

## **Abducting the Agency of Art**

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Alfred Gell's *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (hereafter *AA*), posthumously published in 1998, offers an intriguing proposal for an 'anthropology of art'. According to Gell, an anthropology of art should identify the beliefs sustained by agents, typically the users or what Gell calls the 'recipients' of works of art, when they infer or 'abduct' the identity, actions, or motivations and intentions of the agents supposed to have constituted the work of art. In such abductive reception, as we might call it, the recipients of the 'agency of art' identify who or what has caused the work of art, as they believe, to have the formal, semantic, and social properties and effects it seems to them to possess or to display or to produce. (I say 'who or what' because the inferred generative agents of the work of art, as Gell makes clear, need not be human beings; they might, for example, be supernatural entities or natural or inorganic processes.) In this 'art nexus', a work of art can be understood by its makers and other original observers and users as an 'index' of the agencies believed to have caused it.

Gell's anthropology addresses the agent-caused properties of artifacts, or, more exactly, what people believe to be the agent-caused properties. Because these properties are believed to be agentively constituted, they can be said to be 'natural signs' of their cause in the sense that smoke signals the presence of fire or a bullet hole in a wall marks the impact of a bullet fired at the wall. Abduction is the mode of knowing—of inferring—causes; abductive knowledge is the understanding of indexes. In Gell's terms, then, the work of art specifically is an 'art-index', having the power (its own attributed 'agency') to move its recipients to beliefs about its origins and its efficacy. Gell's approach can be contrasted with anthropologies and art histories that would start—and perhaps end—by identifying the 'meaning' of the symbolic image, asserting (as it were)

that if a symbol is meaningful it must have agency. Gell wants us to start—and end—differently: Gell’s anthropology of art investigates the very conditions of possibility of symbolic function—namely, the way that the artifact is believed to ‘do’ something, to have agency, in ways that organize the recipient’s actions in using it. For all intents and purposes, this artistic agency—it is devolved from and materially relays the abducted causal agency believed to have occasioned the work—constitutes the ‘meaning’ of the artwork in material, in symbolic, in social, and in aesthetic terms.

### Abducting and indexing

All of these terms—‘agency’, ‘abduction’, ‘art nexus’, ‘index’, and ‘art-index’—have been given somewhat special senses in Gell’s anthropology of art; they are conceptually interrelated in Gell’s model of ‘art and agency’; and they require careful disentangling. Gell’s emphasis on the agency of art (referring both to its abducted agentive causation and to its power to motivate agents’ actions) is highly instructive; when applied to anthropological and historical examples, it can be revealing. But it is also possible, as I will suggest, that Gell’s model of the abduction of agencies in the art nexus can lead us too far away from the history of the art-index itself. As a consequence, aspects of art’s historicity—its ‘art history’—could be overlooked in a Gellian anthropology of art. In this sense, Gell’s model of the abduction of the agency of art—as my title has it—risks ‘abducting’ the agency of art. That is to say, it risks neglecting, misrecognizing, or high-jacking the historical agency specifically of *art*—even if and possibly especially because the work of art must be an index of the many historical agents inferred to have caused it.

In addressing this matter, at the outset I want to acknowledge that I am sympathetic to Gell's basic theoretical inclinations. Among these we should count, first, his dogged resistance to any 'textualisation' of visual culture and of material artifacts (even though he exaggerates the difference between semiotic models of art modeled on the operations of natural language and his own supposedly nonlinguistic account); second, his desire to construct a specifically *anthropological* theory of art (in relation to what he takes to be 'aesthetics' and to a lesser extent 'art history') that at the same time corrects the unhistorical tendencies of an established 'anthropology of art'; and third, his continual engagement with art's *intentionality* conceived as constituted in peoples' abduction of art's *causality*. As what I have already said will have implied, *Art and Agency* blends the intellectual traditions—and the technical terminology—of communication studies, semiotic and reception theory, intentional analytics, the phenomenology of knowledge, Wittgensteinian language philosophy, cognitive anthropology, and pragmatic interactionism and social-psychological transactionism. A protean writer uniting all these possibilities (at least *in nuce*) would, of course, be Charles Sanders Peirce—originator of the Index in the sense that Gell deploys the term. Indeed, Gell explicitly cites Peirce's work as his inaugural authority for the concept of the index and of indexicality.

But we should be cautious in supposing that Gell attempted to apply or refine Peirce's theory of signs.<sup>1</sup> As Peirce noted, there are no pure indexes. In Peircean semeiotic, any given artifact-sign triangulates the notional sign-functions of indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity. These functions must be tracked in turn to further triadic involutions in the continuing recursion of the 'interpretant', the sign as intelligible—resulting in Peirce's well-known (though still arbitrarily limited) table of sixty-six logically possible sign-

functions.<sup>2</sup> Depending on the artifact-sign under consideration (for example, a ‘mask’ or a ‘portrait’), some of these sign-functions would seem to have greater cognitive weight or force than others and to possess greater or lesser proportions of indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity; moreover, a plaster mask taken “from life” (or after death) and a portrait photograph might have different *kinds* of specifically indexical relations with their putative objects. In some artifact-signs, indexicality would seem to be more deeply embedded and ramified in the entire or total recursion of the sign—though Peirce made it clear that ultimately interpretants are ‘endless’ or nontotalized—than either iconicity or symbolicity. It might usually be harmless to call such signs ‘indexes’ or ‘indexical’. But the convenience can be misleading in certain important ways. Indexicality always involves—and in narrow but crucial ways it sometimes requires—iconic and symbolic mediations.

Take, for instance, the case of depiction—a particular but important class or possible form of ‘art-index’ according to Gell’s account of art. In his discussions of what he calls ‘representation’—that is, pictorial image making or depiction—Gell dismisses the role of ‘symbolic’ conventions in constituting the sign. In Peircean terms, however, the iconicity of depiction—in Gell’s terms, its seeming to represent a ‘prototype’, its denoted and pictured object—rests on a symbolic feature *of* iconicity: the prototype-resembling feature(s) of the ‘index’ in this case must also (be abducted) to refer to the prototype it putatively resembles. (In other words, mere resemblance to the prototype is necessary but certainly not sufficient for depiction: because the cloud looks like a human face does not mean that it pictures or portrays that face.) Any agency exerted by the prototype can only be mediated in the primordial depiction-constituting symbol. But what is the agent-

derived causality and the resulting agency of the symbolism that resolves depiction *as* depiction (what I have elsewhere called the ‘constitutive criterion’ of images)? How do people abduct the fact of depiction, or what I have elsewhere called the ‘presence of pictures’, apart from the abduction of a prototype as a putative agent *of* the depiction?<sup>3</sup> If one sees that the picture portrays the king, perhaps one infers that the king has caused the picture. But even if one knows that the king has caused the picture of him, one does not necessarily infer that the picture portrays the king; even its resemblance to the king does not guarantee that it refers (entirely) to him. Thus, for example, a picture of ‘Churchill’ in a newspaper cartoon might refer to ‘the English people’ as much as—or rather than—refer to the historical Prime Minister. This kind of intransitivity directs us to an essential self-displaying or self-indexing process within depiction: the picture must index itself—show us that it is a picture—at the same time as it portrays its object.

