VISUALITY AND VISION: QUESTIONS FOR A POST-CULTURALIST ART HISTORY

WHITNEY DAVIS

'Post-culturalist art history' doesn't take for granted the ontological fact of culture as the context and content in dealing with the concrete material things and aesthetic practices which make up the putative 'objects' of art history. And therefore it doesn't take for granted the epistemological primacy of cultural history in interpretation and explanation of its objects. It means offering a nontautological *analysis* of the social emergence and partial consolidation of visual culture, including traditions of pictorial art. What this analysis claims and does in its terms and details is less important than the very fact of a strenuous effort to provide it. Precisely because post-culturalist thinking doesn't take for granted the fact of culture and the primacy of cultural history, potentially it can situate itself in productive and practical ways in relation to *non*-cultural inquiries in art history and in studies of art.

I confess I had never thought of calling myself a 'post-culturalist' art historian until Jakub Stejskal and I were talking about a framing question that might offer a way in to the kind of analytic work that I've been doing in recent years, and that I've been drawing *from* – for example, the 'post-formalist' art history developed by the art historian David Summers and work in the philosophy of perception and depiction by Bence Nanay and others. But now that the term has been found, I quite like it.[1]

The present essay is based on a talk at a symposium organized by Jakub Stejskal at the Dahlem Humanities Center, Freie Universität Berlin, in April 2016. In revising it for publication, I have tried to preserve something of its informal tone. My thanks to Stejskal, Hans Christian Hönes, and Gerhard Wolf for their vigorous responses and suggestions.

1 This essay intersects with discussions of 'post-formalism' and 'post-culturalist' art history which I have presented in other forums: see Whitney Davis, 'Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte', in *Metzler Lexikon Kunstwissenschaft: Ideen, Methoden, Begriffe*, ed. Ulrich Pfisterer, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2011), 500–504; 'What Is Post-Formalism? (Or, *Das Sehen an sich hat seine* Kunst*geschichte*)', *nonsite.org*, no. 7 (2012), http://nonsite.org/article/what-is-post-formalism-or-das-sehen-an-sich-hat-seine-kunstgeschichte; 'Visual Culture', in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6:240–44; 'A General Theory of Visual Culture', in *Farewell to Visual Studies*, ed. James Elkins, Gustav Frank, and Sunil Manghani (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 108–17; 'Knowing Art Historically', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 78 (2016): 341–44; and 'Bivisibility: Why Art History Is Comparative',

I will start by saying that to my mind 'post-culturalist art history' – and 'post-culturalist' historical inquiry of any kind, for example, in archaeology – does not mean *non*-culturalist and it does not mean *anti*-culturalist, though it has sometimes been misread in both of those ways. It is a way of thinking *about* culture which is not what I call 'cultur*ological*', for emphasis (*GTVC*, pp. 291–95). That is, it doesn't take for granted the ontological fact of culture as the context and content in dealing with the concrete material things and aesthetic practices which make up the putative 'objects' of art history and its close cognates in visual studies, image theory, and the anthropology of art. And therefore it doesn't take for granted the epistemological primacy of cultural history – especially its investment in strictly 'idiographic' approaches to human practices, purposes, and projects in life – in interpretation and explanation of its objects. (As a robust, recent, and responsible example of idiographic culturology in art history, I would cite the elegant and highly self-conscious work of Michael Baxandall in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* and *Patterns of Intention*,[2] though in his later work Baxandall qualified his cultural history in 'nomological' terms – that is, the terms of general 'laws' of nature – which he derived from the perceptual psychology of attention and perhaps from its neurophysiology.[3] But classic culturology is less likely to be found in art history strictly speaking than in the long-dominant culturalist strand of the 'anthropology of art'.) For me post-culturalist art history means offering a nontautological *analysis* of what I call 'succession to visuality' (*GTVC*, pp. 322–40) – the social emergence and partial consolidation of visual culture, including traditions of pictorial art. For my purposes in this essay, what this analysis claims and does in its terms and details is less important than the very fact of a strenuous effort to provide it – or to provide *one* at any rate. Precisely because post-culturalist thinking doesn't take for granted the fact of culture and the primacy of cultural history, potentially it can situate itself in productive and practical ways in relation to *non*-cultural inquiries in art history (though some readers might continue to find 'non-cultural

in *Comparativism in Art History*, ed. Jaś Elsner (London: Routledge, 2017), 42–59. The 'analytic work' that I refer to has been developed systematically in my book *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011) – hereafter: *GTVC* – and *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Prehistory to Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

2 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) and *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). See *GTVC*, pp. 14–15, 158–60.

3 See Whitney Davis, 'Art History, Re-enactment, and the Idiographic Stance', in *Michael Baxandall, Vision and the Work of Words*, ed. Peter Mack and Robert Williams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 69–89, and John Onians, *Neuroarthistory: From Aristotle and Pliny to Baxandall and Zeki* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 178–88.

art history' a contradiction in terms) and in studies of art – a point to which I will devote the second half of this essay.

Post-culturalist art history certainly includes – it embraces and welcomes – such possibilities as 'multicultural', 'intercultural', and 'transcultural' art history. That is, it happily addresses the historical texture of what is now often called 'world art studies' or 'global art history', which involve many mosaics, interactions, and sediments of 'cultures' as formerly described in twentieth-century cultural anthropology to be relatively discrete colonies (even islands) of shared material and social practices within a group – practices having a shared 'sense' (*Sinn*), or, to adopt the Wittgensteinian vocabulary I tend to prefer, a shared (or at least a highly shareable) use of the aspects with which things are endowed in human perception, thought, and communication.[4] Multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural approaches emphasize the transmission, translation, mutation, and diversity of this sharing-of-sense, this use-of-aspects, despite the indeterminacy of these processes (and maybe in virtue *of* their indeterminacy), moving away from older models of the relative impermeability and incommensurability of cultures (which in turn seemed to imply a strong 'cultural relativism') – and I'm all for that. Indeed, they might be described as 'post-colonial' approaches not only because they frequently focus on histories of the formation and breakdown of empires, of migrations and diasporas, and of hybrid, cosmopolitan, and spectral social identities. They're also 'post-colonial' (in an analytic sense) because they drop, or at any rate decentre, the foundational culturalist image of a colony of organisms – in this case human beliefs, customs, practices, senses, and uses – reproducing itself in a kind of self-enclosed Petri dish in minimal or no contact with other colonies and in minimal or no interaction with the ethnographer-observer herself. (I venture to guess that it was the 'critique of ethnography' launched by James Clifford, George Marcus, and other anthropologists in the 1970s which really spelled the beginning of the end of that 'high culturalist' – deeply culturological – way of thinking about culture, in the North American academy at rate, and in turn opened historical and anthropological disciplines in North America to the conceptualizations of 'cultural studies' developed by Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha in the UK.)[5] Multicultural,

