely that anything he said would be of much use to someone interested in either Renaissance painting or Sepik River carving. While Kant is perhaps an extreme example, western aesthetic writing generally is unhelpful if one wants to have a more discerning eye for, or a better understanding of art.

So Openness does not bring to the conversation any heavy-duty philosophy of art, and the claim of some anthropologists that the aesthetic is an invention of modern western philosophy confuses a phenomenon with philosophical attempts to analyse that phenomenon.²⁴ But it is worth saying in addition—though this is by no means a claim essential to the defence of Openness--that philosophical theories of art and the aesthetic may give us valuable and quite general insights into the nature of aesthetic appreciation, in much the way that linguistic theories give us insight into language production. Theories of grammar are not understood by competent speakers; if they were, progress in the construction of theories of grammar could be made simply by consulting the opinions of native speakers about why certain strings are acceptable and others are not.²⁵ But theories of grammar may yet help us understand the processes of language use, if the distinctions made within the theory correspond to causally effective distinctions within the mechanisms of speech comprehension and production—mechanisms to which speakers do not have personal access. A philosophical theory of the aesthetic is not the same sort of thing as a theory of

grammar. A theory of grammar looks for an account of the causal structure of language comprehension and production; a philosophical theory of the aesthetic seeks an account of the conceptual structure of art and the aesthetic. But they are similar in this: neither is limited in its ambitions by the thought that its deliverances do not correspond to the intuitive understanding of those who engage in the corresponding activity.

I shall not, I repeat, appeal here to philosophically inspired analyses of such concepts as art, beauty, the aesthetic, or attention; my strategy throughout is to pay regard instead to common practices visible among western audiences who regularly do take an interest, apparently aesthetic, in the artefacts of other cultures, to take my lead from those practices in identifying the sorts of artefacts that we ought to consider, which apparently give pleasure to audiences who attend to and reflect on such things as colour, form, quality of making, elegance of design, strikingness of expression in a represented face: the sorts of properties which, considered in connection with a gallery-object in our own culture, would count as unproblematic instances of attention to the aesthetic. But one philosophical commitment I will sign up to, as a decision on this issue is crucial to avoiding the accusation that an aesthetic approach to artefacts is a kind of pure, context-free—and hence culture-free-looking. There are suggestions of this view—the one I am going to reject—in various philosophically influenced systems: one thinks in this context of such notions as aesthetic distance, disinterested contemplation, the independence of aesthetic judgement from concepts, and the supposed dependence of aesthetic features on such “appearance properties” as colour and shape, volume and texture.²⁶ Within the world of art theory and practice something like this view was pressed by Clement Greenberg as part of his advocacy of abstract expressionism; Greenberg especially emphasised the idea of taste as a kind of context-free sensitivity to the appearances of things. This view, often called *formalism*, offers a relatively thin account of the aesthetic domain: it says that, once you know exactly what the object looks like, you know everything on which its correct aesthetic characterisation depends. According to formalism, what is available to be appreciated in art is entirely a function of what can be seen in it.²⁷ Thus a popular response to the discovery of forgery in art is to declare those who would remove the offending item from the gallery walls to be snobs, on the grounds that the work “does not look any different after the discovery

from the way it looked before". Generalising formalism about the visual arts to other areas, we may say that what matters in music is the notes played and how they are sounded, not who wrote the piece, when and under what circumstances; what matters for the novel is the words on the page, not the genre to which it belongs or the literary influences on its author.

The minimalist will say that the act of looking or hearing or reading is something that involves attention, concentration and acuity, and so is a matter of improvable skill; we are not all, automatically, highly competent interpreters and judges of art, even on the minimalist account. But those with normally developed senses and, for literature, basic literacy count at least as beginners in the looking, hearing or reading stakes, and we are all thus provided with a ticket for entry into the world of art, as Openness requires. So formalism sounds like a good bet for anyone keen to promote Openness. Indeed, Arthur Danto argues that minimalist thinking in the twentieth century was influential in creating a more inclusive idea of aesthetic activity, de-emphasising the ideas of canon and tradition that previously isolated western art from the arts of other cultures, and encouraging the inclusion of those arts within the horizon of taste.²⁸

