ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Thinking through the sociality of art objects

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Abstract
A central theme weaving through this paper is the sociality of art objects in an essentially evolving, increasingly dynamic global art world. It examines a number of theoretical trends in anthropology concerning art production, perception, and circulation. Art objects are considered live social beings whose aesthetic value, significance, and emotional efficacy are subject to change in the course of their mobility through time and space. This paper looks at how artworks are incorporated into discourses of empowerment and advocacy, set against the emergence, growth, and intensification of networks of social relations between institutions and individuals, in a particular society and cross-culturally. It is argued that people's engagement with artworks is reinforced by the social parameters of transactional artistic fields of visual representation. Previous knowledge about the meaning and status of an artwork induces particular interpretations and influences the aesthetic experience. Case studies from the colonial Gold Coast and contemporary Ghana discussed here demonstrate that artistic subjectivity is entangled with aesthetic and other culture-specific ideologies within a sensorial sphere of knowledge and experience. This discussion highlights the theoretical implications of a processual relativist view of the performative life of the art object for the anthropological study of art.

Keywords: art world; emotional agency; sociality; object performativity; aestheticization; Ghana; anthropology

“Horrible, horrible, this is not African art, this is European art!” screamed H. V. Meyerowitz, the British sculptor and designer and head of the art department of Achimota College in the British Gold Coast Colony in the thirties, when Amon Kotei, an aspirant young African artist studying at Achimota Art College, made a realistic portrait sculpture of an African head in clay. The “Education Code,” which was put down by the British colonial government in 1887, prescribed certain aesthetic values specific to Africa as part of a wider hierarchic cultural scheme in the colony. Instead
of indulging in "Western" art forms, the students were instructed to make only traditional objects, such as wooden posts and fertility statues, which represented a stylistic contrast to European realism and were, by the end of the twenties, labeled as "primitive art."¹ The colonial staff, wishing to "preserve primitive culture," restricted the artistic freedom of the students, forcing them more or less to produce art in the supposedly timeless "natural" style of their ancestors. Indigenous African artifacts made of wood, clay, ivory, metal, or textiles, such as fetish objects, tools, weapons, everyday utensils, and so forth, were perceived by the Europeans as timeless, unchanging forms of traditional African art and completely in harmony with the primitive, non-rational, and inferior image of Ghanaians as second-rate, exotic people.

Most pertinent to discourses of political domination and resistance within the context of identity construction and the politicization of indigenous art and aesthetics are the struggles happening at the visual level, both in one society and in cross-cultural contexts. In this particular case, the enforcement of a specific artistic style was but one aspect of a hegemonic rhetoric perpetuating the primitivist and thus universalizing conceptions of Africans. The ideological foundation of verbal and visual discourses on "African" style and identity can be analyzed against the backdrop of the interplay between various artistic and non-artistic processes that mark the late forties and fifties—the period and society that gave rise to nationalist and pan-African movements. In this perspective, the image of African artists as "primitive" and incapable of producing great art is a true reflection of unequal power structures. Visual culture is perceived here as the transparent lens through which challenged notions of artistic vision and racial identity become apparent. Art can indeed become a powerful symbolic weapon in the fight for recognition of culturally distinctive claims to equality and self-determination. On these grounds, "art objectifies power."²

The example mentioned above illustrates how the hierarchic observance of some aesthetic norms and values of art over others was used by the British to reinforce processes of social differentiation and integration in colonial Africa. Thus, the potentially fundamental role of art in the wider social world is realized in the transformative contexts of a transactional visual schemata, not only in one society but in intercultural settings as well. Further, contested notions of "visuality" can contribute to the development of different narratives and new forms of relationship between art and social reality.

