ART AND AESTHETICS

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From the beginning the question of aesthetics is always a non-dialogue between those who subscribe to the conditioned world order and those who stand to gain from a reconstructed forum.

Clyde Taylor, "Black Cinema in a Post-Aesthetic Era," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, eds Jim Pines and Paul Williams (London: British Film Institute, 1989), 90.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the beginning of the twenty-first century we live in a globalised and increasingly globalising world. Assumptions about the universal application of the Western traditions in fields of intellectual endeavour are making room for the claims of other epistemologies, histories, points of view. It is perhaps a mark of the strength of the Western Enlightenment project that this 'making way,' in part, comes out of Western challenges to its own intellectual hegemony, out of the very fecundity of its own thinking by way of forms of Marxism, feminism, postcolonial theory and revisionist histories. Western theories, histories, and the intellectual foundations upon which visual art is assessed, judged and evaluated have been vigorously challenged.[1]

In the Western tradition a well documented and elaborated history has been built up around the notion of aesthetics – the way we understand, feel about, judge, appreciate and apprehend works of art, particularly the so-called Fine Arts as taught in the academies, those institutions teaching art practice and assuming guardianship over the economy of taste.

This 'making way' has also been forced upon the Western tradition through the fast-moving social changes of the past hundred years. Many parts of the world are now multicultural, having populations that have come together for various reasons from different intellectual traditions. Other formerly colonised, or politically dominated, societies are asserting their own values and traditions. The social history of our times is dynamic, fluid, even explosive as political and intellectual tensions arise on the borders of cultural conflict.

In the comparatively quieter waters of art history and theory it may well be time in the West to reconstruct our thinking about aesthetics, to take into account changing ideas about global history, multicultural complexities, to examine the games we play with language when making statements about the arts in a multicultural world.[2]

As William McEvilley pointed out as long ago as 1985 in *Artforum*:

> We no longer live in a separate world. Our tribal view of art history as primarily or exclusively European or Eurocentric will become increasingly harmful as it cuts us off from the emerging Third World and isolates us from the global culture which is already in its early stages. We must have values that can include the rest of the world when the moment comes – and the moment is upon us.[3]

2. CULTURAL COMBATIVENESS

Notions of taste often differentiate a dominant, authenticating élite from the disenfranchised masses, one culture from another – in the crudest terms, the West from the non-West. Gadamer claims that "what is valid in a society, what taste dominates it, characterises the community of social life. Such a society chooses and knows what belongs to it and what does not. Even the possession of artistic interests is not random and universal in its ideas, but what artists create and what society values belong together in the unity of a style of life and ideal of taste."[4] There is a dynamic history of cultural combativeness – one set of social forces now dominant, only to be replaced in time by another, itself temporarily more successful in controlling the way reality is perceived. All societies are driven by the desire for power, to control others through economic and cultural domination, wielding the clubs of ideological aggression. One aspect of that ideological aggression is the imposition of rules of taste and notions of aesthetic approbation.[5]

Part of the West's ideological armoury is its adoption of the idea of a universal aesthetic, that "no longer permit[s] any criterion of content and dissolv[es] the connection of the work of art with its world."[6] The strength of this position lies in its total lack of definiteness. Gadamer goes on to point out that in these circumstances "the connection of the work of art with its world is no longer of any importance to it but, on the contrary, the aesthetic consciousness is the experiencing centre from which everything considered to be art is measured."[7]

Processes such as these, creating aesthetic, and therefore, social differentiation, exist both in the West and the non-West, in various cultures and times, usually for the purpose of claiming superiority for systems, both in time and place, of evaluating 'works of art.' These systems are socially constructed. In claiming a monopoly over questions of taste by a mobile feeling for quality, through a dominating aesthetic system, élites exclude from their purview the products and practices of 'Others' and develop what Kaja Silverman calls "dominant fictions."[8] They are driven by the desire, often unconscious because it is regarded as self-evident, for ideological and political hegemonic authority, rather than a sense of egalitarian pluralism.