[4] A superb account of the origins of twentieth-century English-language cultural anthropology in late-nineteenth-century bacteriology and sociology can be found in Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), dealing with such foundational texts as Robert Lowie's *Primitive Culture*, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, Alfred B. Kroeber's massive anthology *Anthropology Today*, and Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures*. For European traditions, see Karl J. Weintraub, *Visions of Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[5] For further discussion and references, see Davis, 'Visual Culture'.

intercultural, and transcultural approaches have helped provoke, have academically and institutionally helped call up, post-culturalist analysis of just what the sharing-of-sense – the use-of-aspects – actually involves in material, psychological, and social terms, and on the hypothesis that these processes can indeed be modelled (and described with fair regularity and predictability) despite their complexity and their recursive structures.

I don't want to dwell for long on *my* model, which is erected on quasi-Wittgensteinian foundations: a group of people 'succeed' to a 'visuality', to a common visual culture of sharing-of-sense and using-of-aspects, by coordinating their actions and practices (actions and practices in making things such as paintings and buildings) in relation to analogies – replicatory relationships and salient correspondences, or what I call 'forms of likeness' – that they already partly share and that they can consolidate *in* the making, the enacting *of* the analogies. In my concluding thought-experiment in *GTVC* (pp. 287–317), based on Wittgenstein's parable of a 'complete primitive language-game' in the *Philosophical Investigations*, a way of building a building in order to have a particular colour scheme and a way of building it *not* to have a colour scheme possess different 'forms of likeness', even if the buildings *look* exactly alike to an external observer. (Indeed, they may be the *same* building, looked-at in the colour-scheming form of life and its forms of likeness on the one hand and in the not-colour-scheming form of life / forms of likeness on the other hand.)[6] Hence they reside in partly different visualities, because in the first kind of coordination the builders – a master builder and an apprentice – analogize it, say, to 'choosing red' (among fruits in a market – colour-scheming) and in the second kind of coordination analogize it, say, to 'choosing apples' (among the fruits at the market – *not*-colour-scheming) at the same time as the forms of life to be described as 'Choosing Red' or as 'Choosing Apples' partly emerge in the building as an analogical ground in itself (Colour-Scheming, *Not*-Colour-Scheming) – one pole or node of correspondences emerging elsewhere, not on the building site but, here, in the fruit market. This entails straight off that one-sided focus on 'the object' – the building, an art-historical object – could miss the key fact that its cultural status in visuality actually emerges partly in the fruit market, which is maybe *not* an art-historical 'object' but nonetheless a relevant context of the network

[6] In my thought experiment, the sequences of actions and the resulting structures in both analogical coordinations are morphologically or perceptually identical, permitting no ambiguity about culturally relevant features at the level of visibility as such, of the 'form' of 'the object'; nonetheless, each sequence has a different form of likeness. This stricture enables clarity of demonstration, but it can, of course, be relaxed with regard to real cases.

of forms of likeness. This implication might be called a 'post-formalist' feature of my version of post-culturalist art history.

There's a lot of 'resistance' in these successions (whether we address what might be called the 'master succession' to visuality, or more local successions to the 'formality', 'stylisticality', and the 'pictoriality' of artefacts and configurations); they readily fail; and it's analytically incoherent – though maybe heuristically convenient for gross sociological purposes – to say they totalize in the same way for everyone in a group, or even for any two participants. In fact, I stress the opposite logical possibility. An indeterminate area of culture is likely structured as the 'paradox' that Saul Kripke identified as an insight by Ludwig Wittgenstein: in using the sign '+' for adding integers less than 57, you and I are 'adding', but for integers greater than 57 I could be 'plussing' (in plussing, 57 + n = 57 + n) and you could be 'quussing' (in quussing, 57 + n = 57). This can become *visible* (or otherwise known), and a matter for our adjustment or recalibration of our uses of '+' for adding, plussing, *and* quussing, only when our provisional coordinations break down and the sign '+' splits up in the neighbourhood of 57. (In addition to Wittgenstein and Kripke, my approach is indebted to David Lewis's theory of the 'coordination equilibria' of 'conventions' as well as implications Arthur Danto has extracted from the phenomena, the puzzle, of what he calls 'morphological indiscernibles'.)[7]

An analytics of culture is completely neutral about the social *scale* of the units of culture, that is, the number of participants, the duration of participation, and so on. But it is fair to say that macro-sociologies of large established groups (patrons of vase painters in fifth-century Athens; visitors to the Paris Salon in 1865) are both too unwieldy and too general to enable micro-histories of succession to visuality. One of the implications of my approach is that art historians might 'drop down' from large-scale sociologies (to the extent that they are actually employed in art history) and instead 'build up' from the small-scale, ephemeral interactions between any two agents engaged in coordinating fairly simple actions, such as the master and apprentice choosing construction materials at a building site. Of course, this requires high resolution in the archaeological and historical record. If the record is not fine-grained enough, the more ephemeral *processes* of succession will be *less* visible (how the two builders figure out how to colour-

[7] Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); David Lewis, *Convention* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981). For a full discussion, see *GTVC*; I offered an earlier and briefer application of the Wittgensteinian/Kripkean 'sceptical puzzle' to archaeology and art history in 'Finding Symbols in History', in *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 35–45.

scheme) and post-culturalist findings less robust, and the more stable *results* of succession (the production of colour-schemed buildings for the community that wants or needs them) will be *more* visible, promoting culturalist reification. But the approach is thoroughly consistent with one of the basic *non*-cultural parameters of visuality, namely, geometrical optics: the visibility of everything, and hence succession to visuality, varies with the visual angle at each and every beholder's standpoint(s) – a fact sometimes inconsequential, sometimes determining. (In *Visuality and Virtuality*, I explore this matter and the methodological and empirical opportunities and problems it presents for art historians.) For analytic and heuristic purposes, I often like to work with social dyads: two agents in mutual coordination of forms of likeness with respect to one or a limited number of artefacts and practices of making and using them.[8] Obviously this is going to be tricky in wide swathes of world art history and prehistory, which cannot get close enough to individual human agents. As in prehistoric archaeology today, then, it is probably going to require a lot *more* seriation, stochastic, and computational modelling, virtual reconstruction, and even 'counterfactualism' (working analytically with logically possible processes) and a lot *less* focus on 'actual' objects (and causes and contexts inferred for them) that happen to survive in the material record. But so be it.