Moreover, the ability of a picture to ‘symbolize’ something other than (or in addition to) what it seems to ‘index’ (for example, ‘the English people’ instead of ‘the British Prime Minister during the Blitz’) is one of the several kinds of ambiguous, incomplete, or self-resisting self-agency—what might be called a partial presencing—at the heart of the very possibility of depiction understood as indexical.<sup>4</sup> In depiction, the ‘natural sign’ is partly *iconic*-indexical. Because the picture looks like the king (the ‘icon’ is related to its object by way of resemblance), it can be abducted to be caused at least in part by the king’s identity, appearance, action, or agency as the prototype for his portrait—the resemblance-relation that Gell understands in terms of the agency of the prototype supposedly constituting the ‘representational’ art-index. But the constitutive *symbolicity* that establishes the depiction is not limited to this indexicality. It is not only the

appearance of the king (an indexical icon) that indexes his agency; his agency is also relayed in the fact that the king caused a picture to be made of his appearance (an indexical symbol). And so on: the ‘impurity’ of the index and indexicality—or more generally the mixed (triadic) nature of signs as Peirce classified them in terms of notional indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity—ramifies in all directions throughout Gell’s model of the agency of art. Gell’s model can certainly accommodate this fact. Indeed, his anthropology of art in principle permits a rich description of pictorial and artifactual signification so far as signification must be abducted by its recipients to be caused by agents. Nevertheless, Gell’s own emphasis on indexicality—his anthropology would have us track agent-caused indexicality in the ‘art index’—tends to subordinate complementary processes of iconicity and symbolicity. These too might be agent-caused (the king commanded his portrait to ‘look like’ him as well as ‘stand for’ all his people) and therefore they have indexical (and in principle ‘abductible’) dimensions.

One way of stating the issue here might be to say that Gell’s anthropology of art investigates the agent-caused identity (as it were the ‘meta-indexicality’) of the ‘indexicality’, ‘iconicity’, and ‘symbolicity’ of artifact-signs in Peirce’s terms—that is, it examines indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity *as indexes specifically of agency*. Gell deals with the indexicality of iconicity, as we might put it, in examining how recipients might abduct the agency of the king who commanded his portrait to look like him; and he deals with the indexicality of symbolicity in examining how recipients might abduct the agency of the king when his people take his portrait to stand for all of them. In this sense, Gell’s model deploys and integrates *two* discriminable definitions of the index—as ‘natural sign’ (Peirce’s ‘indexicality’) and as agent-caused (Peirce’s ‘abduction’). Both

concepts of indexing derive from Peirce's work: 'indexicality' refers to one of the notional or *logical* dimensions of all sign-functions, and 'abduction' refers to the *cognitive* activity of interpreting all signs as having been caused. Gell's continual passage between the logical and the cognitive levels of analysis of indexing contributes to the richness and power of his work. But it can lead to certain questions and possible confusions.

In particular, Gell's model continually prompts us to ask about the 'art index' in the 'art nexus' as he describes it. How do we identify the limits of the intelligibility of the art-index in the indefinite ramification of agent-caused indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity in the art nexus? Put another way, is it possible or necessary to specify the agency specifically 'of art' in a nexus that fully includes all the agents inferred to have caused it (i.e., its 'anthropology')? As we will see, it will not be possible to answer these questions in a fully satisfactory way on the basis of the arguments and materials provided in Gell's book. In part because he resisted what he called the claims of 'aesthetics', Gell himself seems to have been unsure whether to consider art's agency as known in abduction or as specifically indexical—as being a discrete if unavoidably complex 'natural sign' having a clear inferred agentive causation. In the end he tends to need to say that 'art' is abductively opaque or extraordinary (in his memorable phrase, it has '*cognitive stickiness*' [AA, 86; my emphasis])—even though this conclusion would seem to have to undermine his historical 'anthropology' of its notional or *logical* indexicality. It turns out that art is not quite like the smoke telling us that there's a fire. It's like a smoke that gets in your eyes.

## Gellograms and art history

It will be helpful to understand *Art and Agency* as incorporating *two* books. The first book (chaps. 1-5, and parts of chap. 6), which I will call *AA-1*, presents Gell's substantive theoretical construction—namely, a concept of (and a quasi-formal notation for) the logical relations of the art nexus that he would have us observe in an anthropology of art. This analysis is accompanied by brief ethnographic and art-historical demonstrations and exemplifications.

To be sure, for some readers in art history or philosophical aesthetics *AA-1* will be strangely distorted by Gell's failure to engage the fundamental claims of idealist or critical aesthetics. In *AA-1*, in fact, Gell claims decisively to reject Kantian aesthetics as the presumption of his own project. In the Kantian tradition, however, aesthetic judgment (*pace* Gell) is conceived as an essentially social process of winning others' agreements to one's judgments of taste—that is, of the formation of a *sensus communis* or what Gell himself might call a 'distributed person' or 'extended mind' in the *second* part of his book (*AA-2*).<sup>5</sup> In the end a Kantian aesthetics might be thought to require or suggest—certainly it could readily endorse—an anthropology that might look rather like Gell's own. Unfortunately, Gell's view of 'aesthetics' in *AA-1* sets up a straw man to which his 'anthropology' is misleadingly contrasted. On the one hand, this prevents him from fully calibrating his anthropological theory with the phenomenology of the distributed person or extended mind developed in *AA-2*. And on the other hand, it keeps him from fully explicating his anthropology *as* an aesthetics—an account of the historical phenomenology of artistic agency as agents abduct it. I will return to these points.

To some extent this confusing feature of Gell's presentation can be explained straightforwardly as an historiographic anomaly. In the 'anthropology of art confraternity' to whom Gell addresses a good part of his book, especially *AA-1*, one frequently does find a total reduction of philosophical aesthetics and critical theory, an account of human sensuous knowing in its contexts of bodily finitude and historical social relations, to the question of an individual human being's 'art appreciation' (or, at a slightly higher level, to an 'anthropology of aesthetic judgment' in a given historical community).<sup>6</sup> Readers outside that confraternity—readers versed in hermeneutic art history, in the phenomenology of culture, or in critical theory—will be impatient with this side of Gell's presentation.

But Gell's opinions about aesthetics—about what aesthetics is or is not historiographically and what it has or has not analytically achieved—are inessential to his substantive or positive theoretical model of the agency of art-indexes in *AA-1* as he develops it. They can safely be ignored in evaluating that model, even if it seems to be predicated on an anthropology of the social universalisation of 'mind' that is rooted in Kantian traditions—at least by way of the interactionist phenomenology that Gell's terms in the second part of his book manifestly seem to employ. Much more important, at least in the manifest argument of *AA-1*, is Gell's concept of the work of art as an index enabling an abduction of the social relations believed to have generated it—the *sensus communis* that it requires, replicates, and relays.