In certain respects, African students and colonial art teachers had conflicting ideas about the aesthetic definition of "art." Formal art education in the Gold Coast promoted Western artistic superiority. African students were expected to create art according to the model set by British officials. They were obliged to make only traditional "functional" objects, such as Akuaba fertility figures, which were perceived as indigenous symbols of their cultural past. This points to how Western interpretations and presentations of African art actually reified essentializing notions of a "traditional" African culture rooted in a boundless "ethnographic present," as it were.³ Moreover, the contextual dynamics of aesthetic disagreement can be seen to reveal the degree of structural difference between, and also within, different societies. The category of "art," rendered negotiable through the mobilization of a number of different artistic styles and aesthetic strategies, becomes a site of dispute as interested parties struggle to impose their own interpretations of what constitutes "art." Indeed, perceptions of art are always shaped by the contextual dimensions of the production, circulation, and consumption of objects and artifacts over time and across different societies, nations, and civilizations.⁴

The particular case of the British school system of Achimota Art College in the former British Gold Coast demonstrates how definitions of "art" are often internally contested in thought as well as action by different social groups within the same society. It highlights the point that visual culture comprises a necessary dimension for understanding the socio-political dynamics of power-relations in contemporary Ghana. Moreover, this example supports the opinion that the artistic status of an art object is socially grounded.⁵

The decision of some Ghanaian artists, such as Amon Kotei and Kofi Antubam, who continued to indulge in a broadly defined "European" realism that incorporated a diversity of artistic styles, to transcend the imposed colonial artistic model can be interpreted as an act of resistance. Also, their attempt to revalue and transform Western aesthetic categories in order to better
their own position can be situated within the conceptual framework of discourses of colonialism, decolonization, and postcolonialism. It is significant to note, however, that black artists continue to be relatively powerless, gaining no visibility or regard, within the parameters of the ideological construct of the colonialist project, only to be modernized according to the objective conditions and terms of subjectivity set by the colonial rule. On the other hand, contrary to Kotei and Antubam, other Gold Coast artists, such as the sculptor Oku Amfo, considered abstraction as an authentic expression of a “dynamic” African identity that should be developed further in the present and in the future:

And what about the future? Many there are who think that any attempt to revive African traditional art or even learn from it will be like flogging a dead horse. I hold the opposite view . . . the rest of the country may well see a definite renaissance. The aesthetic appeal of African art cannot be limited to any particular epoch.

These artists renounced realism in favor of an abstract and “neo-traditional” style that expressed nationalist and pan-African values. In fact, to a large extent, they were influenced by the philosophy of African personality propagated by Kwame Nkrumah, who was appointed as Ghana’s first president when the Gold Coast became independent in 1957. They chose to depict “tradition” through their selection of material (e.g. ebony) and choice of themes—for example, the acrylic paintings of Kobina Buckner often depicted Akuaba fertility figures in a style he called the “Sculptural Idiom.” Again, in this context, visual culture becomes an experimental zone where new social identities are demarcated, defined, and forged.

Hence, a very important element in this struggle, with reference to the relation of the development of the Ghanaian art world to history in the making of Ghana, has to do with the deployment of artworks for contestatory purposes—how Ghanaian artists used art objects to subvert racist and demeaning stereotypes and to reinvent their identity. The examples discussed above suggest that the relationship of people to art objects is neither static nor politically innocent. Accordingly, art objects are suitable subjects for social analysis. In other words, they become vital clues to the incremental and gradual synthesis of constructions of visuality, materiality, and notions of artistic style and identity for the diachronic analysis of patterns of sociocultural change. Art objects “may not merely be used to refer to a given social group, but may themselves be constitutive of a certain social relation.” In fact, art objects have their own “cultural biographies,” or “careers.” They, like persons, are said to acquire social lives in the course of the chronology and causation of value exchange. From this perspective, the ontological status of a work of art, as a “thing-in-motion,” is conditioned by the social contexts of its reciprocal spatial distribution and historical circulation. This discussion designates certain aesthetic criteria by which art is generally politicized and spatially contextualized within local, national and global milieux.

The politicization of aesthetics in the colonial West African context makes the interrelation between the oppressive impact and the liberating potential of different ideologies of art production and social distinction visible. In this view, the notion of power is not just repressive, in the Marxist sense of the word, but is rather positive and productive within specific domains of social reality. Ghanaian artists responded, actively and creatively, to the oppressive and rigid character of the colonial artistic discourse by appropriating and (re)contextualizing the immediate objective of the use of “Western” artistic styles—an artistic strategy which holds connotations of an antiwhite political orientation. This adds a further dimension to the significance of the individual output of black artists and, most crucially, thickens the context of the African nationalist fight for the emancipation and independence of Ghana. It exemplifies the use of art objects not only as symbols of dominion and resistance, but as powerful weapons in the nation’s struggle for political freedom and economic gain as well. In this context, they also function as social agents in the construction of national and black consciousness. Namely, artworks are said to be “important means through which consciousness is articulated and communicated.” This conceptual centrality of the idea of the uniqueness and potency of art objects, with reference to anthropological discourses of art, aesthetics and artistic behavior, is closely intertwined with the changing dynamics of the relationship between the artist and society. Therefore, the distinctive nature of art objects, as physical...
entities, should be explained in terms of the relational aesthetics of their social mediation. 17