With ideas of universalising 'aesthetic differentiation' now spreading from the West to the culturally colonised world, the artist, both in the West and in the non-Western world, is changing the sense of volition and vocation formerly embedded in the customs and traditions of local art histories, and is tempted to function by competing for a place amongst the galaxy of those chosen for favour by the gate-keepers of a still-Western-dominated international aesthetic consciousness.

At this time in history, we may feel the need to rethink our position as historians of the visual arts, to shift out of our aesthetic comfort zone and move into the wider world's pluralism, both ideologically egalitarian and simultaneously and experientially biased to fashion and the market, and start by exploring the ground for a theory of culturally inclusive aesthetics, rather than re-adapting Kant and Hegel to an inappropriate present.

3. AESTHETIC VALUES

Artworks are socially valued objects in the world. They serve a range of cultural purposes relevant to the society in which they are produced, function and have value. Those functions and values change within the specific histories of artistic traditions and the wider processes of world history, those traditions and processes themselves being subject to the reflexive push and pull of cultural conditions.

Some of the values accruing to artworks may be described as 'aesthetic.' This is an adjective, sometimes used ideologically, but generally with a range of unspecified meanings. It is deeply etched into the Western history of art, into discussions about the qualities of artworks and the 'aesthetic disposition' of the viewer (consumer), about 'aesthetic experience,'[9] responses and judgements. It can be used, amongst other things, to mean 'having good taste,' 'beautiful' (often related to 'good'), 'worthy of appreciation.'[10] 'Taste,' 'beautiful,' 'worthy,' are themselves multivalent,

having meanings produced by the context of their use. Those 'meanings' may disguise other, often complex, values: for example, 'beautiful' might contain within it symbolic values, such as being 'culturally prestigious,' 'culturally appropriate,'[11] 'effective in ritual,' 'ordered,' 'harmonious,' 'at peace,' even having 'a shimmering brilliance.'[12] Above all we need to examine "the occasions on which [such words as 'beautiful'] are said – on the enormously complicated situation in which the aesthetic expression has a place, in which the expression itself has almost a negligible place."[13]

Aesthetic values are relative, subjective and fugitive,[14] yet they are often strong markers of social groupings – those experiencing the sensation of an art object's effects in the body; those with, as opposed to those without, taste; those educated in the norms of the cultural élites; those with a knowledge of the philosophies of aesthetics; those subscribing to aesthetic ideologies, either Western or local.

'Aesthetic' can be used as a term of approbation, for example confirming 'aesthetic validity.' Those with sufficient intellectual capital or social standing to give access to an aesthetic disposition, to aesthetic judgements, often regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as in a privileged position, as charismatic compared with those too insecure in their social standing to make pronouncements of taste. It is the élites who grant or preserve prestige, elaborate the criteria of aesthetic mediation.[15] "The very complicated competition and collaboration between 'experts' from the artworld, dealers, producers, scholars, and consumers is part of the economy of taste in the contemporary West."[16] In other words 'aesthetic' and 'aesthetics' are terms often used as weapons in sites of social contestation, as emblems to mark social distinctions. For Wittgenstein that contestation is marked by the language games of aesthetics, those games being played within specific socially embedded contexts.[17] Those who play the game successfully dominate the kingdom of aesthetic judgements: those who cannot grasp the language or the rules well enough to dominate accept the values of their intellectual masters.

4. THE WESTERN UNIVERSAL AESTHETIC

Part of the intellectual armoury of the West is the assumption of a universal aesthetic that, as Gadamer says, "dissolves the connection of the work of art with its world."[18] The Western "aesthetic consciousness is the experiencing centre from which everything considered to be art is measured."[19] Yet all attitudes, ideological, political, value-laden, are socially constructed within particular cultural configurations of history for specific, but essentially transient, local purposes. The exercise of aesthetic judgements, the expression of feelings and opinions, are related to current dominant cultural fictions. Just as there are period-specific aesthetic, ethical and ontological codes, so too are there culture-specific aesthetics, of which the West's is only one. These codes have their own histories, are in constant flux, change their character and their social bases of construction, influence one another, merge, are replaced by the codes of others and so on.