To present his analysis in *AA-1*, Gell developed a suggestive quasi-formal notation; it produces what might be called 'Gellograms' that permit us to represent the relations of agency and the operations of abduction in the art-index in a perspicuous fashion. In turn

these representations enable us to make revealing historical and cultural comparisons—comparisons that not only suggest particular neglected or new anthropologies or art histories but also, and more deeply, motivate the very project and claims of the ‘anthropological theory of art’ in the first place. To take one of the most prominent examples discussed in *Art and Agency*, Gell’s notation enables us to identify a logical overlap—specific similarities in the structure and the routes of the abduction of agency—between an ‘idol worship’ (or so-called fetishism) supposedly to be found in many pre-modern or non-Western cultural traditions, on the one hand, and the ‘aesthetic appreciation’ of artworks characteristic of modern Western cultural traditions on the other hand.

I will return to the details of this particular example momentarily. But in light of this comparison between idol worship and aesthetic appreciation, Gell’s critique of aesthetics (as he deploys the term) is clearly well taken, though not especially novel: as an abduction of agency in which works of painting, sculpture, or other media of artifact- and image-making are believed to be essentially self-generative, or created by an artist ‘for their own sake’, the modern aesthetics specifically of ‘art’ (or Art) reflects Renaissance, Baroque and Enlightenment European art theories and idealist philosophies. In particular, it corresponds to Kant’s local doctrine of the ‘idealization’ or ‘perfection’ of disinterested judgments of beauty specifically attained by the *sensus communis*, the subjective universalization of judgment (or aesthetic judgment in the broadest Kantian sense), in the ‘fine art’ of an historical culture. (Needless to say, Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment was not limited to—indeed, it was not even primarily interested in—these judgments of taste in ‘fine art’ or artistic culture; it chiefly addressed itself to

nonconceptual judgments of beauty, and complementary problems of usefulness and interestedness, in nature and in social life.) As Gell urges, the deployment of this modern aesthetics of Art as a *general* anthropological theory of human aesthetic judgment *outside* modern Western cultural tradition has been misguided. By the same token, however, to identify critical aesthetics, or even the Kantian doctrine of the subjective universality of aesthetic judgment, with the ‘aesthetic appreciation of (the perfected beauty or the beautiful ideal of) art’, whether or not referring to modern Western cultural tradition, is equally misguided. Here, as I have already suggested, Gell indulges a self-serving historiographical amnesia.

In a Gellian anthropology and represented or revealed by Gellogrammatic contiguities, ‘aesthetic appreciation’ is nothing more—though also nothing less—than a modern Western cultural instance of the generalized cognitive-social possibility of ‘idol worship’. If we were to try to explain the efficacies of ‘idol worship’—or the effects of a particular ‘idol’—as caused by or generated in ‘aesthetic appreciation’, as Roger Fry or Clive Bell might have done in the early twentieth century,<sup>7</sup> we might entirely invert its social phenomenology and we would probably overlook its cultural-historical genealogies. Perhaps we could superficially *describe* but we certainly would not *explain* its agency.

Other scholars have noticed generalized similarities between the seemingly disjunct kinds of using and understanding artifacts and images embodied in ‘fetishism’ and ‘aesthetics’ respectively—seemingly disjunct world-historical cultures. Among others, David Freedberg and Hans Belting have observed specific historical connections between a long-standing devotional iconism in the European Middle Ages (in both Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian traditions) and an emergent aesthetic iconism in the

Renaissance and later periods of the European tradition, culminating in peculiarly modern conceptions of aesthetic ‘disinterestedness’, ‘art for art’s sake’, and the like.<sup>8</sup> But Gell would have us notice a deeper and broader—a structural, logical, and cognitive—affiliation: in Gell’s terms, ‘idol worship’ is cognitively *like* ‘aesthetic appreciation’ in specifiable and informative ways—embodying psychological operations and social relations of particular logical kinds—made analytically visible to us in the Gellograms. To this extent Gell’s anthropology of art might rewrite the standard or received *history* of art by discovering hitherto unobserved parallels—and by the same token, hitherto unobserved disjunctions or dissimilarities—between different cultures of abducting the agency of art. Whether or not these parallels can be fleshed out in an actual art history—an account of historical interconnections and cultural interactions—was not, perhaps, Gell’s principal interest; indeed, he drew heavily on existing art-historical portrayals of the transhistorical cultural processes that might have linked a European medieval iconism and a modern (and now global) aestheticism. Still, Gell’s account frequently implies or suggests the possibility of substantive art histories that have yet to be written. The Gellograms ask us to organize and narrate art-historical evidence in new ways and direct us to look for new evidence that might well be mobilized in fulfillment of merely Gellogrammatic or notional and theoretical predictions. At the same time, Gell’s account permits a rich *anthropology*: identifying the art nexus of idol worship and/or ‘art viewing’, as Gell calls it, leads us to the localized sociocultural determinations of art abducted within one particular historical tradition.

Needless to say, it is not easy to balance the claims of a general anthropology (let alone a cognitive typology) of art and the findings of particular art histories. As *Art and*

*Agency* proceeds, it becomes increasingly obvious that there are no ‘pure cases’ of agency in the vicinity of the art-index (i.e., a pure case like [ Index-A ---> Recipient-P ] and similar logically possible structures in the art nexus [see *AA*, 29, Table 1]). (Gell identifies sixteen logically possible permutations for the notional pure cases, though some of these are said to be cognitively ‘empty’, ‘illegimate’, or nonrealized; there will be thirty-six permutations of the more complex cases he chooses to address.) At best, the pure cases provide the ‘general formula’—but not a particular art history—of ‘artistic genius’, for example, or of ‘idol worship’.

The real interest of Gell’s account, then, has to be that the *degree and type of affiliation and/or disjunction in logical-cognitive relations* (as represented in the Gellograms) might mark a *real sociocultural and historical affiliation and/or disjunction*. In this spirit Gell claims that distinctive social practices of viewing art in modern Western nation-states were historically continuous with—if in certain specific ways an inversion of—idol worship; for Gell, idol worship and viewing art are closely related, if not continuous or identical, ‘general forms’ of abductively interpreting agency in relation to artifacts. It is no wonder, then, that late-medieval European history should provide an example of seeming historical development *from* idol worship *to* viewing art. In Gell’s view, late-medieval and early-modern European consciousness simply continued to think what it had long ‘liked to think’ about the agency of artifacts—even as these artifacts changed to some degree in their formats and functions as ‘icons’ became ‘artworks’.