As a number of anthropologists of art have pointed out, with regard to the aesthetic categories of African visual production, “art” is considered to be “what the dominant culture designates as art, often irrespective of the original function and intention of its producers.” 18 African artists were expected to remain true to their “primitive” cultural tradition, as it were— a tradition of skilled African craftsmanship singled out and patterned by the authorial government of the colonial powers in Africa. However, in the aftermath of the Second World War, and with the rise of nationalist and pan-African movements in the late forties and fifties, some African artists, such as Amon Kotei, the distinguished Ghanaian graphic and commercial artist who designed Ghana’s coat of arms, contested the ideological foundation of the colonial status quo more openly, proclaiming their artistic integrity and, in the process, reinventing a new national identity of their group. 19 They challenged white stylistic superiority and the constructed nature of the racist caricature of blacks. Through the powerful medium of art, Ghanaian artists projected a reaction to the external pressures of the racist order by fabricating a new modernism, so to speak, while internalizing, at the same time, a desire to subvert their oppressors’ supremacist discourse. In fact, as Kotei once stated in a paper he had written in 1977, this image of African art as the timeless, homeostatic product of an isolated, homogeneous ethnic group is indeed very problematic:

The prejudice was that the Ghanaian is not fit, capable, or that it is not African art to do anything that is realistic. Let us change this prejudice, and prove that the color of our skin has nothing to do with acquisition of knowledge which is power, and the exercise of intelligence which is the only possession God gave to human beings to use. 20

In Western definitions of African art and material culture, the artist’s identity is forever relegated to deeply rooted perceptions of a “traditional,” or rather “primitive,” African culture out of place, out of time. Further, in this context, the stigma of “tradition” implies little aesthetic intent, originality or competence on the part of individual artists.

In the examples discussed above, Ghanaian artists sought to undermine the innate superiority of the stylistic model that the colonial employees endorsed and imposed. Mainly, they attempted to deconstruct the symbolic boundaries of ethnic categorization between themselves and their colonizers by letting their art speak on its own terms. However, while Susan Vogel notes that “insofar as one can generalize about so large a group, international artists in Africa do not feel themselves to be marginalized or on the periphery,” 21 Maruška Svašek points out the fact that, unlike their Western colleagues, many Ghanaian artists in Accra and Kumasi, where she conducted her fieldwork research in 1989 and 1990, had problems in finding access to the international High Art market. 22 Yet, definitions of Ghanaian artistic style and identity can change according to the different ways artists, critics, and consumers articulate notions of social identity and political consciousness in the context of an increasingly global art world, either in line with or against the aesthetic preferences and expectations of the public or other artists and critics. 23 Moreover, as Katherine Ewing remarks, “people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context dependent and may shift rapidly.” Similarly, some artifacts that are not intentionally produced as artworks, and vice versa, can be actively appropriated and transformed into art in the process. 24

In terms of identifying the many different factors influencing the ways in which people perceive and interpret artworks, Maruška Svašek points out the significance of two concepts of social and historical change, referred to as transit and transition, by which artistic discourse is conceptualized within the context of distinct political, economic, cultural, and socio-historical processes. Transit chronicles the processual activity of objects, and in some cases object-makers, through time and space, while transition examines how the temporal and spatial mobility of objects changes not only the meaning, status, efficacy, and aesthetic value of these objects but also, and most crucially, the ways people experience them. 25 Consider, for instance, the case of Oku Ampofo, who visited African art exhibitions at British museums when he was a medical student living in Edinburgh in the thirties. He described the emotional effect which pieces of African sculpture, removed from their original geographic setting and “African” cultural context, had on him: “I found
in these ancient masterpieces the emotional appeal and satisfaction which Western education had failed to cultivate in me. It was as though an African had to go all the way to Europe to discover himself.”26 On the one hand, this example illustrates how, when shifted from one location to another, African artifacts became entangled with artistic, cultural as well as national and international political issues and debates. On the other hand, it highlights the point that the sorts of feelings that are engendered when people interact with art objects are embedded in specific social, political, religious, and other discourses, practices, and experiences. Furthermore, the scope of the potential meanings these art objects can acquire, when (re)contextualized within particular socio-historical and spatial settings, is closely relevant to the range of the emotional responses they might evoke.