Aesthetic theories, such as those of Kant,[20] are themselves the product of intellectual endeavour within a specific historical and social matrix.[21] Bürger argues persuasively that the process of the autonomy of art in the West, and the concomitant process of the developing concept of aesthetic pleasure, began in the early fifteenth century in Italy: "the works in which the aesthetic offers itself for the first time as a special object of pleasure may well have been connected in their genesis with the aura emanating from those that rule, but that does not change the fact that in the course of further historical development, they not only made possible a certain kind of pleasure (the aesthetic) but contributed toward the creation of the sphere we [in the West] call art."[22] Certainly since the late eighteenth century art in the West became more and more assigned to an autonomous field of production calling for a purely aesthetic disposition, provided with a theoretical framework, and institutionalised in the museum or art gallery. That disposition was, and is, dependent upon a certain cultural competence. That competence is acquired, and endlessly re-produced, through education. It enables its possessor to identify, among all the candidates for appreciation offered to the gaze, the distinctive features of an 'artwork,' as Pierre Bourdieu points out,

> by referring [it], consciously or unconsciously, to the universe of possible alternatives. This mastery is, for the most part, acquired simply by contact with works of art – that is, through an implicit learning analogous to that which makes it possible to recognise familiar faces without explicit rules or criteria – and it generally remains at a practical level; it is what makes it possible to identify styles, i.e. modes of expression characteristic of a period, a civilisation or a school, without having to distinguish clearly, or state explicitly, the features which constitute their originality.[23]
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> It is the aesthetic point of view that makes the aesthetic object.[24]

The omnipotence of the Western aesthetic gaze is made manifest in choosing, on occasion, to describe ethnographic objects from dominated societies as the stuff of 'material culture' or, often under pressure from the flux of ideas and politics, to raise certain of these objects to the status of 'works of art.' This arrogation of judgement to Western aesthetics was highlighted by the controversies surrounding the exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1984.[25]

5. ART AND LIFE

The 'pure' gaze in the act of Kantian judgment implies an aesthetic disposition for its own sake, an elective distance, a disinterestedness, a moral agnosticism, what Arthur Danto mischievously calls a "narcoleptic pleasure," quite distinct from the types of looking utilised in the day-to-day social world.[26]

> The aesthetic disposition which tends to bracket off the nature and function of the object represented and to exclude any 'naïve' reaction – horror at the horrible, desire for the desirable, pious reverence for the sacred – along with all purely ethical responses, in order to concentrate solely upon the mode of representation, the style, perceived and appreciated by comparison with other styles, is one dimension of a total relation to the world and to others, a life-style, in which the effects of particular conditions of existence are expressed in a 'misrecognisable' form.[27]

Bourdieu goes on to distinguish between this pure, élite gaze and the popular reception of art.[28] For the élite it is the form of the artwork that has precedence over any obvious function, the representation rather than the thing represented – art is separate from life, the aesthetic is autonomous and seemingly unencumbered by either ideological or political considerations.[29] For the masses, however, the work must have some functional value, even if only as a sign – there must be continuity between art and life. In addition art has about it – and this seems to bear on the fact that for the élite it has 'aesthetic' value – some relationship to the Good. 'Aesthetic,' in this context, tends to bear an ethical value.

The élite may elect to confer on some object of popular culture its aesthetic approbation: "nothing is more distinctive, more distinguished, than the capacity to confer aesthetic status on objects that are banal or even 'common' (because the 'common' people make them their own, especially for aesthetic purposes)."[30] This act itself confirms the power of the élite to determine values operative in the culture as a whole. Bourdieu maintains that even "the definition of art, and through it the art of living, is an object of struggle among the classes."[31] Western "legitimate" aesthetics has been constructed "by an immense repression."[32]