Should we be able to find *similar* histories of development or transfer between idol worship and viewing art—a transfer facilitated cognitively by the putative likeness of the general form of the complex abductions involved—in *other* cultural traditions, for

example, in ancient or non-Western traditions? And by the same token, should we be able to find an inverse development *from* viewing art *to* idol worship *within* the cultural history of the European tradition itself? The strong implication—virtually the explicit historical claim—of *Art and Agency* to both of these anthropological and historical questions is ‘Yes’. The general form of cognition in which idol worship and viewing art are logically affiliated—and find material interconversions—is a kind of anthropological universal: if we set out to look for it in Gellian terms, we should expect it to be able to find it in the canonical tradition of ancient Egyptian art in the third millennium B.C. or in the avant-garde practices of twentieth-century modernist European artists as much as in late medieval and early modern Europe. Ancient Egyptian depiction generated both icons and artworks, and recipients of the artifacts in question moved cognitively between these closely-related possibilities for their abducted agentive constitution. And despite the fact that twentieth-century European artistic culture has supposedly superseded its medieval ‘iconism’, a ‘fetishism’ or ‘idol worship’ can surely be said to characterize much of the modern artworld. Gell’s anthropology would seem to be on firm ground in both of these cases *outside* the particular historical interaction between devotional iconism and pictorial interpretation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Of course, there is a distinct threat of self-fulfilling historical prediction here. To stay with the case of idol worship and viewing art in late-medieval and early-modern Europe, the continuity in practices (as art historians tell us) was a function of the *particular historical connection* between late-medieval European uses of icons in devotion and early-modern European procedures of pictorial interpretation. Gell’s anthropological presentation implies, however, that the connection devolved from the *inherent cognitive*

*affiliation*, the logical likeness, in the abduction of agency. And yet the *logical* or *cognitive* affiliation between idol worship and art viewing or aesthetic appreciation is only striking to us in pure cases—cases in which the relative lack of specificity in anthropological description and contextualization does not fully reveal the historical particularity of each practice. Without the pure cases, or absent the ideal types, the historical relations might not be asserted.

In *Art and Agency*, agency is, as Gell frankly acknowledges, an elastic concept.<sup>9</sup> But the Gellogrammatic approach risks reducing different historical types, degrees, or intensities of agency to equivalents in a cognitive typology. Consider, for example, Gell's historical interpretation of the 'Slashed Rokeby Venus' (*AA*, 62-65), Diego Velazquez's *Rokeby Venus* as slashed by Mary Richardson in 1914 in protest at the incarceration of the suffragette leader Mrs. Pankhurst. The nexus of agencies abducted by the 'outraged' viewers of the vandalized canvas comprised (1) being caused to be outraged; (2) doing violence (twice, or in two different aspects—vandalizing a painting and assaulting a human being); (3) depicting; and (4) being inspired (twice, or in two different aspects—being interested in a mythological figure as a subject for painting and being interested in a real political actor as a model for society). We might wonder whether all these agencies—for example, the picturing that realized the 'inspiration' of Velazquez and the politicking that 'inspired' Mary Richardson—were essentially equivalent holders of comparable cognitive slots in abductive inference. This is not to dispute the overall plausibility of Gell's historical conclusion in this case—namely, that the iconoclasm of Mary Richardson seemed so shocking at the time (though as it were perversely appropriate) because of 'the quasi-identity between the "mythological"

heroine, Venus, and her “modern” counterpart, Mrs. Pankhurst’ (AA, 65). But we knew *this* already, without Gell’s analysis of the recipients’ putative abduction of agency in this art nexus and without his demonstration of the way in which Venus and Mrs. Pankhurst could have been inferred to act in parallel ways as agents on Velazquez and Mary Richardson. Mary explicitly stated just this much in her own legal testimony in 1914 (‘I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the government for destroying Mrs. Pankhurst, the most beautiful character in modern history’). At bottom Gell’s formalism in this historical case simply indulges and ratifies Mary’s public claims about her motivations. The Gellogram might be warranted as a kind of cognitive anthropology—an interpretive reporting of Mary’s own belief, inference, and utterance that offers an analytic schematization of its putative cognitive constitution in terms of ideal types. But is it an anthropological *art history*?

To stick with the example broached already, on the face of it Mrs. Pankhurst’s grip on the political imagination of Mary would seem to be quite different from the grip that Venus exerted on the pictorial imagination of Velazquez. As historians we could infer this precisely because Venus, so far as we can tell, never caused Velazquez to act in the way that Mrs. Pankhurst caused Mary to act—even if Gell’s cognitive typology lumps both of these agencies under one and the same descriptive explication (namely, pictorial and political ‘inspiration’). A formal (i.e., cognitive) parallelism in *both* the type *and* the degree of agency would seem to be implied in this case (Gell represents the *type* of agency in his superscript explications of the pure causal arrows of agency in the Gellograms but he tells us nothing about the *degree* of agency). In particular, the intensity of Velazquez’s painting of Venus would have had to be taken to be considerably

like (even if it was in some ways also taken to be the inversion of) the intensity of the prison warders' assault on the person of Mrs. Pankhurst as well as the intensity of Mary's vandalization of the object of art. On the evidence, historians perhaps cannot say whether these cognitive equivalencings occurred in this case. It might be a virtue of Gell's model, as I have already noted, that it reveals equivalences or equivalencing—a history—that we might otherwise overlook. Obviously at the time people had to have highly esteemed Velazquez's painting to have been shocked by Mary's attack on it. But again, we already knew *that* art-historical fact.

#### The phenomenology of the art-index and its agency

The second book in *Art and Agency*, *AA-2* (parts of chap. 6, and chaps. 7-9), presents Gell's reflections on the relationships between styles of decoration or of what he calls 'representation' (that is, depiction), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, 'persons' considered anthropologically in terms of the social genealogy, determination, and dissemination of their agency—terms that cut against certain engrained and as it were non-anthropological conceptions of integral personhood. Gell's views of social personhood and distributed consciousness in *AA-2* often repeat notions familiar within anthropology, sociology, and psychology, including but certainly not limited to notions adumbrated in the phenomenology of intersubjectivity and in various schools of psychoanalysis. In particular, Gell's approach echoes the views expressed (as so-called Melanesian deconstructionism) by the anthropologists Roy Wagner and especially Marilyn Strathern.<sup>10</sup> More broadly, as Gell acknowledges (*AA*, 9-10), his anthropology

of art can be seen as a descendant (and as an application) of a conception of the relations between persons and artifacts in a network of exchange(s). (Gell explicitly acknowledges the influence of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss on his work—that is, on his formal-theoretical modeling of logico-cognitive possibilities as well as the historico-descriptive statement of their substance in particular ethnographic instances. Thus he courts a parallel between his anthropology of art and structuralist social anthropology: we can have a ‘theory of kinship’, for example as gendered exchange in alliance and procreation [i.e., as a type of ‘gift’], to account for social formations of intermarriage and lineage in relation to logically available—if abductively excluded or ‘tabooed’—possibilities. The difference between Gell’s anthropology and the Maussian/Lévi-Straussian tradition lies not so much in their respective general models of human thought as in their manifest sociologies of the people who think—relatively more ‘deconstructive’ in Gell’s hands than in his structuralist predecessors’.) Compared to the strict and forceful argumentation of *AA-1*, however, the various sections of *AA-2* are not always tightly related analytically; several pieces of *AA-2*—such as a long and bravura set-piece on the ‘Marquesan corpus’ (*AA*, 168-220)—are not entirely congruent with the theoretical or interpretive claims they are supposed to exemplify.