Now I want to go to the opposite end of the continuum from the culturalism and culturology critically engaged by a post-culturalist art history – namely, to the possibilities of *non*-cultural art history, and perhaps of naturalistic and universalizing 'sciences' of object- and picture-perception, artistic process, and aesthetic experience which would provide a platform of invariant facts and principles – 'nomological' resources – for all sociocultural treatments of particular works, styles, and traditions of art and depiction, however 'idiographic' in overall orientation. Obviously certain natural, physical, and physiological invariants get built into art-historical inquiries: the geomorphology of land and the chemistry of pigments, for example, and, as I've already mentioned, the structure of geometrical optics and perception under the visual angle at standpoint. Insofar as art historians going about their business often act partly as archaeologists, as conservators, and as optical surveyors, among many other things, they are thoroughly involved with these sciences, and quite uncontroversially so.

More controversial is the considerably narrower thesis that natural-historical (non-cultural) *invariants of object- and picture-perception, artistic process, and*

[8] See Whitney Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation, and Freud's 'Wolf Man'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and '"Fitted Like a Glove": Wittgenstein's House for His Sister in Vienna, 1926–28', in *Space, Time, and Depiction* (forthcoming).

aesthetic experience might be identified – *have* been identified – and that our art histories should strive to pinpoint them at work in all their myriad ways in the myriad instances and contexts in which they operate, and for which general scientific descriptions can be provided, in turn enabling rigorous comparison *between* instances and contexts and the tracking of regularities and irregularities of instance and context. There has been a recent resurgence of interest both inside and outside art history in several such possibilities.

First, evolutionary-developmental ('evo-devo'), evolutionary-adaptive or evolutionary-functionalist, and evolutionary-cognitive accounts of artefact-making, art, and depiction, as in Ellen Dissanayake's and Stephen Davies's evolutionary aesthetics (in *How the Arts Began* and *The Artful Species*) and in Francesco d'Errico's and Lambros Malafouris's pioneering work on 'external memory storage' devices and the 'brain-artefact interface' in paleoanthropological prehistory, that is, in the study of hominid evolution, where the models of EMS and BAI have been extended from Middle Palaeolithic tool-making to the Upper Palaeolithic emergence of notation and depiction.[9]

Second, the physiology and psychology of empathy, explored by David Freedberg, David Summers, and others.[10]

Third, physiological or empirical aesthetics, now dominated by the thousands of technical findings and an increasing number of overall syntheses in the field of a so-called neuroaesthetics supposedly having a direct – if tendentious – relevance to art historians, such as Semir Zeki's *Inner Vision* and Gabriella Starr's *Feeling Beauty*.[11]

And fourth, a new geographic and environmental materialism, inflected both by neuroscience (especially the hypothesis of the plasticity and pluripotency of the brain, that is, the neurobiology of the continuous lifelong myelinization of neurons and rewiring of 'neural networks' as a habituated function of repeated similar stimulations of the organism) and by evo-devo (that is, histories of

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9 Ellen Dissanayake, *What Is Art For?* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1998) and *Art and Intimacy: How the Arts Began* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001); Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Francesco d'Errico and Christopher Henshilwood, eds., *Homo Symbolicus: The Dawn of Imagination, Language and Spirituality* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2011); Lambros Malafouris, *How Things Shape the Mind: A Theory of Material Engagement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

10 David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, 'Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 11 (2007): 197–203; David Summers's historiography of empathy theory and its applications and misapplications is currently in progress.

11 Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gabriella Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

adaptation to the selective pressures of particular historical environments and ecologies), most systematically advocated in art history by John Onians under the rubric 'neuroarthistory'.[12]

I have been highly selective and somewhat random in mentioning some recent names and texts in English-language scholarship only. All of these supposedly recent and sometimes self-consciously trendy trends have intellectual roots in the nineteenth century if not before; Onians's environmental determinism, for example, descends from Montesquieu and Winckelmann in the eighteenth century and Hippolyte Taine in the nineteenth. I will not attempt sustained historiography and exposition. But what's a post-culturalist art-historical take on all this?

I'm sympathetic to Matthew Rampley's book-length critique of these four areas of recent inquiry as applied to the visual and spatial arts, which he presents from his vantage points of intellectual history, cultural historicism, critical theory, and philosophical aesthetics (and indeed employing some of the terminology of *GTVC*); it is rigorous, trenchant, and often devastating, exposing gaps in inference, leaps of logic, and tendentious selections of evidence.[13] But for the purposes of the present essay I'm not going fully to endorse two of Rampley's broadest complaints about the entire smorgasbord: first, that the findings, claims, and implications of evo-devo, neuroarthistory, and so on, are far too general to be of interest to art historians, who seem, in Rampley's account, to be wedded to practices of 'close looking' at particular objects in specific sociocultural contexts; and second, that the findings, claims, and implications amount to nothing more than 'redescriptions' (in new technical jargons) of processes for which art history already has a subtle epistemology, and certainly do not amount to any kind of nomological scientific 'explanation' (*Erklärung* in the *Naturwissenschaften*) where, in this regard, the Rampleyan art historian would seem to be committed to idiographic humanistic 'understanding' (*Verstehen* in the *Geisteswissenschaften*). To my mind and for the purposes of the present essay, both claims are wholly transitive, that is, they apply to high culturalism *and* non-culturalism alike, and therefore are somewhat moot. The humanist-culturalist art historian seems to me to be just as exposed as the naturalist-scientific historian to the charge that their claims sometimes have no interest for the other approach, don't help one to 'do anything' with the evidence, and 'make a difference' in making sense of it, to cite Rampley's somewhat instrumentalist criteria.

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12 Onians, *Neuroarthistory*; John Onians, *European Art, Prehistory to the Present: A Neuroarthistory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

13 Matthew Rampley, *The Seductions of Darwin: Art, Evolution, Neuroscience* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017).