"The easiest, and so the most frequent and most spectacular way to 'shock (*épater*) the bourgeois' by proving the extent of one's power to confer aesthetic status is to *transgress* ever more radically the ethical censorships … which the other classes accept even within an area which the dominant defines as aesthetic."[33] As Pop Art demonstrated, it was even possible (in terms of language games) to have an aesthetic that was anti-aesthetic: "The style is happily retrograde and thrillingly insensitive … It is too much to endure, like a steel fist pressing in the face."[34]

In the West, within the confines of art galleries and museums, and in the popular press, spectators and readers (consumers) are expected not only to follow the lead of the 'experts' in terms of the hierarchies of approbation, but also to have a rudimentary grasp of the history of artistic periods, the biographies of artists, some words with which to 'appreciate' artworks. In other words, spectators are expected to collude with the socially consecrated illusions of aesthetic value of the élite.[35]

6. OTHER AESTHETIC CODES

This aesthetic disposition is almost exclusively discussed in terms of Western art. Culturally complex theories of aesthetics exist in other cultures – in China[36] and Japan,[37] in Islamic calligraphy and architecture,[38] for example, with elaborated languages and literatures, used not only to mark the educated élites, but also, more widely, to distinguish types of artistic practice and qualities of value (not unlike 'connoisseurship'). Here too there are changing histories of taste, of class differences between art-for-art's sake and art functioning within spheres of specific social behaviours.

It would be an error to claim that every culture has a similarly elaborated ideational system of aesthetic judgement comparable to those in the West, India, China and Japan and the Islamic world. Nevertheless in all societies judgements, conscious and unconscious, from simple reactions to complex, reasoned and nuanced explanations, are made about objects of ritual, of symbolic value, about artworks. Though there may be no word corresponding to 'aesthetic,' aesthetic principles (or something like them) are mobilised in the course of social interactions within the parameters of particular social relationships, of local language and customs, predicated on systems of values and governed by rules that are culturally specific and historically determined. Only the most insensitive intellectual hubris would lead anyone to claim that this is not the way Western aesthetics also operates.

In non-Western societies objects are often judged on their effectiveness, not only in terms of magic, or as totems, emblems, but also as substitutes for other symbolic objects. For example the Ancient Greeks made art objects as offerings to the gods, as records of piety, being at first a substitute for an actual sacrifice. The third century BC carving in bas-relief of a *bucranion* (the skull of a bovine) on one side, and the skull of a wild boar on the lateral faces, of a stele from Thespiae, as an offering to Zeus Karaios, was a substitute for the real head of a bovine or a boar.[39] Anthony Shelton has described the offerings, the symbolic mats, arrows and votive bowls, made by the Huichol of northwest Mexico, to procure rains, to bring the sun, to celebrate marriage.[40]

In these examples art is commemorative, connecting the celebrants with their history (their collective memory), their customs, their belief systems, their cultural identity. Image and function are interdependent: art is used to commemorate the relationship, the contract, between human beings and the supernatural powers to which they are in thrall. Art as ritual offering was, and is, widespread in non-Western societies. In these circumstances aesthetic value is related to appropriateness, how well the rules are followed, how effective the substitute, how acceptable the object is to the gods.

In all societies 'beauty' exists as a significant commendation of art, however that word is used within different cultural contexts. We are familiar with its use in Western aesthetics, even if we are unsure of its meaning outside of a particular context. Other aesthetic codes also commend 'beauty,' but using their own metaphorical terms for this elusive concept. For example, Biebuyck points out that the Lega of Zaire explain their sense of 'the beautiful' by reference to forms in the natural world, bongo antelopes, white *bubulcus* birds and white *kinsamba* mushrooms, objects that possess the colours and glossy textures associated by the Lega with 'beauty.'[41]

Other artworks – heirloom shell valuables among the Lelet peoples of New Ireland in the Pacific, for example – enter into the psychological realms of the forbidden, the taboo. Heirlooms are dangerous and must be kept away from children. Yet their possession confers a sense of identity, of solidarity with those sharing a cultural history. They even project their owner's identity into the future. They are called 'the bones of the clan.' Their manufacture, out of commonly found things like spiders' webs, vines from the banyan tree, shells, is not associated with skill. Their

aesthetic arises entirely from the histories their owners have woven about them, often narratives of settlement and migration. They become most obviously fetishes. "Like the clan or lineage itself, these valuables should ideally remain seated and immobile. Should they be lost, the clan and lineage are considered to be without a place to sit."[42] The revelation of particular wealth in heirlooms is a mark of power, just as in the West the revelation of the extent and significance of a private collection of art, in terms of the aesthetic criteria of experts, in a mark of wealth, of social standing.