In earlier work, Gell had sketched a sophisticated account of the temporality of intentionality based in large measure on Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of consciousness.<sup>11</sup> But its theoretical relation to Gell’s later and quasi-Peircean model of the abduction of agency, though readily apparent in the unfolding of *Art and Agency*, needs clarification and must be handled cautiously. In my view, Gell’s Husserlian account of the retentive and protentive temporalities of intentionality (developed largely

in *AA-2* though based on Gell's earlier writing) must underwrite his account of the abduction of the agency of art (developed largely in *AA-1* and representing a newer turn in Gell's work before his death). Yet the structure and direction of Gell's argumentation in *Art and Agency* might lead one to suppose that his analysis of the abduction of agency underwrites his later conclusions about the multiplied intentionalities of art in a 'distributed personhood'. Protention and retention, of course, belong as much to an individuated and integral personhood—they establish its coherent, continuous, and unitary 'personal identity' over time and in relation to the analogous individuation of objects and other people—as they do to the distributed personhood that seems to stand behind, or to result from, the indefinitely ramified and recursively organized agencies specifically to be identified in the abductions of art's agency.

The same point applies to Gell's pages on the Husserlian doctrine of the ever-moving Now (*AA*, 238-41)—a crucial element of the traditional analytics of the intentionality of integral personhood or continuous 'personal identity'. In his philosophical inclinations Gell clearly remained deeply attracted to it despite his embrace of a 'deconstructionist' social anthropology. Of course, certain readers of Husserl—notably Jacques Derrida in his dissertation on Husserl's history of the intuition of geometry in ancient Greece and in the essays published as *Speech and Phenomena*—have reached the conclusion that the 'moving Now' of temporalized personal self-consciousness *inherently* produces a 'lack of presence' in self-awareness or in 'intentionality'. According to them, the 'moving Now' constitutes the sign-in-consciousness or meaning, *Logos*, as *essentially* indecipherable in terms of its origin—what Derrida called *écriture*.<sup>12</sup>

But if Gellograms are written out, they are not, I think, notations for *écriture* as such—for at the limit, the ramifications and recursions of *écriture*, as Derrida insisted, must defeat the very possibility of causal abduction, of identifying and understanding ‘origins’. A better substantive—rather than rhetorical—congruence between *AA-1* and *AA-2* would have obtained if Gell had considered that the Husserlian analytic of the temporality of consciousness analyzes the abductive structure of *one* index in-the-making (equivalent to *one* mind-in-modification, whether ‘extended’ and ‘distributed’ or not). In turn, this analytic requires a model of the abductive structures of agency/patency as structures of protention and retention. The latter argument is lacking in *AA-1*. And oddly, in *AA-2* Gell chooses to see Husserlian temporality as a model of singular (seemingly *nondistributed*) personal identity and awareness *distributed in many indexes* in turn causally understood to be the product of *one* agent. This approach (it seems to reflect a bias not required by the underlying philosophy) requires him to discover a rather factitious and forced set of ‘protentions’ and ‘retentions’ linking up all the artworks in the complete canonical oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp (*AA*, 242-51). One would have thought, quite conversely, that Gell would consider Duchamp’s oeuvre (one index to the next) to display the multiple, ramified agency of extended mind or distributed personhood. Art historians have already suggested, of course, that Duchamp ‘intended’ his work—and was abductively placed as an agent by the recipients of his work—in a critique of existing cultural notions of an individual artist’s integrated and continuous artistic ‘originality’.<sup>13</sup>

The overall relations between the first book in *Art and Agency* (*AA-1*) and the second book (*AA-2*), then, are difficult to pin down. At points, the analysis in *AA-1* seems to warrant or to solicit the reflections offered in *AA-2*. At other points, the claims advanced

in *AA-2* (whether or not they are Gell's original theoretical constructions) are needed to make sense of the analytic decisions in *AA-1*. And at still other points, the accounts of ramified indexicality in *AA-1* and extended mind vested in distributed personhood in *AA-2* do not appear to be fully consistent—at least if pushed to their logical conclusions or regarded in historiographical or theoretical terms. Nevertheless, it is clear that Gell himself wanted to see the argument of *Art and Agency* as continuous and cumulative.

In principle, the general argument that *should* unite *AA-1* and *AA-2* would see an analogy between the art nexus as the abduction of ramified agency—agency not limited to the individuated personal identities of patrons, artists, or viewers—and the distributed personhoods of social people in culture. Indeed, the one should be the agentive cause (and therefore the index) of the other—or perhaps *vice versa*. A Gellian model of the causal-temporal imbrication of art's ramified abducted agency and peoples' extended agency in distributed personhood certainly constitutes a significant anthropological contribution to aesthetics and art history. Unfortunately, however, *AA-2* does not directly pursue the analogy as I have just stated it.

To be sure, Gell's project in *Art and Agency* rests on the proposition, as already noted, that people bring their practical 'inferential schemes', or abductions, to indexical artifact-signs in a way 'very like, if not actually identical to, the ones [they] bring to bear on social others' (*AA*, 15). We need not dispute the suggestiveness of Gell's notion of equating artworks and persons as analogously or equivalently distributed. (Of course, a profound identification of artworks and persons has often been deployed as a basic principle of historical interpretation, most notably in the writing of psychoanalytically-minded critics of the arts.<sup>14</sup> But the artworks and persons in question in these

histories—despite psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity, transference, and object relations—have often been conceived to be relatively individuated and nondistributed in Gell’s agentive terms.) Still, the equation immediately raises the possibility that artworks, in Gell’s terms, must be just as mysterious, intractable, and resistant to interpretation as other people can be—and for largely the same reasons. Although we can see what they are *doing*, and we seem to know more or less incorrigibly and irreducibly what they are doing *to us*, often we do not clearly or fully know what they *mean*.

In *AA-2*, Gell would have us avoid the ‘internalist’ or mentalist quagmire (once known as the intentional fallacy) of ‘meaning’. He promotes what he calls an alternative ‘externalist’ theory of mind as a ‘public’ or ‘extended’ social fact (*AA*, 126-33) consistent with his social anthropology of distributed personhood. Nonetheless, Gell’s anthropology of art in *AA-1* would track the nexus of agent-derived causality abducted in the vicinity of art-indexes. To this extent, it must be an anthropology of what people believe, and know they believe, and what they know, or believe they know, about the index—an anthropology, in other words, of the most well-established mentalist or ‘internalist’ sort. At the same time, a decidedly externalist Gellian approach to the art nexus (if *AA-1* were rendered fully consistent with *AA-2*) might itself be contravened by the internal disjunctiveness, complexity, and self-resistance of the index-as-abducted or in-abduction—what Gell sometimes calls, in a seemingly self-contradictory moment, its ‘indecipherability’ (*AA*, 71).