For example, from a naturalistic point of view one might say that Baxandall's 'period eye' is partly a sociologistic redescription of Ernst Gombrich's concept of the 'beholder's share', which Gombrich drew partly from animal-behaviour studies and perceptual psychology. This doesn't mean that Baxandall's 'social history of pictorial style' adds nothing to Gombrich's account of the 'mental set' of particular communities of picture-makers, or doesn't enable us to 'make a difference' in understanding them. It only means that some components of Baxandall's model should, at least in principle, be convertible into the descriptive and analytic language of, say, the perceptual psychology on which Gombrich originally relied in explicating the 'beholder's share'. (As already noted, in his last published scholarship Baxandall fully acknowledged this.) And vice versa: some components of Dissanayake's evolutionist narrative of the aesthetics of what she calls 'making special' could be converted into the familiar terms of any number of aesthetic systems happily employed by art historians writing culturalist art history, and might be seen to be partly aligned with such concepts as Alva Noë's descriptions of the 'strange tools' of art and Jakub Stejskal's investigation of 'striking visibility', despite the fact that Noë and Stejskal are not hard-core partisans of full-blast evo-devo.[14] These are simple and straightforward points, I think; and precisely because they are simple and straightforward we might conclude, I suggest, that there is much less of a problem (even a crisis) in resolving putative disputes between culturalist and non-culturalist inquiries than a Rampley-style account of a profound polarization might imply. Certainly, there are differences of terminology and method. But there is also considerable intersection.

To my mind, then, and despite Rampley's powerful critique, the post-culturalist art historian (of my kind anyway) *does* take an interest in non-culturalist inquiries into the nature and history of art, picture-making, and other human practices of making things, and *is* engaged in the issues of explanation and understanding, of description and redescription, which they raise. Here again my question – my agenda – concerns succession and recursion. Indeed, it concerns *not only* the history of successions to visuality, to consolidated 'visual culture' in the sense I've already sketched – that is, historical succession *to* visuality *from* such phylogenetically and/or ontogenetically prior, assumed, and/or invariant parameters as selection pressures on adaptation (evo-devo), neural localization and specialization in the visual cortex (neuroaesthetics), and variable environments of habituation of perception (neuroarthistory). It *also* and equally

[14] Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015); Jakub Stejskal, 'Striking Visibility: Visual Objects of Authority' (lecture, Department of History of Art, University of California at Berkeley, February 2017).

concerns the recursion(s), the *feedbacks*, of emergent visualities – emergent social coordinations of networks of forms of likeness in the doing and using of things – *in* adaptive behaviour, *in* cortical localization and specialization, and *in* perceptual habituation, potentially contributing in important ways to our understanding of them, whether it is 'naturalistic' or 'culturalist'. (Both terms become somewhat moot in a post-culturalist art history, which is presumably also 'post-naturalist'.) Because technological and cultural feedbacks in the long-term evolution of hominid hands, eyes, and brain are broadly accepted in palaeoanthropology, and have been incorporated in David Summers's narrative of world art as a series of 'abstraction[s] to the notional', I don't have anything 'post-culturalist/post-naturalist' to say about evo-devo that I haven't said elsewhere, for example, in a recent short essay in *World Art* commenting on the increasing visibility and creativity of prehistoric studies in art history.[15] But I do want to comment on the issue of successions to visuality and feedbacks from visuality as studied in the 'neuro' domain broadly speaking. Here the main point, for me, is that it would be more economical and plausible analytically to model and empirically to investigate successions and recursions of visuality understood in a post-culturalist sense, that is, as nontotalized networks of forms of likeness, than in a high culturalist one, that is, as totalized activation of socially shared meaning-complexes.

In illustrating one of the overarching findings of visual neuroscience as he takes it to be relevant to aesthetics, art theory, and art history, Zeki presents a diagram (fig. 1) of a person (hard to say whether male or female) looking at either an array of coloured patches (such as what seems to be a painting on the left of the diagram) or a field of movement (such as the black-and-white televisual stimulus modelled on the right). According to Zeki (whose account I will accept for the purposes of argument here), neuroscientific research based on brain imaging techniques determines that different groups of cells in different parts of the visual brain – functionally specialized and localized groups – 'fire' when looking at the coloured and the moving stimuli respectively, processing the affordance: colour in the neural topography of the visual brain known as V4 and movement in V5. In turn, V4 processing of colour and V5 processing of motion

[15] Whitney Davis, 'Radical WAS: The Sense of History in World Art Studies', *World Art* 3 (2013): 201–10. As Summers writes, 'abstractions to the notional' that become 'evident in the results of operations' of production (such as Plane abstracted from Surface) are '*channelled back* into making' (my emphasis), yielding 'new relations on the level of the notional itself', making 'more operations imaginable and doable [which] in turn develop what may be regarded as pure relations'. David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 108, 113.

are integrated in our ordinary perception of a three-dimensional, full-colour, moving world of objects and states of affairs.[16]

The results for V4 are obtained by showing test subjects what is informally known as a 'Mondrian stimulus' (fig. 2) – a term originally applied by the inventor of Polaroid photography, Edwin H. Land, when he was investigating what he called 'retinex', the cortical processing of retinal images in colour vision (and in Land's case in particular, the phenomenon of colour constancy).[17] Zeki could be

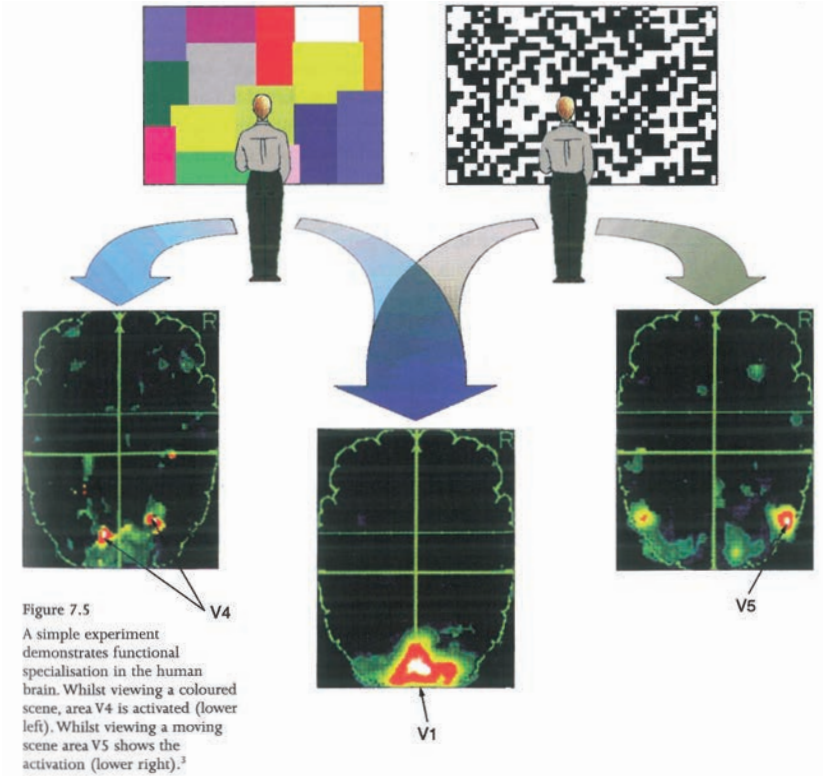

Figure 7.5
A simple experiment demonstrates functional specialisation in the human brain. Whilst viewing a coloured scene, area V4 is activated (lower left). Whilst viewing a moving scene area V5 shows the activation (lower right).[3]

Figure 1. Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63, fig. 7.5. Courtesy of Semir Zeki.

