

ally determined, but the desire for the performance, and its appreciation, appear to be universal. In fact, aren't the same desire and appreciation at work when we pay to applaud an acrobat, a juggler, or a lion tamer, who (art/skill overcoming difficulty) performs acts beyond our normal powers? In semiotic terms, any such performance, and all of them, may still be considered a sign, but autotelic, almost totally collapsed on itself, drawing attention to its signifier—i.e., what we see, hear, or taste. The signified only specifies that the particular signifier is indeed a performance—i.e., positively different in degree from normality. And the referent is that performance—i.e., the sign, i.e., mainly the signifier. Any other referential messages will come from the outside and through secondary signs. But then, isn't the primary sign at the center of circus? By means of costumes, varied messages can be grafted on the acrobatic act, which starts with the performance; without the performance, there would be no circus, only theater or pantomime. And again: does one communicate a performance?

The questions raised by the circus prompt interest in other types of public "shows" which value performances and hence draw attention to the signifier. One could attempt to order them within that perspective. In theater, for example, despite some stress on the performance—quality of acting, beauty of a face or figure, harmony or extravaganza of sets—the referential function of secondary signs dominates to the point that they are generally viewed as primary, and priority is given to the text. A one-person act, on the other hand, although it may use referential material, is mainly appreciated for the performance—not for the content of jokes but for the manner of their telling. The circus operates like a many-people show: it stresses the performance but also conveys messages. Bouissac's book shows that these are subtle and concerted, and powerfully grounded in our culture. I am not sure, however, whether they really account for the success of the circus, or whether they play second fiddle to the sheer enjoyment of the performance.

**Michael Greenhalgh and Vincent Megaw, eds.** *Art in Society: Studies in Style, Culture, and Aesthetics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978, xiii + 350 pp. (cloth).

**Reviewed by Marie Jeanne (Monni) Adams**  
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As befits a publication on art this is a handsome book, with an attractive print layout, sprinkled with photographs, drawings, and graphs, firmly bound, and appropriately heavy but compact in the hand. How it weighs in as a contribution to the subject cannot be stated as a simple sum of its parts, for a few brilliant sections outweigh the whole.

The title sweeps across a wide intellectual horizon, but in fact the twenty-two essays stay neatly within the bounds of art studied by anthropologists; that is, they concentrate on small-scale societies, living, dead, or dying. The contributions stem from a symposium on art and society, sponsored by the editors, held at Leicester University in early 1975, with the addition of three papers, all but one drawn from British backgrounds.

Few anthropologists focus their primary effort on visual art in the same way they might on ritual or oral tradition, and fewer art historians concentrate on the art of exotic peoples. The result is that ethnoart is a bit of everybody's business, and the inevitable resulting miscellany shows up clearly in this kind of book, which lacks a specific theme or regional focus and includes a philosopher, art historians, archaeologists, social anthropologists, museum ethnographers, and practicing artists who are teachers or collectors.

The resulting range of viewpoints and topics may give this book, as the cover claims, a wide appeal, but their juxtaposition and the ensuing seesawing quality can induce vertigo even in a tolerant reader. The extremes in levels of expression and research caliber that characterize this compendium are illustrated by the first two selections. Philosopher of aesthetics Richard Wollheim offers a worthy if obscurely abstract admonition that gleams with fashionable terms as he dismisses the taxonomic or distinctive feature approach in favor of the "generative," for the proper analysis of art works. This is followed by the trivial statements of Michael Cardew, the potter who served as a craft development teacher in Nigeria, to the effect that preliterate art is comparable to the art of children and that "others" do not have our habit of conceptual thinking. The entire first section, with nine essays on appreciation and aesthetics—none longer than five pages—resembles a slightly awry Hungarian cake with several dark tasty layers interspersed with light, airy ones. The remaining longer articles are loosely grouped under two headings: Methodology and Stylistic Analysis (six pieces) and Some Ethnographic Samples



(seven articles). It will be more revealing of the book's qualities and generally useful to the reader to review the contents in relation to the specific topics currently in favor by those who study art in anthropology (see Silver 1979).