But the cost of this minimalist justification for openness is the severing of art from its religious, symbolic and sometimes utilitarian background—a pretence that artworks are “pure appearances” made wholly for appearance sake. And the effect of that is an impoverishment, not an enhancement, of the work’s aesthetic richness. Of course there is something true in the minimalist’s claim. On anyone’s account, the look of the picture, the sound of the symphony, the text of the novel are highly important to appreciating the work. Let’s say that acquaintance with these things is acquaintance with the *appearance* of the work, where the appearance, overall, of the work is given by the totality of its *appearance-properties*—properties such as colour and shape properties for painting, and word order and spelling for literature. Acquaintance with the appearance of the work is a necessary condition for appreciation. It can be rational to believe that a painting you have never seen is beautiful—you might have been told that it is by an extremely reliable judge of these matters, and in this area as in others, knowledge can be transferred by testimony. But belief is not appreciation;

to appreciate the work, you have to see it. The question at issue is whether appearance *on its own* determines the aesthetic properties of the work.²⁹

Surely it does not. As people have often pointed out, it's possible (I emphasise the word "possible"; it certainly isn't likely) for a paint spillage to result in something visually indistinguishable from an old master painting, or perhaps (a bit more plausibly) a Morris Louis abstract. The paint spillage that looked exactly like a work of art would be astonishing and no doubt the source of endless interest; it might even be beautiful in the way that a sunset or landscape is for those of us who don't see The Maker's hand in nature, though it is more likely to be regarded as simply bizarre. But it would not be a work of art, and it would not have the kind of aesthetic appeal that we associate with art rather than with nature. In particular, it would not be in any sense an achievement, and I believe that the idea of achievement is fundamental to our most basic and most universal sense of value in art. Artworks are essentially vehicles for the manifestation of skill, imagination, insight and other admired traits; that is why we are often concerned with expression in art, for we recognise art as a pre-eminently efficient means by which a person's qualities and dispositions are expressed.³⁰ The psychologist Nick Humphrey puts the point well:

We love beauty through the medium of our senses, but at the same time what we love is obviously *not merely the sensory stimulus as such*. With cheesecake, we have only to have the stimulus on our tongue and the right affective buttons will be pressed. But with beauty it's not so straightforward. For a start we often need to be told that this *is* beauty, before we will respond to it at all... We care deeply about *genuineness and authenticity*. While we find a copy of a slice of cheesecake just as tasty as any other version, we find a reproduction of a Rembrandt less valuable—and surely less beautiful--than the original. While we enjoy the cheesecake for its gustatory qualities without thinking to ask who or what made it, we marvel at the cave paintings at Lascaux only because we believe they were made by human beings — and if it were to turn out they'd been created by a freak flood they'd become merely quaint.³¹

It would be wrong to conclude from this that artworks are merely instruments by which we gain access to the really valuable personal qualities they express. We do

value the work itself.³² There is a difference between purely instrumental value and the derived but intrinsic value I claim is possessed by artworks. Consider a poorly composed, dark, and out of focus photograph of a loved one. In such a case the photograph is of instrumental value only, and is considered a mode of access to the really valuable thing, the person. Works of art, by contrast, are objects which have their own value, but it is value they have in virtue of the activity which went into their production, and if it turns out that they are natural or accidental products they cease to be accorded that kind of value, whatever other value they may have. (I'll say more about photographs in this connection later.) To understand such varied qualities as artistic vision, originality, sensitivity to tradition, respect for the medium, we have to do more than simply be exposed to the work's appearance, even if we know already that it is a work, and not a spillage. We need to know a great deal about its art historical context: it's genre, it's place in historical development, it's role in a magical or religious belief system, its place in the artist's oeuvre, what the artist was trying to do, the techniques available to her. That in broad outline is the contextualist's position, and I agree with it.

Artworks as traces

It is these historical-cultural aspects of context which philosophers have so rightly emphasised recently.³³ But this emphasis might be taken to imply that works are closed to us when we lack this kind of specialised knowledge, which is not after all easily come by, and hence as an indication that Contextualism is inconsistent with Openness. This, I will argue, is an unnecessarily pessimistic conclusion. While it is true that one cannot arrive at an excellent critical grasp of a work and its qualities without this sort of historically and culturally specific understanding, there is a more broadly human context in which we as observers participate in virtue of our common bodily nature. This participation does not depend on propositional knowledge: knowing that such and such is the case. Rather, it provides the scaffolding around which our propositionally represented understanding and appreciation of artworks may grow. Many linguists say that, for all the apparent divergence between human languages, they actually have a good deal in common, since all must conform to the constraints set by our first-language acquisition mechanism. This is a controversial view, but I suggest that something like it can be said of human aesthetic sensibility: while it is a response to forms that seem bewilderingly varied, it is constrained by

universal facts about our bodily constitution; Martians with quite different bodies may have aesthetic experiences and values that are closed to us, while ours are unavailable to them.³⁴ The connection with art that this provides—preconceptual, bodily based, and partly invisible to consciousness—is enough, I think, to allow us to say that the arts of cultures of which we know little or nothing are, while not immediately transparent, also not locked in a safe marked “do not open before passing Ethnography 401”.