Those objects that have power (charge or eloquence), that have elaborated histories – stories attached to them – are designated 'sacred,' and become models of aesthetic approbation. They assist a culture to make available, even visible, often in symbolic form, the invisible, the supernatural. Medieval Christian images acted in this manner in Europe.[43] The cultural context also supplies the criteria for their evaluation. "Aesthetics as a discourse [may] not exist, but aesthetics as an ethical codification of the use, significance, and purpose behind sacred and ritual arts pervades metaphysics and ontology."[44] Value is based on occult rather than visible criteria: but isn't this similar to the conferment of aesthetic approbation in the West? "Beauty is a form of revelation which explicates what is implicit and reveals that which is occult."[45]

In non-Western societies there is often less distinction between signified and signifier: art is not so much a representation of invisible powers but a manifestation of them. Signification becomes actualisation. (The wine *is* the blood of Christ.) We may generalise Shelton's remarks about the Huichol to cover a wide range of non-Western cultural uses of aesthetics: "Aesthetics is not concerned with passive reflection, but with an active attitude to maintain or adjust a system of ethics, inherited from … ancestral deities, which organises the world and defines appropriate activities and relations within it."[46]

7. COMMON FEATURES OF AESTHETIC CODES

Aesthetic codes are often divided in the West between aspects of essentialist thinking – 'beauty,' 'form,' 'truth to materials' and so on – and institutional theories, such as those elaborated in the 1960s by Arthur Danto and George Dickie.[47] Social theories of art treat these avenues of enquiry as just two prosects in a wider landscape of art making, use (consumption), evaluation and appreciation. Art and identity is another aspect of the subject, related to art and psychology. None are as all-embracing as art and culture, which itself includes the way art's concepts operate for the individual mind, within the group, in the wider society and multi-culturally, both dynamically over time and space.

8. AESTHETICS AND IDENTITY POLITICS

The word 'aesthetic,' used as a noun, has come to stand for a style, or a point of special approbation, "a view of the beautiful (the good) from a special-interest point of vantage", "a particular type of approbation radically different from the theory and history of Western aesthetics." Often 'an aesthetic' is undefined, its sense comprehensible only through immersion in a sub-culture in which that particular 'aesthetic' becomes clear through experience or through the close study of special-interest literature.[48]

For example a Black Aesthetic is associated with Afro-Americans. At its most intense, this explores notions of the beautiful (the good) through an unequivocal, an uncompromised association of the art of West Africa and of the descendents of slaves in the North American continent, marking off European and white American influences, rendering them extraneous and Other. The Black Aesthetic is characterised by the 1960s slogan 'Black is Beautiful.' Kobena Mercer takes a more nuanced approach, naming this a neo-African aesthetic among those of African descent, however recent or remote in time, in cultural diaspora in both North America and Europe.

> The patterns and practices of aesthetic stylisation developed by black cultures in First World societies may be seen as modalities of cultural practices *inscribed* in critical engagement with the dominant white culture and at the same time *expressive* of a neo-African approach to the pleasures of beauty at the level of everyday life.
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> Black practices of aesthetic stylisation are intelligible at one 'functional' level as dialogic responses to the racism of the dominant culture, but at another level involve acts of appropriation from that same 'master' culture through which 'syncretic' forms of diasporean culture have evolved.[49]

The Black Aesthetic has its own history, moving from the aesthetic of negation – where it was characterised as 'not-European' – to an aesthetic of de-negation, seeking its own cultural criteria of value.