[16] Zeki, *Inner Vision*, 63, and fig. 7.5 (originally published in 1990). Strictly speaking, the experiment observes 'changes in cerebral blood flow in local regions of the brain'. 'When the cells of the cortex respond [to a stimulus], they do so by increasing their activity, specifically by increasing their resting electrical discharge rates. This excess activity results in an increased metabolic rate which in turn results in an increased demand for oxygenated blood. The local increase in blood flow, restricted to an area, can be detected with sophisticated imaging techniques' (*Inner Vision*, 63). For short, we say we observe the cells 'firing' or 'lighting up'.

[17] Edwin H. Land and John J. McCann, 'Lightness and Retinex Theory', *Journal of the Optical Society of America* 61 (1971): 1–11, and Edwin H. Land, 'The Retinex Theory of Colour Vision', *Proceedings of the Royal Institution of Great Britain* 47 (1974): 23–58. The 'Land Color Mondrian Experiment' is described by Zeki, *Inner Vision*, 186–89.

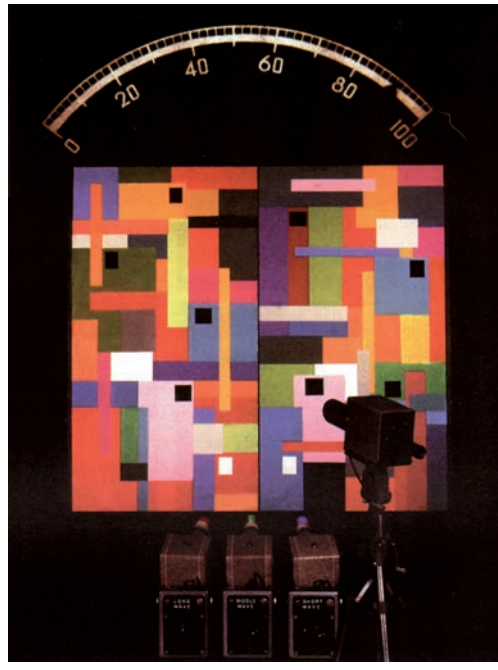

Figure 2: Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 187, fig. 18.1. Courtesy of Semir Zeki.

able to say, then, that when someone is looking at an actual painting by Mondrian their V4 is lighting up – that's what's going on 'aesthetically'.[18] And indeed it *is* what's going on aesthetically – it is what's given an analysis if not an explanation by knowing what gradients of colour and illumination activate which cells – when by 'aesthetics' we mean 'proprioception', seeing. But if by 'aesthetics' – as in cultural

[18] See Zeki, *Inner Vision*, 198. In order to make a variety of points about the perception of colour and motion, Zeki gives several brief accounts of paintings by Mondrian himself (for example, *Inner Vision*, 109–11, 140–41, 198–201, 205–6), but these accounts do not bear directly on the argument here. It is worth pointing out, however, that Land's 'Mondrian stimulus' was configured in ways that a 'real' Mondrian would not be; for example, much of the 'Mondrian Colour Experiment' as described by Zeki has to do with the constancy of 'green', a colour explicitly avoided by Mondrian, at least when he had fully worked out his mature configurative style of 'Neo-Plasticism'. I'm not sure whether a Mondrian Colour Experiment can be set up (and/or described) to conform to Mondrian's mature Neo-Plastic practice of using only the primary colours (red, yellow, and blue) and black and white. But for the purposes of argument let's assume it could. Moreover, Zeki's account of looking at a Mondrian (whether a stimulus 'Mondrian' or a 'real' Mondrian) seems to require that V5 – the 'motion' area – is *not* lighting up; Mondrian's classic abstracts are supposedly non-kinetic ('the closest Mondrian ever got to motion in his late work is to be found in his static *Boogie Woogies* [*sic*]', *Inner Vision,* 153, illustrating Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* of 1942–43). For purposes of argument (again), I won't dispute this, though strictly speaking it is false – one must move into position to look at a Mondrian presenting as flat and frontal.

and art history – we mean 'looking at (and getting some particular experience, feeling, meaning, and/or message from) an abstract painting by Mondrian', a Rampley-style critic could fairly ask 'So what?' Yes, V4 is activated in such-and-such a way – that's just a way to (re)describe 'looking at an abstract painting by Mondrian', seeing it. But certainly it is not, and to use my terms in *GTVC*, to describe what that looking is *like* for a particular real beholder, as distinct from the anonymous humanoid in Zeki's diagram (fig. 1). And I don't just mean what it's 'aesthetically' like in the colloquial sense – that is, pleasant, unpleasant, relaxing, boring. I mean what it's *analogically* like in networks of visible and invisible forms of likeness, whether or not our beholder fully belongs, say, to a modernist artworld in which Mondrian is to be liked *and* likened in certain highly particular ways – ways often held to be somewhat mysterious by noninitiates in that particular form of life and perhaps requiring a laborious art-historical dissection of Mondrian's formal, semiotic, and symbolic concerns as a painter, diverse and complex as they were.[19] Still, this scepticism about the neuroaesthetic contribution – 'So what?' – is a *culturalist* scepticism. It assumes that we aim to understand Mondrian (not to speak of any particular painting by Mondrian) in the modernist artworld which was (in theory) his form of life in painting (framing its forms of likenesses, or a large swathe of them at any rate) and in turn to gauge and calibrate our own reactions thereto – should we care, that is, to share in that life and those likenesses.