In their pursuit of a broad definition that would allow them to classify certain material objects as “works of art,” many anthropologists in the past adopted what is often referred to as a generalizing system.27 This approach was based on the idea that art constitutes a universal category that can be used for the analysis and cross-cultural comparison of other social or cultural types of behavior in different parts of the world. However, in this paper, instead of this ethnocentric, generalizing definition of art that takes it out of its unique socio-historical contexts, art is considered as a “set of historically specific ideas and practices that have shifted meanings across the course of the centuries.”28 Much of the earlier anthropological work on art was mainly concerned with the classification of ethnographic collections and the taxonomy of indigenous systems of knowledge and meaning production, which reified fixed identity-place notions of culture and completely disregarded historical change and individual creativity.29 Anthropological writings on art during the nineties and onward showed, however, that the notion of “bounded” cultures, within the territorial boundaries of which “art” was perceived as a timeless, descriptive category in an eternal immutable state of being, can no longer be maintained.30 New theories have been developed that emphasize the significance of the ideological aspects of object production, interpretation, and aesthetic experience, thereby marking a postlinguistic, postsemiotic shift toward an interest in the “thingness” of artifacts, as it were, their function and intentionalities.31

Daniel Miller’s theory of material culture addressed the limitations of semiosis and the concept of discursive practice in thinking about visual representation. He argued that while an emphasis on the ideological nature of the process of semiosis allowed anthropologists to explore the connections between art production and processes of power creation, change and maintenance,32 semiology, and discourse analysis transformed matter into a “text-like reality” and conceptualized individuals as “independent entities.” Miller, on the other hand, called attention to the significance of the dynamics of active consumption for the analysis of the “objectification” of material objects, placing objects in a particular relation to persons. According to this view, “[t]he authenticity of artefacts as culture derives . . . from their active participation in a process of social self-creation in which they are directly constitutive of our understanding of ourselves and others.”33 Similarly, Alfred Gell’s theory on art and the mediation of agency by indexes breaks with the legacy of semiotic and symbolic analysis. “In place of symbolic communication,” his “action-centred” approach places “all the emphasis on agency, intention, result, and transformation.”34 Accordingly, art objects are intended to mediate rather than encode symbolic meaning. They are not to be interpreted “as if” they were texts. They are not, with the exception of a few special cases, part of language, and they neither comprise an alternative language nor belong to a separate domain of “visual” language. In other words, the nature of the art object is dependent upon its functionality in the context of its unique “social–relational matrix.”35 Interestingly, especially from the eighties onward, numerous anthropologists became interested in examining the dynamics of people’s relationships with artifacts in everyday life. Jeremy Coote, for example, defined “everyday aesthetics” as the “valued formal qualities of perception,”36 arguing that anthropologists should not project Western aesthetic preferences on the art of the societies they study. In his words:

In their accounts of the aesthetics of other cultures, anthropologists have concentrated on materials that fit Western notions of “works of art,” at times compounding the problem by making the focus of their studies
those objects which are “deeply prized” by the Western anthropologist, rather than those most valued by the people themselves.\textsuperscript{37}

Gell, on the other hand, considered the project of “indigenous aesthetics” an “exclusively cultural, rather than social” theoretical approach to non-Western art, arguing that while it provides a “cultural context within which non-Western art objects can be assimilated to the categories of Western aesthetic art-appreciation,” it does not necessarily account for the social dynamics of art production, circulation and reception.\textsuperscript{38}