Four essays in this book stand out for their insights into another culture and for a disciplined method and message that can inspire and guide future studies. The first three, by Vastokas, Kaeppler, and McLeod, can be grouped as the search for cognitive order. Scholars of European art assume that an art object is ordered and that a conceptual schema lies at the genesis of a work of art; they proceed to discuss fine points of that order, such as the precise relationship of twelve apostles on a painted ceiling, or the invisible diagonal organizing a Michelangelo scene, or the horizontal composition of an impressionist landscape. In ethnographic art, however, compositional devices are not readily grasped by our viewers, so that, beginning with Boas in the early twentieth century, ethnographers have accepted the burden of *demonstrating* the presence of structure or composition. The further step of linking these compositional orders to organizing principles in other fields of social activity was taken but slowly in the mid-twentieth century, the major efforts having been made by Panofsky and Lévi-Strauss.

As early as 1970, Fernandez (1977), in an analysis of the Fang of Gabon, compared the structure of an African village layout and the popular game board and figural sculpture of the Fang with the conceptions villagers held of the zones of their surroundings and the shape of their past. My own field work in Indonesia yielded such a study (1973), in which I found a structural homology between the tripartite compositional layout in East Sumba men's textiles, the structure of the village and the imagined cosmos, and the concepts regarding relationships among marriage and trading groups. So, for Kaeppler or Vastokas to find corresponding forms in artistic efforts and in social order or cultural dynamics is not new. However, their studies are exemplary.

Vastokas concentrates on demonstrating the special character and the primacy of tripartite and quadripartite divisions in Northwest Coast architecture, admirably indicating her evidence in objects and ritual action and demonstrating at each step the theoretical influences on her own thinking. (However, I would qualify her enthusiasm for Arnheim's visual thinking.) In conclusion, she reduces this complex analysis to a single theme: a tension or ambiguous movement in the works of art that in her view expresses latent cognitive-cultural tensions characterizing the economy, social organization, and religion. This sounds too much like "totalism," the earlier tendency to sum up a style and a civilization in one phrase. The interpretive stress on tensions, stemming from the work of Lévi-Strauss and Victor Turner, is a healthy reaction to many earlier studies that found harmony and stability the quintessence of art-and-society. In most art and society there is an interplay of stability and tension; we need to get beyond this level of generality.

The lasting value of this essay lies in the sophisticated analysis of certain features of Northwest Coast art style.

Using "ethnoscience structuralism" and an elegant compression of style, Kaeppler focuses on a specific structure in vocal music which is given explicit formulation by Pacific Tongans as melody, drone, and decoration. She finds similarly structured sequences in work patterns and designs of bark cloth, in social domains of ranking, political relationships, and, exhibited on a grand scale, in major communal ritual. She also makes the interesting proposal that these forms yield an aesthetic experience because at some level the people comprehend the underlying structure. Because of the clarity and freshness of insight cutting across various domains of activity and because of my own interest in work patterns (1971, 1977), I find this essay exceptionally stimulating and an excellent model for studies elsewhere.

The third essay differs in its investigatory focus. Instead of accounting for what is presented to the eye, McLeod, Keeper of the Department of Ethnography at the London Museum of Manki, in an interesting turnabout offers an explanation—that is, a principle—that accounts for the *absence* of certain motifs, mainly domestic creatures, in Asante figurative goldweights earlier used as units to weigh gold dust in exchange transactions on the former Gold Coast, West Africa. He points to the significant dichotomy between village and bush that is basic to Asante ritual, proverbs, and myths, and then suggests that domestic animals are representative of the category "village," and as such they are kept out of the money system because money functions to blur or equalize categories. This is an excellent example of how anthropological theories deriving from Lévi-Strauss, Leach, and Douglas about cognitive orders can clarify problems in ethnoart.