What difference does it make that a particular beholder is looking at an *actual* Mondrian, such as *Composition* (1921) now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 3), analogous for that beholder to other configurations in modernist art and to background images of the sensory tensions of modern life and their presentation and exploration in pure painterly abstraction? – call it an 'avant-garde' visuality or culture of looking.[20] Arguably V4 lights up in pretty much the same way whether the configuration is one such Mondrian (say, *Composition*) – that is, it bears the forms of likeness just outlined, belonging to that avant-garde

[19] For example, see Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), who attempts to work out Mondrian's configurative system (an inquiry criticized by Richard Wollheim as an unsustainable 'Latent Formalism': see Whitney Davis, 'Formalism as Art History', in Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 3:73–83); for a different approach, see Marek Wieczorek, 'Mondrian's First Diamond Composition: Hegelian Spatial Totality in the Starry Sky', in *Meanings of Abstract Art: Between Nature and Theory*, ed. Paul Crowther and Isabel Wünsche (New York: Routledge, 2012), 30–46.

[20] In order to position this real Mondrian as closely as possible to the Mondrian stimulus in Land's experiment – though it still is not very close at all – I have chosen an early example of Mondrian's experimentations leading up to his mature Neo-Plasticism; in *Composition*, red plus blue diluted with white gives a 'green' patch at the bottom edge, though as I have already noted Mondrian's mature Neo-Plasticism avoids green.

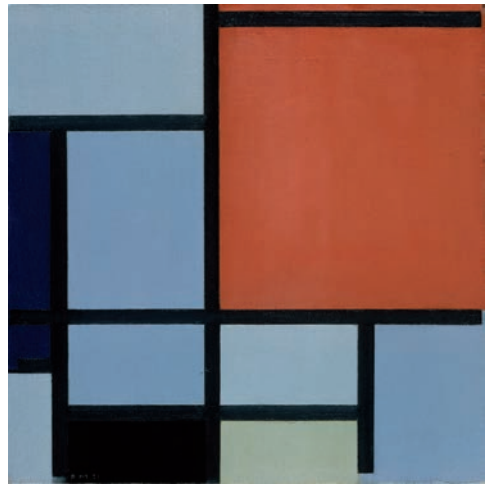

Figure 3: Piet Mondrian, *Composition*, 1921. 49.5 × 49.5 cm.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

visuality for our beholder – or, alternately, is *another* Mondrian (though it is still the artefact *Composition* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) with *different* likenesses – likenesses presumably constituted for a different beholder or for our beholder looking through the lens of a different visuality (fig. 4). (As Zeki sums up at the end of his book, 'at an elementary level, what happens in the brain of one individual when he or she looks at works of art is very similar to what happens in the brain of another'.)[21] In this different visuality, perhaps the painting belongs to a world of commercial experiments with peoples' likes and dislikes with respect to colour-samples arrayed in various ways – what some beholders in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York looking at *Composition* might activate as the salient analogical matrix for what they're seeing, though that way

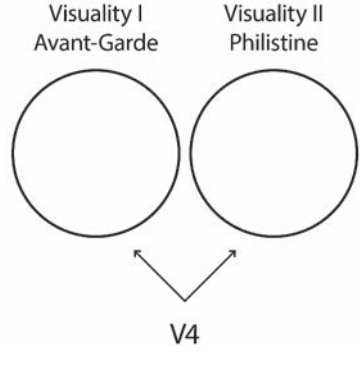

Figure 4

[21] Zeki, *Inner Vision*, 218.

of seeing might be described (by the avant-garde beholder) as a 'philistine' visuality (one in which the Mondrian is merely a quasi-decorative experiment with our colour hedonics, not 'art').[22] I am not aware of experiments designed explicitly to investigate this hypothesis, which I am accepting for the sake of argument, and there would be a number of difficulties in doing so. Nonetheless, it would seem to be open to experimental investigation (though perhaps not full experimental resolution) as an empirical research project in a post-culturalist art history setting out to test the scope and depth of visuality in vision – of a particular set of forms of likeness.

These considerations are not fanciful. In his investigations of his 'Mondrian stimulus', Land worked within a visuality – a scientist's and engineer's – deeply informed by a decades-long debate about colour constancy, a matter that might be of little interest to avant-garde and philistine beholders of modern art or, alternately, of *equal* interest to them – thus not a special distinction between them in the ways in which *Composition* has particular forms of likeness for them.[23] And at any rate, it seems reasonable to suppose that the population of subjects investigated in Zeki's experiments on the cortical localization and specialization of colour vision – that is, in identifying the activities of that part of the visual brain now known as V4 – would contain some people to whom the experimenters'

[22] This gradient – an acceptance of 'modern art' as art and a rejection of it as not-art – is explored at a theoretical level in Thierry de Duve's incisive study of the transformation in Kantian aesthetics (the judgement that an object is beautiful/not-beautiful) after the revolution caused by the invention of 'ready-mades' (the judgement that an object is art/not-art) (*Kant after Duchamp* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996]). De Duve does not investigate the gradient in psychological or social terms, that is, as a variation in judgement across/within a given population, though he clearly assumes that it exists historically. But such 'social psychology' of judgements of taste, 'arthood', and so forth, is a commonplace in the sociology of culture. (De Duve's analysis is undertaken partly in the light of such inquiries as Pierre Bourdieu's in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984]). What's new, if anything, is investigation by means of fMRI and other brain imaging techniques, where, as I am suggesting, the gradient is not mapped in the invariant activity of V4. Of course, in identifying 'avant-gardista' and 'philistine' I am simplifying for the sake of argument. An artist like Mondrian would have been familiar with the quasi-scientific colour experiments of the Bauhaus (see especially Clark V. Poling, *Bauhaus Color* [Atlanta, GA: High Museum of Art, 1975]). And an artist like Andy Warhol could wrap a practice around the oscillation and interpenetration of art-object/avant-garde and commodity-object/'populism' (undecidably both/and, either/or, neither/nor) (see especially Michael Golec, *The Brillo Box Archive: Aesthetics, Design, and Art* [Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008] and Anthony E. Grudin, '"A Sign of Good Taste": Andy Warhol and the Rise of Brand Image Advertising', *Oxford Art Journal* 33 [2010]: 211–32.)

[23] See Zeki, *Inner Vision*, 198–99. In particular, Land worked against two major earlier hypotheses that colour constancy is due to a conceptual idea of the 'real' colours of natural objects which we bring to *seeing* them inconstantly (Helmholtz) and/or that it rides on memories of the colours of things and their variations compiled into a constant (Hering).