This paper uses the concept of \textit{aestheticization} to examine the ways in which material realities can exercise power over people. This perspective maintains that the dynamics of interaction with objects are grounded in multisensorial experiences and bodily perceptions, which are often linked to abstract ideas about the meaning and impact of these objects in specific socio-historical settings. In particular, the context within which the materiality of art objects may be (de)aestheticized is multilayered and more fluid, where “[d]iscourses about art, as well as the different ways it is practised and experienced, both influence and are influenced by wider societal processes.”\textsuperscript{39} This analytical approach, which accounts for not only processes of object \textit{transit} and \textit{transition}, but also for the processual nature of object aestheticization and commoditization, is what Maruška Svašek refers to as \textit{processual relativism}.\textsuperscript{40} It clearly indicates a shift away from cultural relativism from the late seventies onward toward a more processual approach to art and culture in anthropology.\textsuperscript{41}

Furthermore, as suggested earlier with regard to the aestheticization of Ghanaian art and artifacts, the spatial and temporal movement of art objects through market forces reinforces particular aesthetic discourses. In a similar vein, Arjun Appadurai proposed a dynamic theoretical approach to examining the commodification of artifacts that also accounts for the changing aesthetic values of objects in the course of their \textit{transit} and \textit{transition} through art markets:

Let us approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of thing, at different points in their \textit{social lives}. This means looking at the \textit{commodity potential} of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things. It also breaks significantly with the production-dominated Marxian view of the commodity and focuses on its \textit{total} trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption.\textsuperscript{42}

This paper strongly agrees with Svašek’s view and argues that a \textit{processual relativist} approach to art proves a useful tool for examining the processes by which artifacts are not only discursively constructed but also commoditized and (de)aestheticized in evolving and essentially permeable art worlds.

Alfred Gell defined the anthropology of art as the study of “social relations in the vicinity of objects mediating social agency.”\textsuperscript{43} In this perspective, \textit{theoretically} speaking, a Shiva idol in a Hindu temple is believed to mediate the spirit of the divinity and provide it with a body. It follows that, in specific contexts, persons are analogous to art objects, and that “anything whatsoever could, conceivably, be an art object from an anthropological point of view, including living persons.”\textsuperscript{44} According to this kind of logic, the anthropology of art can integrate relevant theoretical approaches to personhood, the body and the relations between persons and “things” and between persons and persons by agency of “things,” with reference to animism, anthropomorphism, forms of exchange, and so forth. Also, art objects can trigger emotions and mediate social agency. The potential social and emotional efficacy of an art object is generated, maintained, and mobilized through certain social processes. The intersubjective dynamics of these interactive, partly mental, partly physical aesthetic experiences engender the “social agency” of an art object. The \textit{abduction} of “social agency” is also linked to both the recipient’s perceptual state and their affective transitions ensuing from aesthetically experiencing the art object as it exists in the external physical and social world.

The artist, on the other hand, focuses their efforts toward achieving the desired effect upon the recipient. The recipient’s ideational and emotional engagement in comprehending the artifactual message is embedded in their experience of reality—immediate and universal. Ultimately, in my view, the affective–transformative impact of the agency of an artwork is induced by inculcated
modes of sensory responses and embodied dispositions, that is to say, by culturally determined subjective experiences. Hence, object signification/indexicality is socially constituted. It emerges and unfolds within the context of a particular “social-relational matrix.” The abduction of agency is conceptualized as “a particular cognitive operation” which the “material ‘index’ (the visible, physical, ‘thing’)” permits in an “art-like situation.” In this context, an “index” “in Piercean semiotics is a ‘natural sign’, that is, an entity from which the observer can make a causal inference of some kind, or an inference about the intentions or capabilities of another person.” In particular, the “index is itself seen as the outcome, and/or the instrument of social agency.”

Summarizing, perception and interpretation are shaped by the intense sensations ensuing from dialectical processes of interaction with art objects. These feelings “make themselves ‘known’ as bodily-felt and imaged internalised presence.” Also, the aesthetic experience is embedded in social action, and, accordingly, the efficacy of an art object is (re)conceptualized in the context of the particular social circumstances that enable and transcend action.