The fourth essay I have singled out, Wilkinson's "Carving a Social Message," deals with visual art forms as signs in a social system, perhaps the most familiar approach to art in society by anthropologists. Wilkinson, who taught literature on Tabar Island, part of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea, studied their Malanggan ritual carvings and shows that particular combinations of motifs belong to certain owners and identify both kin and status groupings. The understanding of Malanggan sculpture, the most complex carving in Melanesia, has been plagued by lack of thorough documentation, first on the level of what is represented, and further, on what any item means. This article, richly informative on these points, is clear evidence that Wilkinson's work deserves fuller publication.

Gathercole, who works in the museum at Cambridge University, also would see art in the frame of social sign. Deploping the lack of information on early collections, he recommends that we look at the motifs repeated on many Maori objects, not only as general reminders of the ideological continuum of gods, ancestors, and human life, but also as signs of ethnic identity which increased in



elaboration during the nineteenth century as acculturative pressures mounted on the Maori people.

Based on the work of the Stratherns (1971) on the body decoration of the Mt. Hageners of Papua New Guinea, Layton constructs a chart of the Hageners' sensory signs to show how they combine to communicate status positions and wearers' intentions. His essay also reflects the current fashion for elements of communication theory. He would distinguish art from visual communication by the features of symbolism and redundancy, a reductive position that is further weakened by the distortion required for the concept of redundancy when applied to art.

Faris, who provided such a splendid analysis of Nuba body painting (1972), based on his field work in the Sudan, East Africa, spins an argument that represents another current influencing the analysis of art; that is, a Marxist emphasis on mode of production, the underlying thesis being that the significant social relationships which must be symbolized for purposes of maintenance, celebration, socialization, and mystification stem from productive activities. According to Faris, if people control their means of production, art will celebrate human productive activity, as indeed was the situation he found among the Nuba. Where producers lack control, such circumstances need to be justified, and symbols will be used for mystification in order to legitimize the exploitation. With these theorems, Faris proposes to tell why certain people use ancestor figures and to account for the expressive character of some West African masks. He claims that the Dogon create ancestor figures as part of the mystique of the clan, which, having no kin or material basis, is an ideological construct to favor the elders; the Dan produce masks of cool arrogance because they have a politically powerful Poro society, while lesser local men's societies have to employ frightening masks. These explanations were prepared before 1975, and it is hoped that in the interval, besides correcting other errors in his article, Faris has had a chance to reread Harley (1950) to learn that the forceful Poro society (among the Mano) makes much use of frightening masks, and that there is no true Poro among the Dan (*ibid.*:42)—a point reiterated in several publications by field workers Himmelheber and Fischer. What evidence there is about Dogon human figure sculpture does not limit them, for example, to *clan* rituals, temples, or groups. With several Africanists at hand, the editors must be faulted for permitting these hypothetical arguments based on misinformation to be cast in permanently accessible form. More attention needs to be given to art in relation to power structures, in spite of this miscarried effort.

Two essays cater to the increasing interest in the situation of the living artist. Nettleship offers a fine descriptive account of the social context of women's weaving arts, which are no longer functional, among the Atayal of Taiwan. His concern with creativity, presented in a vague and groping manner, leads to the following points: the

weaver, influenced by aesthetic or nonaesthetic values, can make selections at various points in the work process and, to assess their innovation, these decision points deserve close study. Gerbrands, known for his publications on the Asmat artist, continues his search for the master artist, this time among the Kilenge of New Britain, and provides some interesting anecdotes about a wood-carver's relations with his big-man patron and the efforts of his apprentice.