‘Indecipherability’: plurality, regress, and opacity in the abduction of agency

Gell acknowledges that the abductive structures and histories which he diagrams as ‘trees’ of inference (*AA*, 53-59) might have to be seen—in the phenomenological (and even quasi-psychiatric) terms to which he reverts—as a ‘maze’ (e.g., *AA*, 86) or even as a ‘knot’ (e.g., *AA*, 62). Indeed, following his earlier influential work on the ‘technology of enchantment’ (see *AA*, 68-73) Gell would hope to make the supposed ‘difficulty’ of the artwork into the very engine of the abductive work people will expend on it.<sup>15</sup> He sees agentive indecipherability chiefly in terms of technical virtuosity and visual-morphological intricacy: the more intricate the work of art seems to be in its formal constitution and effects, and the greater the technical virtuosity we identify and appreciate in it, the higher the degree of its ‘cognitive stickiness’ or ‘indecipherability’. This is fair enough so far as it goes. At its first exhibition in 1917, however, Kasimir Malevich’s *Black Square* was ‘difficult’ not in virtue of its painterly virtuosity (which was minimal) or its morphological complexity (it was simple). Malevich’s *Black Square* was difficult—resistant to interpretation, opaque to a contemporary observer’s abduction of its generating causal agencies—because its recipients did not know what it could possibly mean in terms of any traditions of significance or agent-caused determination traditionally known to them. Nonetheless, by Gell’s terms it must have had *some* kind of abducted agentive identity—an anthropological intelligibility in and as ‘difficult.’

To pursue this question, we must underline the plurality of ‘agencies’ at work in Gell’s model of the agency of art and of art’s agency. Received art-historical models of the causal generation and intentional constitution of a work of art, their ‘patterns of intention’ (to use Michael Baxandall’s phrase), have tended to focus on a small number

of interacting agents (often living human social beings) as having been understood (abducted) by the work's contemporary makers and other original users to have occasioned it—for example, an 'artist', a 'patron', and perhaps an anticipated observer or 'viewer'. By contrast, Gell's model of the agencies of art—and of art's agency—can specify an indefinitely large number of highly differentiated, ramifying, and nested relations of putatively causal or abducted agency. We might address the agency, for example, of a divinity believed to be acting on a patron, the agency of materials believed to be acting on an artist, and the agency of a depicted object or entity (the prototype) acting on patron, artist, or viewer—or other salient abducted (and as it were primary) agencies of abducted (and as it were secondary) agencies. In particular, in principle Gell's model can elegantly handle recursive or proleptic and retrodictive relations in the resulting nexus. It can, for example, address the anticipated agency of a viewer as it were predictively acting on the agency of a patron or artist. Or to take a different possibility, it can investigate the continuous agency of a divinity or a human ruler differentially acting on the multiple agencies of patrons, artists, and viewers throughout the entire ramified history of the causal-material generation and social-cultural constitution of the work of art that passes through their different kinds of intentional involvements with it.

By the same token, as this mention of the differentiation of agencies will suggest, Gell's model can readily recognize internally bifurcated, self-deviating, or seemingly conflictual or contradictory agencies nonetheless believed to constitute art in the entire network or nexus of its causal and intentional relations. For example, the prototype of a depicted ruler (perhaps a mythic, heroic, or ancestral king) acting on the agency of the viewer might be self-evidently disjunct from—even opposite to—the real social

personage and identity of the patron (that very same ruler) acting on the agency of the artist and artwork. For example, individual monarchs in ancient Egypt were typically figured as beings whose divine identity and authority devolved from an ancient past of rulership into each present-day context of rule. Each historical Egyptian king was metaphorically associated with a prehistoric culture of hunting and with immemorial traditions of observing and trying to predict and control the rhythms of the inundation of the Nile River and of the sun, moon, and stars. At the same time, monarchs usually asserted themselves as contemporary political actors, sometimes overtly ‘usurping’ or even effacing the monuments of earlier rulers—as it were denying their predecessors’ very historical existence. Nonetheless, the ‘usurper’ might well commission a depiction of himself in terms of the continuous tradition of Egyptian rulership—figuratively linking himself with the metaphors that had been employed by all previous kings as well, including the kings whose monuments were usurped or whose memorials were effaced.<sup>16</sup>

The perceptual and performative *distinction* between a continuous divine and a contemporary political kingship might have been readily understood by the working artist-craftsman commissioned to ‘portray’ the living historical king in terms of his divine identity, and at least certain ordinary viewers as well, even though the prototype (divine king) and the patron (contemporary patron) might be similar or even identical beings.

At the extreme, the distinction or disjunction between prototype and patron might lead to the kind of internally contradictory or destabilizing perceptual-cognitive and social-political results ingeniously identified in Louis Marin’s deconstructive analysis of the imagistic or representational—the specifically depictive—quandaries that confronted early-modern image-makers, beholden to emergent concepts of ‘portraiture’, of the

traditional late-medieval European king's 'two bodies'.<sup>17</sup> Which body does the picture portray? The king's prototype—in which case the 'real' king would seem to be unnecessary? The king's personage—in which case the prototype would seem to be unnecessary? Both? Neither? Of course, in this kind of complex and bifurcating nexus the prototype could be regarded as an agent acting on the patron even as the patron could be regarded as acting on the prototype in causing it to be depicted by the artist. In the end, viewers might not be able fully to infer and completely to distinguish the agency of prototype and the agency of patron in acting on the work—let alone be able fully to infer and completely to distinguish the agency of the work in acting on the prototype and on the patron, and so on and so forth. It is in these differentiations and recursions—however abductively complex and ambiguous they could be deduced to have been in a particular historical situation—that we might find the social power, the aesthetic 'enchantment' and cognitive 'indecipherability', of the work of art.

Many of the relations—and interactions—of agency incorporated by Gell's model have, of course, been identified in established anthropologies and histories of art. But these anthropologies and histories have tended to identify only *some* of the logically possible—and anthropologically or historically salient—possibilities. And they have privileged those possibilities at the expense of other logical options—options that could be anthropologically or historically salient. To take a simple example, entire literatures of art history have privileged the agency of patrons acting on artists and abducted by viewers as the causation/intention of the work of art. The common (even clichéd) thesis that works of art serve to legitimate the social authority of the patron—or the patron's lineage, status group, or class—depends on this limited or selective model. (In turn, of

course, these art histories often emerged in order to dispute existing historical interpretations that tended to privilege the agency of individual master artists.) In some cases, a simplistic model of patronage as the salient social context of art has led to obvious historical and interpretive distortions—to neglect of the role of the *artist's agency* in destabilizing or undermining the legitimist agendas of patrons, of the role of the *viewer's* abduction of alternate or proliferated agencies of the work of art in constituting a concept of who or what patrons and artists might be, of the abducted agency of *artistic raw materials* or of art's artifactual materiality in constituting viewers' inferences about the properties that require or solicit such causal understandings—and so on. So far as I know, Gell's model offers the most comprehensive account of the *open range* and *indefinite recursion* of the agencies of art that have been, and equally important should be, considered by anthropologists or historians as the anthropology or the history of art. Gellograms can be indefinitely—perhaps even infinitely—complex. As I have implied already, there must always be a Gellogrammatic 'agent' of an 'agent', and an 'agent' of an 'agent' of an 'agent', and so on—indefinitely and perhaps infinitely.