'Mondrian stimulus' (let's suppose they actually used a *real* Mondrian *Composition*) would be like 'modern art' in an avant-garde sense and other people to whom it would be like it in a philistine sense (that is, '"art" that is not art'). In other words, the test population was likely differentiated internally by visualities though not by the invariant visual activity of V4 across the group.[24]

In addressing this question – why (arguably) does V4 light up in pretty much the same way for the avant-gardista and the philistine (fig. 4)? – the high culturalist, it seems to me, has two options. The first option is simply to ignore the material phenomenon of V4's neural activation, however substantive it might be as a neurophysiological event or process of great interest to neuroscientists; it's irrelevant, simply not salient in the description, historicization, and critique of avant-garde and philistine visualities as brought to bear on the products of modern art, such as Mondrian's *Composition*. It's not salient, of course, because V4 lights up pretty much in the same way for the avant-garde beholders *and* the philistine beholders, and therefore as an invariant correlation it says nothing one way or another (neurophysiologically) about their avant-gardism *or* philistinism, though this 'cultural difference' supposedly is the truly salient parameter – what *Composition* is differently *like* visually for the avant-gardistas and the philistines respectively.

This first option, however, would be contradicted by the second option for the high culturalist (though at different moments in his book Rampley seems to entertain both options). In virtue of the discriminably and even dramatically different visualities of avant-garde and philistine 'views' of modern art, V4 should indeed light up differently (fig. 5) – definitely and measurably so. Since it does not, one concludes, in turn, that whatever is going on perceptually and

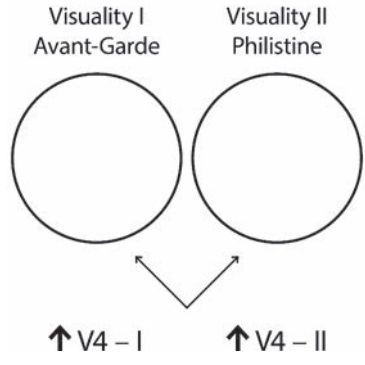

Figure 5

[24] For the original experiments, see Semir Zeki, 'La construction des images par le cerveau', *La Recherche* 21 (1990): 712–21; Semir Zeki et al., 'A Direct Demonstration of Functional Specialization in Human Visual Cortex', *Journal of Neuroscience* 11 (1991): 641–49.

cognitively (and visual-culturally) isn't correlated at all – causally and statistically – with the neural activity of V4 as identified by Zeki and Co.

Both of these options are unpalatable, to me at any rate. The first option is unpalatable because I think it's wrong: I think it's *not* irrelevant analytically that V4 lights up in pretty much the same way for the avant-gardista and the philistine – it's extremely significant. And the second option is unpalatable because it's implausible: it assumes the absolute mutual impenetrability of the visibility of colours and the ideology of art, pictorial representation, and so on, what is usually called the strict 'modularist' approach to perception and cognition – paradoxically enough, the very psychology that the highest of high culturalists presumably should not want to adopt at all.[25]

A post-culturalist art history potentially breaks free of all this. V4 lights up in pretty much the same way for avant-garde and philistine – and here 'pretty much' begins to bear an empirical and analytic burden – *not* because it has nothing to do with avant-gardism and philistinism, with their supposedly distinctive dispositions, beliefs, and purposes. It lights up in pretty much the same way because there are simply no such things as fully totalized avant-gardisms and philistinisms which *could* light up in different ways: they're chimaeras of culturology in part *precisely because they have no neural correlate*. Rather, a medley or garland of cross-cutting forms of likeness – successions of analogy *to* Mondrian's colours-and-shapes and *from* them – is substantially woven into *both* of these putatively opposed visualities, which have partly succeeded from them and partly fed back into them. And V4 lighting-up simply *is* the lighting-up of those successions and recursions – the *non*-cultural correlate (in the sciences of art) of the processes analytically modelled by *post*-culturalist art history.

A number of specifically art-historical implications could be drawn from this. Though I will state them apodictically here, they are hypotheses to be pursued in post-culturalist inquiry. First, the 'But Is It Art?' question that is often held to distinguish the visualities of avant-garde and philistine, and in which the aesthetics, criticism, and history of modern art has probably become too tangled up, is nowhere near as significant as high culturalists might suppose in the actual looking activities of almost all (on)lookers/beholders for whom works of modern art are visible at all in any way. Here we 'drop down' from culturalism. Second, there are more determinative forms of likeness shared by avant-garde and philistine, who *both* belong to practices of looking at works of modern art

[25] In the analytic philosophy of art, this strict modularism is identified with the invariantist claims of Danto. See especially Arthur C. Danto, 'Seeing and Showing', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 59 (2001): 5–11; for discussion, see *GTVC*, chap. 1.

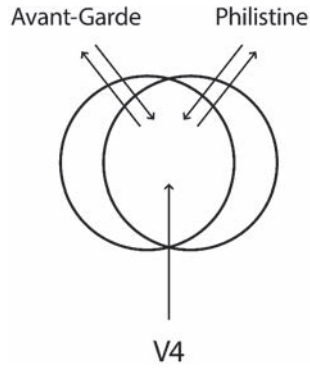

Figure 6

in *some* way, as distinct from the looking of people who have never seen any such works to look at in *any* way. Here we 'build up' from the analytics of culture (fig. 6). Third, these forms of likeness primarily pertain to what can be seen *of* the work ('seen-as-*as*', to use my terms), as distinct (analytically) from what can be seen *in* it, such as the modernist aesthetic acuity of Mondrian (for the avant-garde beholder) or the fakery of art galleries, dealers, and critics (for the philistine beholder).[26] Here we move towards what might be called a visio-centric formalism. Four, most of the constituting analogies of visible objects (such as *Composition*) in the domain of their putative 'meaning' have little to do with any given local instances of *seeing* them. Here we move *away* from visio-centric formalism; as argued in *GTVC*, 'meaning' always transpires partly elsewhere in the network, not only on the building site (or in looking at *Composition* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art) but also in the fruit market (or in the paint shop selling Mondrian-style colour samples to interior decorators). These implications – these hypotheses – are not fully consistent one with another, of course, and I'm not sure which I'd guess to be more likely. Indeed, and insofar as they need to be explored in the terms of a post-culturalist analysis, I propose to entertain all of them.

Whitney Davis
Department of History of Art, University of California at Berkeley,
416 Doe Library #6020, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA
wmdavis@berkeley.edu

[26] For seeing-as-*as*, see Whitney Davis, 'The Archaeology of Radical Pictoriality', in *Images and Imaging in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, ed. Elisabeth Nemeth et al. (Heusenstamm: ontos, 2011), 1–28, and *Visuality and Virtuality*, chap. 3.