A modest experiment in cross-cultural aesthetics is reported by Nelson Graburn, who is best known for his studies of Eskimo art in a changing commercial context. He asked museum audiences at Berkeley to respond to two commercial forms of art-crafts: wooden implements of the Cree Indians and the soapstone figures of the Canadian Arctic Eskimos. Judgments of the works were markedly affected by preconceptions about Indians and about Eskimo culture. The neat, clean wood carvings did not fit respondents' notions of authentic Indian objects, and their negative reactions were frequently cast in terms of guilt about commercialization. Eskimo stone imagery, however, fulfilled their ideas of art as evocative and illustrative of the Eskimos' imagined way of life and struggle with nature. Strangely enough, in this case political regrets did not come to mind.

Another issue in cross-cultural aesthetics—more commonly called artistic influence—concerns the possible effects of African art on the artists of Paris in the early twentieth century. It is patently absurd, as Donne points out, to discuss the influence of African art on the Cubists on the basis of pieces and even styles that the artists of the time did not and could not know. Donne gives a sample of the kind of detective work required to identify which actual pieces came to the notice of artists of that time.

Greenhalgh, one of the editors, takes up a rarely discussed problem in cross-cultural aesthetics: why Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were indifferent to influences from Pre-Columbian art. Not surprisingly, he reasons that the Graeco-Roman framework of Renaissance Europe precluded recognition of the alien style as aesthetic experience. In an erudite sketch of scholarly work of the time, Greenhalgh shows that the tendency to see alien art works as something which can explain religion or society had already begun in the sixteenth century.

However changed our aesthetic appreciation may be, archaeologists continue to use art as a revealing artifact. Two essays in this book give a glimpse of archaeologists at work on style analysis. Roaf seeks differences in hands among a row of similar figures at Persepolis, and Frankel looks for similarities in pottery designs to determine contacts and trade routes in 2nd millennium B.C. Cyprus. Using familiar assumptions in style studies, both men argue, in brief contributions, for more precise, credible results by use of mathematical methods, couched in a variety of charts and diagrams, than were possible by precomputer assessment.



Korn, an art historian, fulfills Wollheim's directive not to rely on distinctive features by offering a computerized formal analysis of an extensive array of design units she has derived from the colorful Abelam paintings collected some 20 years ago by Anthony Forge. Most of her article is taken up with arguing against the use of linguistic models for art analysis, in favor of a comprehensive count of visual regularities.

Art as a qualitative experience is difficult to deal with in social science terms, although a few anthropologists have attempted it. Here Swinton and Herman, who are artists and connoisseurs, carry out this mission in a style of personal conviction.

Most speculative of all investigations into art is the study of its origins, a topic rarely addressed by art historians. In tune with the recent emphasis on the biological contribution to human behavior, several scholars are finding a promising source of designs in the dancing flickers of light, called phosphenes, that appear in interior vision. This view is represented by Reichel-Dolmatoff's favorable comparison of the drawings of drug-experienced visions among a small group of Amazonian Indians with the fifteen phosphenes standardized in a study of European subjects.

In summary, we find that most topics in ethnoart are touched upon in these essays: the search for cognitive order, art as social signs, the artist and the social matrix of production, cross-cultural aesthetics, and qualitative experience. The notable exception is an example of psychological or psychoanalytical study. The best work belongs to those in search of cognitive order. A new note appears in a number of the essays that is worth special comment; that is, an awareness of negative results or a cautionary attitude. We should not hold to a unitary view of the Eskimo aesthetic when Swinton states that, among the Eskimos he knows in the Baker Lake area, carvings are admired for the very reasons they are disdained in Graburn's reports on Arctic Quebec. Wollheim's admonition against the use of distinctive feature analysis, Greenhalgh's consideration of a lack of diffusion, Donne on the need of proof for claims of artistic influence, Vastokas's and Korn's warnings against the use of linguistic models, and most vivid of all, Thurston Shaw's well-reasoned challenge to established theories on the chronology of Benin bronzes—all these introduce critical notes that were absent from the positive propositions presented in two earlier anthologies on ethnoart (Jopling 1971; Otten 1971). On this point, *Art in Society* represents an advance in sophistication about methods that is worthy of wide attention.

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