But it is precisely because of this inherent cognitive possibility of regress that we might need to distinguish the *logic* of abduction and the *phenomenology* of abduction: what people might know is not necessarily what they do, in fact, actually know. Gell's 'anthropological theory' of the agency of art would have us track abductions of agency, as he put it, 'in the vicinity of art'. Gell occasionally put scare quotes around this phrase (e.g., *AA*, 153); clearly it gave him trouble. What, or where, is the 'vicinity' of art? At some point, the abduction of agency (as represented in Gellogrammatic terms) must become so complex, attenuated, and ramified—it supposedly identifies agencies of

agencies of agencies of agencies for agency . . .—that it is difficult to see how it could have been abducted in the first place by the original users of the index (especially without Gellogrammatic assistance!). How, then, do we determine that our tracking of logically *possible* ramifications—ramifications admitted by the cognitive typology and possible in the cultural tradition in question—matches the purview of the original historical activity of abduction? Simply put, how ‘far back’ or ‘deep into’ the nexus of causal agency are we supposed to go to understand the anthropology and the history of art’s agency? As in the instance of Mary Richardson’s ‘*Slashed Rokeby Venus*’ of 1914, a number of Gell’s examples rely on predigested histories in which the ramifications of the original abductions have been identified in advance (though not, of course, using Gell’s typology, terms, and notation). But in end the purview of the ramification admitted for investigation seems to be set by Gell’s theoretical model, despite its elegance, more or less *arbitrarily*—that is, by his *a priori* decision that *four* terms of agency will be treated as nested (i.e., as representing the anthropological and phenomenological purview of actual abductive recursions in the historicity of art) through *three* removes. This recursion takes the canonical form (e.g., *AA*, 52):

[[[ I-A ] ---> II-A ] ---> III-A ] ---> IV-P ]

Many if not most of the Gellograms conform to this underlying plan. I can find no principled reason, however, why the formula should be definitive in any way. Indeed, it constitutes an ‘anthropological’ vicinity for the art-index merely by stipulation.

Moreover, the most productive and intelligible statement of Gell’s ‘anthropology’ of art requires the possibility of an indefinitely extended and endlessly ramified recursion—a recursion not necessary limited to three removes of four types of agency.

Certainly there can be no universal answer to the question of—no universal formula for—the actual depth and directions of abduction. In some cases, perhaps it suffices for people to abduct the most proximate causal agency of the artist (i.e., Gell’s ‘Artist-A’, the ‘first’ agency to the left of final ‘patiency’ or reception) in relation to the index as its final or ultimate agency as well. This, of course, would be the general form of the habitual abduction in the culture of ‘artistic genius’ that Gell describes at one point. In other cases, however, perhaps people abduct causal agents exerting agency *through* the artist *to* the Index. Gell provides several cases of this kind (e.g., in his discussions of patronage) and we can readily imagine (and in a cognitive typology we can easily schematize) agent-causes of a patron’s agency and agent-causes of the agent-causes of a patron’s agency, and so on. But do these background agencies in the nested recursions identified in Gell’s notations—Gell calls them ‘subordinate’ in order to designate their relative distance from the proximate agency supposedly abducted for the index—constitute the abducted Prime Mover in the overall abduction? Until we reach ontological and epistemological primitives, causes have a cause, and the cause of causes have a cause. . . Ordinarily it is a matter of historical or interpretive tact to know where to stop and on what to focus. But Gell wants us to track the *actual* abductions people really do make in identifying the agency of the art-index. If necessary, then, he would track abduction through indefinitely extended ramifications involving agent-entities quite remote from the ‘vicinity’ of art itself. As he says, he would have no qualms if his anthropology of art converted itself, say, into an anthropology of *religion* when the abducted causal nexus of inferred generative agency increasingly involves religious agencies as one tracks backward (in his notation, leftward) from the abduction of the proximate *artistic* agency of the index.

This conversion would seem eminently natural in an anthropology of art as a branch of general anthropology and in a phenomenology of art framed in a cognitive typology of all logically possible modes of abducting agency. But it stretches credibility in explicating the particular historicity of the art-index itself. Indeed, in Gell's own terms the proximate agency (i.e., the rightmost agent specified in the notations) must be the most important causal determination of the index precisely because it mediates the subordinate and increasingly ultimate agents (i.e., the leftmost agencies specified in the notations). As an anthropological proposition it might be perfectly true to say that when people abduct the causal agency of an index they attribute its properties to the unalterable plan of the gods—a plan established for all things, not limited to pictures or artifacts, at the founding of the world. Canonical depiction in ancient Egypt, for example, was authorized by a belief of this kind—a fundamental ideology of the image. But in principle the ideology applied to *everything* in ancient Egyptian experience. As an *art-historical* proposition, then, it would be more desirable to say that a canonical pictorial representation in ancient Egypt was manufactured by artists working within the tightly constrained parameters of an academic system of craft-specialized production; despite the ideological mystification exerted by the theory of ultimate agency, the agentive causality of the picture—the icon or artwork—would have been abducted as such by its recipients or viewers. To be more specific, in Gell's terms canonical depiction took the primary ontology (namely, the divine plan) as its prototype. But it remains unclear, I think, to what degree the more proximate agencies of patrons, artists, and viewers interfered with—even destabilized—this axis of ultimate agency in the entire nexus.<sup>18</sup>

In advancing its anthropology, Gellian analysis must track the abduction of agency in the indefinite and indefinitely ramifying regresses of causes in the ‘vicinity of art’. In advancing an art-historical proposition, analysis tracks the causal nexus within which art—art *specifically*—was actually made and used. There need be no conflict between the anthropological model and the historical investigations. But because abduction as a cognitive process has no *logically necessary* endpoint or ‘origin’, to come to historical terms with the particularity of an index—with the types, degrees, and intensities of agency it is abducted to have as what I earlier called a material index of indexicality, iconicity, and symbolicity—we must provide not only an *anthropology* of art but also an anthropology of *art*.

At the deepest level, Gell’s model does not so much equate ‘art’, a nexus or theater of potential abductive ‘difficulty’, ‘indecipherability’, or ‘cognitive stickiness’, and ‘agency’, the habitus of practical abducted instrumentalities, as much as it *distinguishes* them. It is precisely for this reason that we can construct an ‘anthropological theory’ of art, as Gell puts it in the subtitle of his book, that is, an agentive theory of general aesthetic effectivity in art, as well as investigate different and diverse particularized histories of art. Gell himself does not quite make this argument in *Art and Agency* in part, I think, because he resists the notion that his project has any kind of ‘aesthetic’ presumption or issues in particular conclusions about ‘aesthetics’. But it would seem to flow quite naturally from his analytic model. In the sense that Gell fundamentally deploys the term in his book on ‘art and agency’, ‘art’ *always* permits and relays recursive, bifurcated, and potentially self-deviating or self-contradictory inferences. In other words, art *essentially* relays an enigmatic, uncontrollable, or partly unknowable or

partly unabductible overall agency—an agency only partly integrated and totalized by its recipients. Presumably such forms of ambiguity have little or no practical cognitive place in nonartistic domains of human sociocultural life—especially in the instrumental toolmaking that has often been distinguished from aesthetic awareness and activity. To this degree it could be said that the agency of art in Gell’s anthropology—but cutting against the grain of his own statement of his model—lies specifically in the immanent *nonabductibilities* of its putative agencies.