Similarly, from the theoretical perspective of processual relativism, aestheticization can be defined as the “process by which objects are perceived, and the ensuing sensory experience used to provide a basis for descriptions of ‘aesthetic experience’, which in turn are used to reinforce abstract ideas or beliefs. That experience is often already influenced by additional knowledge about the object and its reported status, and by the spatial setting in which it is used or displayed.” Thus, processes of object perception and interpretation, whether inside or outside artistic fields of practice, can evoke emotional responses and trigger social and political action. In other words, artifacts, as active social and emotional agents, can be highly socially effective in particular “performative” contexts, mediating a variety of emotions, defined as both physical and mental processes which undermine dichotomies between “mind” and “body,” “the individual” and “the social” as well as “intrapsychic realms” and “extrapsychic, external worlds.” Concern with “the emotional” in anthropology can be associated with a traditional hostility to “the psychological.” Some of these tensions include a number of rigid theoretical distinctions between positivism and interpretivism, materialism and idealism, universalism and relativism, romanticism and rationalism as well as individual and culture. However, a renewed interest in comprehending the “sociocultural experience from the perspective of the persons who live it” has made it possible for a wide range of anthropologists to sustain their interest in research on emotions, defined as “one cultural idiom for dealing with the persistent problems of social relationship.” A processual relativist approach to the anthropological study of art aestheticizes emotions within the specific socio-historical contexts of art objects when they are produced and the networks of power relations that inform the modes of behavior of the different social agents inhabiting these contexts.

A basic assumption of this paper is that art objects exercise social and emotional agency in the course of their transit and transition. The concept of object performativity is used here as an analytical tool for exploring the dynamics of the “peculiar relations between persons and ‘things’ which somehow ‘appear as’, or do duty as, persons.” This biographical and relational perspective advocates a Maussian basis to an anthropological theory of art that focuses upon the experiential and interpretational processes in which persons associate with their human and non-human environments. As this paper has shown, particular art objects are perceived and interpreted in different ways according to the changing circumstances and modes of their representation, aestheticization, and spatial (re)contextualization. I have argued that the politics of sensorial and semiotic engagement with art are context-specific and largely conditioned by the processual dynamics of human and object mobility. It follows that the aesthetic value of an art object should be situated within the parameters of a socially embedded discourse involving an intersubjective praxis. In other words, it is subject to the dynamics of socialization and political redefinition. From this point of view, “art,” as an essentially contested concept, constitutes a social-indexical category that marks the symbolic boundary between established and dissolving notions of culture. Also, the material identity of a work of art is conditioned by historically situated, signifying and
potentially dominant artistic practices in specific social and cultural circumstances.

Notes

1. Maruška Svašek, “Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse,” in Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World, ed. Jeremy MacClancy (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 30–2.
2. Jeremy MacClancy, “Anthropology, Art and Contest,” in Contesting Art: Art, Politics and Identity in the Modern World, ed. Jeremy MacClancy (Oxford: Berg, 1997), 4.
3. James Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 46, 196–7, 222–6.
4. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers, eds., The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).
5. Alfred Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); and Maruška Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production (London: Pluto Press, 2007).
6. Maruška Svašek, “Back to African Roots,” Ghana Newsletter 8, (1990): 27–31.
7. Oku Ampofo, “Sankofa,” in Cultural Heritage (Accra, 1968), 24–5.
8. In Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization, Kwame Nkrumah defines philosophical consciencism as “the map in intellectual terms of the disposition of forces which will enable African society to digest the Western and the Islamic and the Euro-Christian elements in Africa, and develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality. The African personality is itself defined by the cluster of humanist principles which underlie the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism is that philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience” (New York: International Publishers, 1980), 79.
9. Svašek, “Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse,” 34–7.
10. MacClancy, “Anthropology, Art and Contest,” 3.
11. Daniel Miller, Material Culture and Mass Consumption (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 122.
12. Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process,” in The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–91.
13. Vera L. Zolberg, Constructing a Sociology of Arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
14. Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.
15. See Michel Foucault, The Archeology of Language and the Discourse on Language (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980); and Michel Foucault, “Afterword: the Subject and the Power,” in Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 208–26.
16. Karin Barber, The Popular Arts in Africa (Birmingham: Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1986), 8.
17. The use of the term here does not adhere to Nicolas Bourriaud’s outlining of the concept of “relational form” in Relational Aesthetics (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002 [1998]).
18. Cesare P poppi, “African Art and Globalization: On Whose Terms the Question?” Engage Review 13 (2003): 1.
19. Svašek, “Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse,” 32–3.
20. Quoted in Svašek, “Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse,” 33.
21. Susan Vogel, “International Art: The Official Story,” in Africa Explores: 20th Century African Art (New York: Centre for African Art, 1991), 194.
22. Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production.
23. See Howard S. Becker, Art Worlds (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).
24. Katherine Ewing, “The Illusion of Wholeness: Culture, Self and the Experience of Inconsistency,” Ethos 13 (1990): 250.
25. Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production, 4.
26. Quoted in Svašek, “Identity and Style in Ghanaian Artistic Discourse,” 35.
27. See Roy Sieber, “Approaches to Non-Western Art,” in The Traditional Artist in African Societies, ed. Warren L. d’Azevedo (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 425–34; and Richard L. Anderson, American Muse: Anthropological Excursions into Art and Aesthetics (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice hall, 2000).
28. Shelly Errington, The Death of Authentic Art and Other Tales of Progress (Berkeley, IN: University of California Press, 1998), 103.
29. See Alfred C. Haddon, The Decorative Art of British New Guinea: A Study in Papuan Ethnography (Dublin: The Academy House, 1894); Alfred C. Haddon, Evolution in Art, as Illustrated by the Life-Histories of Designs (London: Walter Scott, 1895); Douglas Fraser, “The Discovery of Primitive Art,” in Anthropology and Art: Readings in Cross-Cultural Aesthetics, ed. Charlotte M. Otten (New York: Natural History Press, 1971), 20–36; and Fraser, African Arts as Philosophy (New York: Interbook, 1974). See also Claude Lévi-Strauss, Myth and Meaning (New York: Schocken Books, 1979); and
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Toni Flores, “The Anthropology of Aesthetics” Dialectical Anthropology 10 (1985): 27–41.