How does this pretheoretic engagement with the work operate? In the arts I am considering here, where our focus is on physical artefacts, visual engagement is primary: we see the object, and in typical museum conditions we are unlikely to get further than seeing. But what we see is not simply patterns of colour and shape. We see traces of human activity. Western art-historical scholarship has long recognised something of this, notably the power of the drawn line as a mark or trace of the artist's activity, a power that has encouraged talk of the line as emblematic of the artist's genius.³⁵ But in most plastic art-making practices we see traces of the artist's activity, most obviously in brush-strokes, or marks on surfaces that record the process of shaping of solid material (an issue I'll return to when I consider the origins of aesthetic activity), or in the pattern of a woven basket, blanket or rug, all of which, being three dimensional structures rather than mere patterns on a surface, provide a detailed record of the maker's activity.³⁶

What, then, is our response to the seeing of these traces of activity? It is a kind of bodily resonance with that very activity, what Vittorio Gallese, one of the discoverers of mirror neurons, calls “intercorporeity — the mutual resonance of intentionally meaningful sensory-motor behaviours”.³⁷ It is not that we actually start to move our bodies in response to the sight of a striking artefact—or if we do, that is not the response I am indicating. The movements I am speaking of are sometimes said to be imagined, though this gives a misleading impression of control, clarity and determinacy as to their nature. Neuroscientists, who have a great deal of interest in these processes, and well beyond the aesthetic realm, sometimes call them implicit or simulated movements. And neural mechanisms which underlie this are currently under investigation. Gallese has hypothesised that a related neural system, the so-called canonical neurons, is implicated in our responses to art. These neurons fire

when we grasp an object, but also when we merely see an object that could be grasped. It seems that we respond to objects and the opportunities for action which they present—their affordances in Gibson's terms—by mentally simulating the grasping of them.³⁸ The pathology called utilization behaviour, in which people will pick up and drink from a glass of water if one is presented, whether thirsty or not, is thought to result from a breakdown of the systems which normally keep these implicit graspings “off line”.³⁹

In addition to experiencing imagined (I'll go on using this not quite appropriate term in the absence of anything better) interactions with affordance-providing objects, we also, it seems, are capable of reliving the movements that shaped the object. Recent work in neuroscience confirms the idea that seeing the result of a person's behaviour can provoke an imagined or simulated movement of a kind that reproduces the behaviour. It has been shown that exposure to handwriting produces activation in areas of motor cortex which are used in the writing of letters; this activation constitutes a simulated movement which, if really executed, would produce the letter; this is part of the explanation of how, with surprising ease, we read words into very un-word-like squiggles. Gallese suggest that similar patterns of activation underpin our sense of the actions undertaken by artists—the work of Pollock and Giacometti being vivid examples.

This system of responses is one that allows development and training. Brain scanning studies show the dancers respond more strongly in these ways to the sight of people dancing than do non-dancers, and a parallel point holds, not surprisingly, of the imagined movements we undertake when we hear a piano being played.⁴⁰ But the system itself is a primitive one in that it is (a) present to some degree in all normally developing subjects irrespective of the idiosyncrasies of upbringing, education and experience and (b) apt to operate without initiation or control by the subject, though we can also initiate imagined movements at will, as when experimenters ask us to imagine moving our hands in certain ways, or tapping our fingers at a certain rate.

These imagined movements, while often acknowledged on reflection by subjects as part of their artistic experience, are generally recessive and hard to describe. They

have been largely ignored through the last one hundred years of otherwise strenuous aesthetic thinking, partly perhaps because they do not easily submit to articulation within a subtle language of criticism; witness Berenson's somewhat mechanical insistence on "tactile values" as the key to appreciating early Renaissance art.⁴¹ A more austere mood has prevailed through most of the 20th century, exemplified in otherwise divergent theoretical stances: the varieties of formalism; the emphasis emerging in anthropology on an intellectualised notion of symbolic meaning; certain approaches to abstract expressionism which insisted—Greenberg again--on a purely visual engagement freed from the illusion of solid space. And, as I have noted, the philosophers' emphasis on context outlined above has been framed in terms of propositional knowledge rather than, as here, in terms of affinity of bodily disposition.