A similar history can be traced for a feminist aesthetic.

There are aesthetics of liberation, aesthetics of nature (as opposed to artifice). Teshome Gabriel has theorised a nomadic aesthetic, the values given to artworks in nomadic cultures. She characterises the aesthetic as having two essential social functions, to consolidate a community through ritual and performance, and through its collective participation in the production and reception of art.[50] Above all it stresses the transience of life and art, and the social necessity of creating ephemeral, or at their most permanent, mobiliary (that which can be habitually carried from site to site) artworks.

There is even a 'consumption aesthetic.'[51]

Essentialist aesthetic qualities, such as beauty, purity, clean lines, truth to nature, truth to materials, are evoked as ethical virtues in the politics of art movements, of art histories, of social change, of urban renewal, making over what is now regarded as redundant into the currently useful or even simply fashionable.

9. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF AESTHETIC PLEASURE

Aesthetic delight or pleasure is also a psychological quality related to cultural experience, including that of the dominant ideology of a culture ingested through parental models, the home, the extended family, the local community, through schooling and educational institutions, through reading and seeing, through listening to wise women and men with an elevated social status acting as mentors, as spiritual guides, as cultural gatekeepers, as tastemakers. The experience of aesthetic pleasure, aesthetic delight is generated within us, but what is within is constructed by our cultural experience.

Artworks themselves are inert. It would be a fundamental conceptual error to ascribe any intrinsic attractiveness to an object, such as an artwork. We may fetishise the object 'in itself,' focussing attention on the emblem itself, rather than what it is emblematic of. We may use it to sublimate our primary desires. In Barthes's dramatic metaphor: "The text [image] is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*. The text [image] chooses me."[52]

Apart from our genetic inheritance we are structured by the world, including the art of our particular culture and time. Artworks have a dynamic, a reflexive influence over our ways of seeing, our view of the world, our actions. To some extent they structure us, determine us.[53] We turn Barthes's bland 'readerly' experience into the creative 'writerly,' driven by our desires and the cultural matrix in which those desires are free to express themselves. Even though Freud and Lacan explored the intimate psychological underpinnings of our individual personalities, those 'underpinnings' are created within social parameters. The images of art may remind us of what we have lost. They may give us a sense of recovering what we cherish and desire. They may resonate with our longing, with the inchoate material residing in our unconscious. The systems by which these acute desires are activated in the self, the very pleasures of desiring, often provide the material with which psychoanalysis works, but the shape and strength of our desires relate to infancy, to childhood, to places and relationships, which are themselves embedded in social realities.[54]

Social realities operate in the production of art in all societies, Western and non-Western. The artist is embedded in a social order, but psychological motivations play a part in the constant recasting of that order. For example, Marion Wenzel has shown how house decoration in Nubia followed certain prescriptions laid down in tradition, but that individual artists were free to play with, to extend the canon according to their own aesthetic impulses. They could even develop quite new styles, such as those created by Ahmad Batoul from the 1920s. Nevertheless the Nubian artist's aesthetic freedom was constrained by the need to receive regular work as a plasterer and decorator attached to a building team. [55] This tension between aesthetic striving and tradition, between creativity and paid labour, is a dynamic process changing within time across differing social spaces. This is not unlike similar tensions existing between artist and patron in Italy in the Renaissance.

10. AESTHETIC JUDGEMENTS NOT ABOUT ART

In all cultures things other than art – objects, movements and events, such as the world of nature or performance in sport – call into play aesthetic sensibilities and aesthetic judgements. It is possible, and indeed some would prefer, to talk about aesthetics quite separately from art altogether.[56]

11. THE SOCIAL REGISTRATION OF ART

The triple registration of the work of art in the realms of the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, as Ellen Spitz puts it, "comes into being at the intersection of the reflex arc of (sexual/scoptophilic) satisfaction; attenuated experience marked by frustration, delay, and disguise; and the values, expectations, and beliefs imposed by a culture."[57]

In order to secure a place for ourselves within a social group we may identify with its collective sense of taste, its language of aesthetic pleasure, its systems of valorisation. We may be eager to honour the customs of our forebears, to slot into tradition. We may tailor the expression of our desires, of our aesthetic pleasures to the dominant fictions in the groups to which we seek to belong. In that collective process we may shift the parameters of those fictions, in ways often difficult to detect. At times we may even join those seeking to undermine the dominant in order to replace it with one to which we aspire.

12. AESTHETIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

The task of the social historian of art is to restore to the art object its cultural significance, to recognise it as a context-specific signifier. This does not mean to ignore its aesthetic effects, quite the contrary, but rather to understand their cultural roots and trace their transformation through the processes of history. Aesthetics are of central concern to the social historian, whose role it is to co-opt the dynamic history of aesthetic effects into social history, to examine, as the young Clement Greenberg wrote, "the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific – not the generalised – individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place."[58] In other words, to focus on the social ontology of art, including aesthetics.[59]

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1 Both challenged and confirmed in Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein in his "Lectures on Aesthetics" discusses the 'language games' used to make judgements in particular cultural circumstances. See L. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), 5-6.

3 Thomas McEvilley, "I Think Therefore I Art," *Artforum*, 23:10 (Summer 1985), 74–84.

4 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975), 76.

5 The word 'rules' is used here, not unlike Ludwig Wittgenstein in his "Lectures on Aesthetics," to mean the underlying particular historical system, the 'language games,' used to make judgements in particular cultural circumstances. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*, 5-6.

6 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 76.

7 Ibid.

8 Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, 1992), Chapter 1. 'Dominant fiction' is the phrase used by Kaja Silverman to "retheorise the operation of what most often passes ideologically as 'reality.'" Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 239 n. 13.

9 Peter Bürger claims that "aesthetic experience is the positive side of that process [within Western Modernism] by which the social subsystem 'art' defines itself as a distinct sphere. Its negative side is the artist's loss of any social function." It rebels against the praxis of life. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 33-4. See also Noël Carroll, "Art and Aesthetic Experience," in his *Philosophy of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 156-204.

10 As Wittgenstein pointed out: "It is not only difficult to describe what appreciation consists in, but impossible. To describe what it consists in we would have to describe the whole environment." Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*, 7.

11 See, for example, Alfred Gell's discussion of 'beauty' in relation to codes of dress among the Muria Gonds. "Newcomers to the World of Goods: Consumption among the Muria Gonds," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 120.

12 Robert Layton, *The Anthropology of Art*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), 13, 16, 98, 197; and Howard Morphy, "From Dull to Brilliant: The Aesthetics of Spiritual Power among the Yolngu," in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, eds Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford, 1992), 181-208.

13 Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*, 2.

14 Some philosophers have even wondered whether 'aesthetics' has any basic subject matter. See Stuart Hampshire, "Logic and Appreciation" (1952), in *Art and Philosophy*, ed. WE Kennick (New York: St Martin's Press, 1979), 651-7.

15 "Aesthetic codes operate as mediating influences between ideology and particular works of art by interposing themselves as sets of rules and conventions which shape cultural products and which must be used by artists and cultural producers." Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1993), 64-5.

16 Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 45.

17 Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics*, 8. Wittgenstein: "What belongs to a language game is a whole culture."

18 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 76.

19 Ibid.

20 Such as outlined in *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). This paper treats Kant's ideas as exemplars of the Western tradition. The complexity and significance of Kant's thinking, in all three of his *Critiques*, is not the subject of this paper.

21 For example, Kant's work lies on the intellectual frontier of a change in the central focus of Western aesthetics. Before Kant, philosophical aesthetics was focussed on questions of beauty and sublimity in nature; after Kant, the emphasis is refocussed on works of art.

22 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 39.

23 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 4.

24 Ibid., 29.

25 In particular the article by Thomas McEvilley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief: Primitivism in 20th-Century Art at the Museum of Modern Art," *Artforum*, 23:3 (November 1984), 54-61.