30. See Nicholas Thomas, Entangled Objects (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Christopher B. Steiner, African Art in Transit (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Fred R. Myers, “Representing Culture: The Production of Discourses for Aboriginal Acrylic Art,” in Traffic in Culture, ed. George E. Marcus and Fred R. Myers (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 55–9.

31. William J. T. Mitchell, Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986); William J. T. Mitchell, “What Pictures Really Want” October 77 (1996): 71–82; Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment,” in Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40–63; Alfred Gell, “On Coote’s Marvels of Everyday Vision” Social Analysis 38 (1995): 18–30; Alfred Gell, “Vogel’s Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps” Journal of Material Culture 1 (1996): 15–39; and Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory.

32. Roland Barthes, Image Music Text (London: Fontana Press, 1977); and Barthes, “Myth Today,” in A Barthes Reader, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1980), 93–149. See also Foucault, The Archeology of Language and the Discourse on Language; Foucault, Power/Knowledge; and Foucault, “Afterword: the Subject and the Power.”

33. Miller, Material Culture and Mass Consumption, 215.

34. Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, 6.

35. Ibid., 7.

36. Jeremy Coote, “Marvels of Everyday Vision: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes,” in Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 247.

37. Ibid., 245–6.

38. Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, 2–3.

39. Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production, 6.

40. Ibid., 8–9.

41. See Clifford, The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art; and Johannes Fabian, Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

42. Appadurai, “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 13, emphasis added.

43. Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, 7.

44. Ibid. cf. Arthur C. Danto, “Artifact and Art,” in Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections (New York: The Center for African Art, 1988), 18–32.

45. Ibid., 13–15.

46. Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production, 63.

47. Ibid., 10.

48. See Maruška Svašek, “Contacts: Social Dynamics in the Czechoslovak State-Socialist Art World,” Contemporary European History 11 (2002): 67–86; and Maruška Svašek, The Politics of Chosen Trauma: Expellee Memories, Emotions and Identities,” in Mixed Emotions: Anthropological Studies of Feelings, ed. Kay Milton and Maruška Svašek (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 195–214.

49. Catherine A. Lutz and Geoffrey M. White, “The Anthropology of Emotions,” Annual Review of Anthropology 15 (1986): 405–5. See also Maruška Svašek, Introduction: Emotions in Anthropology, in Mixed Emotions: Anthropological Studies of Feelings, ed. Kay Milton and Maruška Svašek (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 1–23.

50. Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory, 9. See also Alaina Lemon, Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Post-Socialism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).

51. Gell, Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory.

52. See Pinney “Photos of the Gods”: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India; Taylor, “Agency and Affectivity of Paintings: The Lives of Chitrīs in Hindu Ritual Contexts”; and Svašek, Anthropology, Art and Cultural Production.