Gell’s anthropology of art, then, issues in an ‘aesthetics’: in Gell’s theory, ‘art’ can be defined as the domain of artifact- and image-making within which the abductibility of agency reaches its limit of cognitive possibility, its phenomenological and historical thresholds of feasibility, transparency, and intelligibility. In dealing with a work of art, as with anything else, it is *logically* possible to abduct agency to its furthest—its most ultimate—ramifications and regresses of natural, human, and cosmic causation. But as aesthetic objects, works of art do not fully encourage or even permit abducting their agency in this way: the ‘agency of art’ remains partly vested in its own peculiar resistance to its complete abduction. In art, ‘agency’ sticks to the artifact itself.



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<sup>1</sup> In *Art and Agency* it appears as ‘Piercean semiotics’ (sic) (AA, 13) rather than Peircean ‘semeiotic’ (as Peirce himself nominated his corpus of proposals), and Peirce’s doctrines of abduction and of indexicality, though deployed by Gell, are quoted by him from what is said to be Umberto Eco’s 1976 *Theory of Semantics* (sic). It is unclear whether these were Gell’s mistakes or later errors by his posthumous editors and proofreaders. In art history, the most fruitful and powerful application of a concept of indexicality—intended to supplement and to some extent even to overturn art-historical emphasis on iconicity and symbolicity—has been carried out by Georges Didi-Huberman. See especially his ‘Ressemblance mythifiée et ressemblance oubliée chez Vasari: la légende du portrait “sur le vif”,’ *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome*, 106, no. 2, 1994, 383-432, which considers the historiographical importance of concepts of indexing in art history, and *L’empreinte*, Paris, 1997, a wide-ranging exhibition of artistic indexicalities.

<sup>2</sup> For lucid and helpful expositions of the relevant Peircean doctrines (and their difficulties), see Arthur W. Burks, ‘Icon, index, and symbol’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, 1944, 673-89, and James Elkins, ‘What does Peirce’s sign theory have to say to art history?’, *Culture, Theory and Critique* 44, 2003, 5-22. Because Gell did not explicitly refer to any particular writings by Peirce, it is not necessary here to pursue the point that Peirce’s writings on ‘icon, index, and symbol’ were published in a highly unsatisfactory way in the second volume of the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA, 1932)—the form of Peirce’s writings available to most readers in the twentieth century.

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<sup>3</sup> See Whitney Davis, *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis*, University Park, PA, 1996, 66-94, and ‘The presence of pictures’, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 29, 2001, 29-38.

<sup>4</sup> I deal with these problems in greater detail in *Art and Analogy: Forms of Likeness in Culture* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Salim Kemal’s expositions of Kant’s aesthetics and theory of fine art highlight this point: see his *Kant and Fine Art: An Essay on Kant and the Philosophy of Fine Art and Culture*, Oxford, 1986, and *Kant’s Aesthetic Theory: An Introduction*, New York, 1992. For sophisticated recent interpretations of Kant’s aesthetics, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Idea of Form: Rethinking Kant’s Aesthetics*, Stanford, 2003, and Kirk Pillow, *Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel*, Cambridge, MA, 2000. For the art-theoretical background of Kant’s doctrine, see David Summers, *The Judgement of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics*, Cambridge, 1987, and for a lucid overview of the traditions of critical aesthetics in German thought since Kant, see Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition*, Cambridge, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, some anthropologists have engaged the tradition of aesthetics in the ‘critical theory’ of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, and Gell in turn addresses that response (e.g., *AA*, 99-104).

<sup>7</sup> See especially Roger Fry, *Last Lectures*, Cambridge, 1939, and William G. Bywater, Jr., *Clive Bell’s Eye*, Detroit, 1975.

<sup>8</sup> See David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, Chicago, 1989, and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Chicago, 1994, and *The Invisible Masterpiece*, trans. Helen Atkins, London, 2001.

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<sup>9</sup> I do not have space here to contrast Gell's concept of art and its agency with the alternative 'performative' model developed by Randall R. Dipert (*Artifacts, Artworks, and Agency*, Philadelphia, 1993). The two books are usefully read in comparison with one another.

<sup>10</sup> Gell's essay 'Strathernograms, or the semiotics of mixed metaphors', in *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams by Alfred Gell*, London, 1999, 29-75, was clearly a precursor of *Art and Agency*.

<sup>11</sup> See especially *The Anthropology of Time*, Oxford, 1992, 221-42; cf. *AA*, 238-41.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr., Stony Brook, NY, 1978, and *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, IL, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA, 1985, and Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis, 1991, and *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge, MA, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> See especially Richard Wollheim, *The Thread of Life*, Cambridge, MA, 1984, *Painting as an Art*, Princeton, 1987, and *The Mind and Its Depths*, Cambridge, MA, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> See Alfred Gell, 'The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology', in Jeremy Coote and Anthony Sheldon, eds., *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, Oxford, 1992, 40-67.

<sup>16</sup> For the ancient—even prehistoric—traditions of representation within which ancient Egyptian kingship was depicted, see Henri Asselberghs, *Chaos en Beheersing: Documenten uit aeneolithisch Egypte*, Leiden, 1961, and Whitney Davis, 'The ascension

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myth in the Pyramid Texts’, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36, 1977, 161-79, and *Masking the Blow: The Scene of Representation in Late Prehistoric Egyptian Art*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989. The complex problems of usurpation, effacement, and related historical processes have been well outlined by Gun Björkman, *Kings at Karnak: A Study of the Treatment of the Monuments of Royal Predecessors in the Early New Kingdom*, Stockholm, 1971. For the ‘cultural temporality’ of canonical depiction in Egypt, see Whitney Davis, ‘Archaism and modernism in the reliefs of Hesy-Ra’, in *‘Never the Like Had Occurred’: Egypt’s View of Its Past*, ed. John Tait, London, 2003, 31-60.

<sup>17</sup> See Louis Marin, *The Portrait of the King*, trans. Martha M. Houle, 1988. I have pursued related problems in *Masking the Blow* (above, note 15).

<sup>18</sup> See Whitney Davis, *The Canonical Tradition in Ancient Egyptian Art*, New York, 1989, 192-224. The question must remain open at the moment. Egyptological art history has focused on ‘legitimationist’ explanations of Egyptian depictions—on the congruence between individual pictorial programs and the ultimate cosmological ideology of the image and what has been called its ‘decorum’ (see John Baines, ‘On the status and purposes of ancient Egyptian art’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 4, 1994, 67-94). Processes of social resistance and transgression in Egyptian art are much less well understood.