We await, I think, a serious empirical study of the role of these implicit movements on our aesthetic sense, but a reasonable projection from current research would be this: that they give rise, first of all, to a strong bodily sense of the artefactuality of the object and to a representation of its manner of making; to a sense—again preconceptual and nonpropositional—of the physical skills and levels of effort and concentration involved. In this way the object, through its retention of traces of making, is expressive of its maker's activity—an important feature, I have claimed, in our response to art and one which is, to some degree, independent of specialised knowledge.⁴²

The idea that art's value partly resides in its being a trace of the maker's activity goes some way towards explaining the controversial status that photography has enjoyed, or suffered from, throughout its one hundred and seventy year history. What is distinctive of photography, compared to painting, is that it collapses the distinction between representation and trace. A painting or other "hand made" image is both a representation—in fact a depiction—of its subject and a trace of the artist's activity. Even where the picture is a self-portrait, there is a distinction to be made between the marks on the paper qua elements in the depiction of the subject, and those same marks qua traces of the artist's activity. But the relation between the trace-features of a photograph and what it represents is more intimate: the surface features of the photograph are traces of the person who stood in front of the camera,

not of the photographer's activity, and the photograph represents whoever it does represent in virtue of being a trace of that person.

Art and the extension of agency

Suppose an anthropologist, previously hostile to the idea of a universal aesthetic sense accepts my arguments. She might respond by saying that the conclusion just isn't of any interest to anthropology, since the concern of the anthropologists is with cultural difference. In response to this two things must be said. The first is that an interest in difference, legitimate though it may be, ought not to be built on a denial of universality, if the claim of universality is true. If something is true, it ought not to be denied. The second is that an interest in difference must also be an interest in sameness. One may be interested in the differences between triangles, but only so long as one is aware of the necessary similarities between them; it will be a waste of time to look for differences in number of sides, for instance. And if one is interested in difference, one is interested in the degree of difference. But that can be assessed only by having a view about the ways in which things are not different.⁴³

But this is rather too abstract for comfort. Let us make the argument for the anthropological relevance of the aesthetic more concrete. Throughout, I've emphasised the connection between art objects and the agency behind the object, a connection described here largely in terms of expression. Our enjoyment and understanding of Renaissance painting, or Yoruba sculpture, or just about anything artefactual, depends on our sense—in its most basic form a bodily sense—that the object in question is the result of a deliberate and skilful act of making. I want now to connect this idea with another, which I take, paradoxically, from a determined opponent of the aestheticisation of artefacts from non-Western societies, Alfred Gell. Gell argued that artworks need to be understood, primarily, as devices for extending the powers of agents.⁴⁴ This, as he sees it, is an alternative—a much better alternative—to the view that artworks should be understood, by the anthropologist, as aesthetic. I shall argue that Gell's case for the power of art objects as extensions of agency is made stronger by appeal to the ideas I have outlined concerning the expressive connection between art and artist, and that his case supports, rather than undermines, an aesthetic approach to art.

How are our views related? I have been saying something about the *input* side, while Gell is concerned with the *output* side. My thesis was that art attracts us because it is the upshot or terminus of the artist's activity; Gell is focusing on the way in which art is a cause rather than an effect, a cause which extends the powers of agents. But the connection here is not hard to see. For objects which are the outcomes of agency, and which are highly expressive of that agency, can be expected to carry with them some of the authority of the agent, and therefore to have, themselves, causal powers in virtue of their being thus expressive. Let us consider an example of how this works. Gell discusses the Asmat, a New Guinean tribe living in what is now Irian Jaya, whose warlike practices once involved the use of long, body-protecting shields covered with remarkable designs.