26 Arthur Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1986), 11. See also Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 41-5. Martha Rosler also talks about "a hedonic-aesthetic respite from instrumental 'reality.'" Martha Rosler, "Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment," *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 259.

27 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 54.

28 Bourdieu relates the pure gaze to a bourgeoisie able to enjoy 'leisure.' Ibid., 55-6.

29 For an amusing, but perceptive, take on this position see Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, 12. Peter Bürger has demonstrated the historical process of that separation, led by the avant-garde, eventuating in the crisis in Western art after the First World War, with some artists seeking to re-engage with social life and others intent on pursuing the autonomy of their production. Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde.*

30 Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

31 Ibid., 48.

32 Ibid., 485.

33 Ibid., 47.

34 Ivan Karp, "Anti-Sensibility Painting," *Artforum*, September 1963, 26.

35 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief," *Media, Culture and Society*, 2 (July 1980), 261-93.

36 Such as Hsieh Ho's *Six Principles of Chinese Painting* (c. 550 BCE).

37 As an example, the following titles give a sense of the depth of scholarship in Japanese art: Kuki Shūzō, *Reflections on Japanese Taste: The Structure of Iki* (1930), trans. John Clark (Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1997); Sōetsu Yanagi, *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty* (Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International, 1972); Itō Teiji, Tanaka Itō and Sesoko Tsune, *Wabi, Sabi, Suki: The Essence of Japanese Beauty* (Hiroshima: Mazda Motor Company, 1993); *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Nancy Hume (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995); Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996).

38 Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2004).

39 The stele is now in the museum in Thebes. K Demakopoulou and D Konsola, *Guide to the Archaeological Museum of Thebes* (Athens, 1981), no. 154.

40 Anthony Shelton, "Predicates of Aesthetic Judgement: Ontology and Value in Huichol Material Representations," in Coote and Shelton, *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 209-44.

41 D Biebuyck, *The Lega: Art, Initiation and Moral Philosophy* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1973), 178-9.

42 Richard Eves, *The Magic Body: Power, Fame and Meaning in a Melanesian Society* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 142-7.

43 See, for example, Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986).

44 Coote and Shelton, *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 235.

45 Ibid., 236.

46 Ibid., 241.

47 Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy*, 61 (October 1964), 571-84; George Dickie, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 6:3 (July 1969), 253-6, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1974) and *Art Circle: A Theory of Art* (Chicago: Spectrum Press, 1997).

48 Wittgenstein frequently highlights the need to be vigilant with our use of words. 'Aesthetic' is such a word calling for care. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch, ed. GH von Wright and Heikki Nyman (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), and *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics.*

49 Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," in *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures*, eds Russell Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1990), 257.

50 Teshome Gabriel, "Nomadic Aesthetics and the Black Independent Cinema," ibid., 396.

51 See, for example, Alladi Venkatesh and Laurie Meamber, "The Aesthetics of Consumption and the Consumer as an Aesthetic Subject," *Consumption Markets and Culture*, 2:1 (2008), 45-70.

52 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 27.

53 Peter Stupples, "Neuroscience and the Artist's Mind," *South African Journal of Art History*, 25:3 (2010), 43-55.

54 These ideas owe a lot to reading the work of Kaja Silverman, for example, *The Subject of Semiotics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

55 Marion Wenzel, *House Decoration in Nubia* (London: Gerard Duckworth, 1972).

56 For example, Jacques Marquet, *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Malibu, Calif.: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1979), 45, and *The Aesthetic Experience: An Anthropologist Looks at the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 33; Nick Zangwill, "Aesthetics and Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26:3 (1986), 257-69; TJ Diffey, "The Idea of Aesthetic Experience," in *Possibility of the Aesthetic Experience*, ed. Michael Mitias (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1986), 3-12; Stefan Morawski, *Inquiries into the Fundamentals of Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974); Coote and Shelton, *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 245-8.

57 Ellen Handler Spitz, *Image and Insight* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 14.

58 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 1*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 6.

59 See John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995) and *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).