Gell says that such an object is "indisputably a work of art of the kind interesting to the anthropologist, but its aesthetic properties (for us) are totally irrelevant to its anthropological implications". For warriors were not interested in the aesthetics of an opponent's shield; it was there to frighten him. "Anthropologically, it is not a 'beautiful' shield, but a fear-inducing shield" (6). But there is no contradiction in holding one and the same shield to be both beautiful and fear inducing.⁴⁵ Indeed, it is a very natural thought that the shield is fear-inducing partly *because* it is beautiful (note that beauty is not the same as prettiness). Of course context matters a great deal here; the same design displayed in a harmonious situation would not be fear inducing. The point is that the design is apt to induce fear in the right circumstances, and apt to do so because its design, particularly in regard to the use of jagged lines and strong verticals, is expressive of personal characteristics which, in the right circumstances, would be fearful.⁴⁶ Of course strong verticals and jagged lines don't automatically make for beauty; the beauty here is a function of the overall "skewed" symmetry of the piece, the evident quality of the craftsmanship, and other factors which, as always, are not easy to localise—we recognise beauty more easily than we are able to analyse it. But the beauty of the design and execution add to the sense of confidence and power which the piece expresses, and hence contributes to its fearful impression. Gell seems to be close to making this point himself when he observes that "their [Asmat shield] designs seem to have been composed in a mood of terror" (31). At least, he recognises here that there is an importantly expressive

element in the power of the work; for expression is generally a matter of something *seeming* to arise from a certain quality of mind or person, as sad music seems, at least, to emanate from a sad person, even though it probably didn't. But he is surely wrong to think that what is expressed is *terror*, and his efforts to bolster this hypothesis only make things worse. An attacking tiger, an enraged opponent, and an Asmat shield all look “terrified”, he says, creating terror in the victim by convincing them that they see their own terror reflected back. It's surely much more plausible to say that the shield (as well as the opponent and the tiger) look *terrifying*, and so we are terrified by them. And the shield does that by seeming to be expressive of characteristics which, in the circumstances of a battle at least, would warrant terror.

This way of seeing the matter suggests that aesthetic considerations sometimes play a significant role in anthropological explanation; things are powerful, sometimes, partly because they are beautiful. More specifically, they are powerful partly because they have that peculiar beauty which is produced by skilful agency and which, through the exercise of that skill, manages to express personal qualities we associate with power.

Art: A postscript

Throughout this essay I have used the word “art” without much thought as to the delimitation of its meaning, and merely in conformity with the admittedly very loose usage of Boas. But anthropologists opposed to an aesthetic approach to art sometimes take as liberal—or more liberal—an approach; Gell defines art as, roughly, an index of social agency. This would include any artefact and, he says, anything found but displayed⁴⁷ We ought, surely, to do better than this.

While some categorisations seem too inclusive to be useful, it is unlikely that any one restriction will be uniquely best. One way ‘art’ is currently used by philosophers is to name the domain of things which exist within a certain institutional setting, which they call the art world, and which contains many things which do not have, and were not intended to have, significantly aesthetic properties; this approach claims as an advantage for itself that it includes the work of conceptual artists (so-called) which an aesthetically based account of art struggle with.⁴⁸ If we adopt the institutional theory little of what I have discussed here counts as art. And much of what would

then count as art would certainly provide counterexamples to Openness. I do not claim that someone from a culture very different from our own would have any initial access to what, if anything, is worth appreciating in the works of Joseph Kosuth or Robert Barry. These are, arguably, objects that depend for their interest wholly on a specific cultural background and do not appeal to an aesthetic sense. And while it is sometimes claimed that works of these kinds take their place within the domain of art by being counter-aesthetic works—works consciously and manifestly created as critical responses to the notion of the aesthetic—and hence as intimately related to the concept of the aesthetic, they would not be aesthetic works of the kind to which we are given the kind of intuitive and body-based initial access I have described; they are works whose relation to the aesthetic is argumentative, and for such works no such pre-theoretic access seems to be helpful.

But we can use the term “art” to tag items which *are*, to some significant degree, aesthetically fashioned. Going further, we might propose the following: we’ll call things art when they are significantly aesthetic artefacts made within a social context which recognises the practice of aesthetic production, thereby making a tradition of that practice; that is how, roughly speaking, the term is used in much anthropological discussion. That recognition may come about through the institutions of religion, through magical and symbolic practices, through the creation of a critical terminology, through the creation of an acknowledged class of artists, or in some other way. Such a definition would allow the Dinka’s cows as art; their practices certainly seem to constitute a tradition. We can refine further; think of the emphasis I have given to the idea of aesthetic artefacts being expressive of their maker’s qualities partly through their displaying traces of their makers’ activities. Adding a clause to the effect that the artefacts concerned should bear significant expressive traces of making would get rid of the cows; they are just too “natural” looking to meet this condition.

At this point we reach about as restrictive a definition as we could go for if we want a notion of art for which Universalism is true. Once we start requiring art be the object of disinterested attention, or to have been made with a purely aesthetic purpose, or to be the product of a person specially designated as an artist, we move into territory occupied by a very limited range of communities. There is no arguing, in the

abstract, about which of these definitions is right; it depends on our purpose. The interest of Universalism and of Openness depends on the fact that—I claim—there are ways of conceiving art which make those claims true.

Gregory Currie

University of Nottingham

¹ In writing this paper I have benefited from discussions with Andrew Hirst. I am also grateful for the comments of Arthur Shimamura and a referee.

² On seeing works sent by Moctezuma to Charles V; quoted in Danto, *After the End of Art* (Princeton University Press, 1998), p.109. As I write, some of the same objects are on display in the British Museum's exhibition, *Moctezuma. Aztec Ruler*.

³ A. W. Eaton and I. Gaskell, "Do subaltern artifacts belong in museums?" in J. Young and C. Brunk eds., *The ethics of cultural appropriation* (Malden, MA., Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

⁴ Jeremy Coote, "Marvels of Everyday Vision": The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes, in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton eds, *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics* (Oxford Studies in the Anthropology of Cultural Forms), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p.253.

⁵ Coote, "Marvels of Everyday Vision", p.252.

⁶ Coote, "Marvels of Everyday Vision", p.254.

⁷ Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotc People*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.

⁸ J. Ryles, *Warriors of the White Nile: The Dinka* (Amsterdam, Time-Life, 1982), p.92. Quoted in Coote, "Marvels of everyday vision, p.251.

⁹ Coote,"Marvels of Everyday Vision", p.256, citing G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961.

¹⁰ Though that modern universalist about art, Denis Dutton, says that "The Dinka of East Africa have almost no visual art, but have a highly developed poetry, along with a connoisseur's fascination with the forms, colours and patterns of the natural markings on the cattle they depend on for their livelihoods" (*The Art Instinct*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p.30).

¹¹ Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, Harvard University Press, 1928, p.9.

¹² See Roger Fry “Negro Sculpture”, in his *Vision and Design*, 1920. Fry’s essay was written in response to an exhibition of African sculpture seen in London in 1920 and was very influential. Items from Fry’s own collection of African and Oceanic works may be seen in the Courtauld Gallery.

¹³ John McDowell, “Aesthetic value, objectivity and the fabric of the world”, in E. Schaper ed., *Pleasure, Preference & Value*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p.3.

¹⁴ Janaway, “Kant’s aesthetic and the “empty cognitive stock”, *Philosophical Quarterly*, 47 (1997): 459-476.

¹⁵ On this see Buller, *Adapting Minds*, Chapter *.

¹⁶ For the view that the aesthetic opinions of experienced judges converge, and an argument from this to the objectivity of aesthetic attributions, see Michael Slote (1971). The Rationality of Aesthetic Value Judgments. *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (22): 821-839.

¹⁷ Note in this connection the work of social psychologists who have challenged the very widespread (perhaps universal) belief in personal character and its role in explaining behaviour. (For references and discussion relating character to the literary arts, see my *Narratives and Narrators*, Oxford University Press, 2010, Chapters 10 and 11.)

¹⁸ See eg Howard Morphy’s study of the Yolngu concept of *bir’yun* (“From dull to brilliant: the Aesthetics of spiritual power among the Yolngu”, in J. Coote and A. Shelton (eds) *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, 1992); on delicacy, proportion and other aesthetic criteria among the Yoruba see Robert Farris Thompson, Yoruba artistic criticism, in W. d’Azevedo (ed) *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1973; see also Coote (“Marvels of everyday vision”) on *dheeng*, a concept with broad, partly aesthetic connotations for the Dinka.

¹⁹ See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency* (Oxford University Press, 1998), Chapter 1.

²⁰ See eg Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, University of Chicago Press, 1989. Much of Price’s argument, highly critical of western curatorial and interpretive practices, can be read as an argument for a universal aesthetic, or at least as countering certain anti-universalistic presumptions, though Price might not see it that way. She points, for example, to the invocation of images of the primitive, the erotic, the symbolically charged and the anonymously collective which serve to distance the

aesthetic of people in small-scale societies from our own (see discussion of the Maroons in *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 2 (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²¹ For an excellent defence of the display of artefacts from other cultures in museums see Eaton and Gaskell, "Do subaltern artifacts belong in museums?".

²² Kwame Anthony Appiah, *New York Review of Books*, 44, APRIL 24, 1997.

²³ See eg Gell, who tells us that the ““aesthetic attitude” is a specific historical product of the religious crisis of the Enlightenment and the rise of Western science ... [that brought about] the separation between the beautiful and the holy' (*Art and Agency*: 97).

²⁴ This point is well made by Coote (“Marvels of everyday vision”, p.248).

²⁵ Chomsky has claimed that grammar is “tacitly” understood by speakers, that they have “unconscious”, knowledge of the principles of grammar (see e.g., *Knowledge of Language*, New York, Praeger, 1986, p.270). Chomsky would not claim that speakers are thereby able to articulate those principles. In my view subjects equipped with normal aesthetic sensitivities do not even have tacit knowledge of the principles (if any) which underlie their responses. For the view that it is the same with language, see Michael Devitt, *Ignorance of Language* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁶ This last doctrine is often associated with the philosopher Frank Sibley (see eg. Kendall Walton, Categories of Art, *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970): 334-67). For Sibley's own exposition see Chapters 1 and 3 of his *Approaches to Aesthetics*, edited by J. Benson et al Oxford University Press, 2001.

²⁷ There are other versions of formalism, and not all are committed to this principle.

²⁸ “Modernism franchised ‘exotic art’ by liberating its viewers for the obligation to narrativise it” (*After the End of Art*, p.110). It is partly this minimalist denial of context that Sally Price is responding to—very negatively—in *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (see especially Chapter 1).

²⁹ Aesthetic properties are generally divided into thick and thin. Thick properties are those like *being expressive in a certain way, having a certain sort of elegant design, effectively embodying certain sorts of skills*. Thin aesthetic properties are the properties of *being beautiful or being ugly, or aesthetically pleasing or displeasing*. Thin aesthetic properties are said to be dependent on thick ones in that, once we have assigned thick aesthetic properties to a work, the distribution of thin properties

to it is thereby determined. Two works cannot differ in their thin properties without differing in their thick properties. Anthony Shelden (Predicates of aesthetic judgement: ontology and value in Huichol material representations, in Coote and Shelton (eds), p. 210, citing Wittgenstein), notes that “beautiful” or terms which can be translated into it, are rare in aesthetic discourse; thick aesthetic predicates are more informative, and hence more often used, their use generally implying one or another thin attribution, which rarely needs to be stated.

³⁰ There is something of this idea in Gregory Bateson’s claim that universality in art depends on the expression of grace, though I think Bateson does not quite acknowledge the extent to which grace is to be understood as a personal quality (“Style, grace and information in primitive art”, in A. Forge, (ed) *Primitive Art and Society*, Oxford University Press, 1973.

³¹ From the outline of a book (never written, I regret to say) which argues for the essentially social nature of our interest in art:

<http://www.humphrey.org.uk/papers/2004Beauty'sChild.pdf>.

³² In earlier work I have taken a somewhat unorthodox view of the nature of artworks, one according to which the art work itself is the action performed by the artist in making it (see my *An Ontology of Art*, London, Macmillan, 1989); a related view is also urged by David Davies (*Art as Performance*, Blackwell, 2004). The points I am making above are ones which, I hope, could be agreed to by people who think, more conventionally, that the work is, at least in the case of the visual arts, the physical artefact which results from that act of making.

³³ For arguments of this kind see, eg Walton, “Categories of Art”, pp. 334-367, Levinson, “What a Musical work is”, *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980):5-28, Currie, *An Ontology of Art* (London, MacMillan, 1989).

³⁴ I consider the ways in which aesthetic values are contingent on facts about our biological evolution in my *Arts and Minds* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 13. The fact that Martian aesthetic experience might be unavailable to us while being none the worse for it is one reason we need to maintain a distinction between the doctrines of Universality and Openness.

³⁵ See David Rosand, *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation*, Cambridge University Press, 2005. See also Patrick Maynard, 2005.

Drawing Distinctions: the varieties of graphic expression. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

³⁶ Some art forms effectively remove the more obvious traces of the artist's activity, as with the smooth sculptural forms of Canova, and in such cases one may require knowledge of the process of making in order to connect with that activity; such objects provide, most immediately, a sense of mystery as to their making.

Significantly, certain communities produce art which itself represents traces of other activities, as with central Australian Aboriginal culture: "The essence of the style is the representation of the marks left by people and animals as they move across the landscape" Robert Layton, "Traditional and contemporary art of Aboriginal Australia: Two case studies", in Coote and Shelton (eds), *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, p.138). See also Shelton on the extent to which Huichol artefacts are considered the "manifestation" of deities ("Predicates of aesthetic judgement", p.240).

³⁷ Vittorio Gallese, "The Two Sides of Mimesis: Girard's Mimetic Theory, Embodied Simulation and Social Identification", *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16 (2009): 21-44.

³⁸ See Freedberg D. and Gallese V., Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2007, 11: 197-203, and Gallese V., Freedberg D., Mirror and canonical neurons are crucial elements in esthetic response, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 2007, 11: 411.

³⁹ See L'hermitte, F."Utilisation behaviour and its relation to lesions of the frontal lobes". *Brain* 106 (1983): 237-255

⁴⁰ See News and comment, *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 6, October 2002; Calvo-Merino et al., *Action observation ad acquired motor skills: an fMRI study of expert dancers*, *Cerebral Cortex*, 15 (2005): 1243-1249; also J Haueisen & T. Knosche, "Involuntary motor activity in pianists evoked by music perception", *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 13 (2001): 786-792.

⁴¹ For remarks on a school of thinkers which I call the empathists who did take bodily involvement seriously, including brief comments on Berenson, see my "Empathy for objects", in A. Coplan and P. Goldie (eds) *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Essays*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁴² The editors sensibly queried this claim, pointing the practice of artistic “readymades” such as Duchamp’s bottle rack. I follow here the tradition of regarding such activity as parasitic in the sense that it can be countenanced as art only by dint of its commenting on, challenging or otherwise engaging with a more conventional artistic practice which involves making.

⁴³ On commonalities and differences between cultures and their relation to aesthetic universals see Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories* (Cambridge, Mass., The Belnap Press, 2009), Chapter 21.

⁴⁴ The idea that art extends agency is surely right. It is not even clear that anyone would disagree with this: artworks affect people in certain ways, and if your aim is to affect them in those ways, making an art work may enable you to do that. Gell himself focuses on ways in which art enhances power. Who would dispute that art extended the power of the Renaissance church and its priests? Why is the extension of agency thesis inconsistent with thinking of art as symbolic? Gell describes the construction of the Maori meeting house thus: “The ridge pole objectifies the genealogical continuity of the chiefly line... while the descending rafters indicate the proliferation of cadet lines on either side” (*Art and Agency*, 253). But surely it is only by convention that there are these associations between poles/rafters and lines of descent. Symbols certainly add to the power of an individual or institution. Even ordinary communicative uses of artefacts extend our powers in various way; we communicate with people because we want to produce changes in their beliefs, their desires, or their behaviour. I happen to agree with Gell that art need not be symbolic, but I am puzzled as to where he thinks the argument for this, based on the efficacy of art, comes from.

⁴⁵ Boris Wiseman says, “From an ‘aesthetic’ point of view, the Asmat shield can be at once a beautiful shield *and* a fear-inducing shield” (*Levi-Strauss, Anthropology, and Aesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, Introduction). Howard Morphy, generally a friend of the aesthetic approach to the anthropology of art, says that “In the case of Yolngu art, what Europeans interpret as an aesthetic effect Yolngu interpret as a manifestation of ancestral power emanating from the ancestral past” (From dull to brilliant: the aesthetic of spiritual power among the Yolngu”, in Coote and Shelton (eds) *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), p.183. Once again, I see no inconsistency in supposing that these aesthetic

effects are part of what explains the capacity of the objects concerned to manifest this connection with an ancestral past.

⁴⁶ I have in mind here the shield which Gell himself chose to illustrate his point; the designs vary somewhat.

⁴⁷ Gell, *Art and Agency*, Chapter 2.

⁴⁸ See eg, Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca: NY: Cornell UP, 1974. *Art Circle: A Theory of Art*. Chicago: Spectrum Press, 1997. For a recent defence of the aesthetic approach to art see N. Zangwill, *Aesthetic Creation*, Oxford University Press, 2007.