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RECONNECTING WITH CULTURE: A REPLY TO WHITNEY DAVIS

HANS CHRISTIAN HÖNES

I

Reading Whitney Davis's text, one wonders whether art history – and the humanities in general – have made any significant advancements over the last hundred and twenty years or so. The methodological paradigms formulated in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century seem to be still pertinent to a lot of present day scholarship, and consequently a suitable target for methodological interventions such as Davis's. We continue to squabble over fundamental questions such as the interrelation of an 'idiographic' and a 'nomothetic' approach to history – a distinction, first made by the German psychologist and philosopher Wilhelm Windelband in 1894. In his programmatic lecture 'Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft', Windelband argued for a difference between the 'two cultures' of the Humanities and the Natural Sciences: nomothetic research (characteristic of the latter, including psychology) strives, according to Windelband, to formulate general laws, based on reductionist datasets.[1] It aims at an abstraction of the phenomena themselves, while idiographic approaches, dominant in the humanities, are dedicated to the analysis of concrete subjects that are historically and geographically specific.

In the light of the continued popularity of non-cultural, natural-historical approaches to art, such as neuroscience and evolutionary biology, this indeed remains a pressing question (though art historical applications of neuroscience probably had their heyday in the early 2000s). Davis's ideas for answering this question and overcoming such a divide constitute a timely and admirable analytical endeavour. Many art historians will especially agree with his plea not to adapt a 'culturological' bias when dealing with historical subjects, since culture is not an ontological fact, and taking certain 'ways of seeing' for granted is undoubtedly a reductive approach that flattens the historical experiences of any given individual.

This almost goes without saying. Hence, I struggle to think of examples for contemporary art historians who *do* defend such a 'culturological' bias.[2] Even fifty years ago, cultural historians, such as Sir Ernst Gombrich, regularly demonstrated

1 Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft: Rede zum Antritt des Rektorats der Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität Strassburg*, 3rd ed. (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1904).

2 The only example that might come to mind is by the literary critic David Holbrook, *Evolution and the Humanities* (Aldershot: Gower, 1987) – a book that is, however, again, 30 years old.

a thorough distaste for universal categories that would assume the a priori existence of the collective singular of culture, especially when imbued with Hegelian *Geist*. The 'belief in the existence of an independent supra-individual collective spirit' has, according to Gombrich 'blocked the emergence of a true cultural history'. He continued: 'Cultural history will make progress [if it] fixes its attention firmly on the individual human being.'[3] Looking at 'living people in concrete situations' and not at 'the metaphysics of history' is the task of the cultural historian.[4] Granted, Gombrich was an art historian with an exceptionally strong interest in 'nomothetic' sciences such as the psychology of perception, but this seems not to be in contradiction with his cultural historical self-definition – quite the contrary.

Against whom, then, is Davis fighting? Where are the hard-core culturologists who 'take for granted the ontological fact of culture'? Has nobody taken up Gombrich's lead from fifty years ago? While Davis quotes a lot of representatives for a strictly 'nomothetic' and non-cultural approach to art (including Onians, Zeki, and Dissanayake), he is conspicuously silent when it comes to the other camp. The only author that is quoted as a representative for a 'idiographic culturology in art history' is Michael Baxandall, who is, apparently, not even a hard-core defendant of 'idiographic' approaches, but quite open to findings of psychology and related disciplines, and, above all, 'highly self-conscious' of the implications of his approach.

All books by Baxandall quoted by Davis were, in any case, published before I was born – I'd thus be hesitant to call them 'recent' and representative for what art historians are interested in today. To most art historians, Baxandall's 'period eye' is probably a rather dated concept; anthropological and sociological approaches in the vein of Alfred Gell or Bruno Latour have since lured the field to prioritize micro-historical inquiries into the social relations between humans and objects. The reconstruction of small-scale networks has visibly pushed back any use of larger 'culturological' categories.

Again: where are the culturologists today? Would Davis class Christopher Wood among them? Ludmilla Jordanova? Alexander Marr? – to name just a few authors who have, to my mind, done rather interesting, complex, cultural historical work in recent years. My hunch would be that defenders of 'culturology' are rather to be found among those who take approaches that are consciously not 'idiographic', and, instead, practice a (computer-aided) 'distant reading' of texts and increasingly

3 Ernst H. Gombrich, 'In Search of Cultural History', in *Ideals and Idols: Essays on Values in History and in Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979), 50.

4 Cited in Peter Burke, 'Gombrich's Search for Cultural History', in *Meditations on a Heritage: Papers on the Work and Legacy of Sir Ernst Gombrich*, ed. by Paul Taylor (London: Holberton, 2014), 15.

of visual artefacts as well. For structuring such a large-scale analysis, writers like Franco Moretti depend on established, a priori categories such as 'suspense', which are sparked by the same literary devices for vast numbers of readers at different times.[5]

II

This leads me to another point. Davis speaks of 'idiographic culturology in art history'. I am not so sure that one can or should equate 'idiographic' and 'culturological' approaches. Some non-cultural approaches, such as Onians's, mapping the 'neural plasticity' of individuals by analysing their biographies are, on the other hand, fundamentally 'idiographic'.

A descriptive analysis of a historical constellation does not imply taking 'for granted the ontological fact of culture'. Quite the contrary. Only a sufficiently fine-grained historical record allows the historian to avoid drawing on 'large-scale sociologies', that is, cultural entities as a collective singular. Consequently, Davis advocates to '"build up" from the small-scale, ephemeral interactions between any two agents' – a procedure that 'requires high resolution in the archaeological and historical record'.[6]

This is, *cum grano salis*, a plea for microhistory, focusing on 'a limited number of artefacts and practices of making and using them'.[7] In this respect, Davis's approach shows some affinities with the historical *Konstellationsforschung*, though it is probably less idealist in its general outlook.[8] Davis is advocating the 'close reading' of constellations, placing the perceiving individual and his or her 'succession to visuality' at the centre. His hypothesis is that things never 'look quite the same for any two' beholders[9] – and that each protagonist's visual configuration therefore has to be studied individually. Such a focus on the individuality of a single beholder (or a single participant in a *Sprachspiel*) is quite refreshing, given the current popularity of approaches marginalizing the beholder's subjectivity in favour of claiming an autonomous, quasi-magical agency of form.[10]

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5 Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

6 Whitney Davis, 'Visuality and Vision: Questions for a Post-culturalist Art History', this issue of *Estetika*, 242.

7 Ibid., 243.

8 See Martin Mulsow and Marcelo Stamm, eds., *Konstellationsforschung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005). For a critique of the method, see the essay by Paul Franks in this volume, 'Fragen an die Konstellationsforschung' (pp. 173–87).

9 Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 319.

10 The most notorious of them is Horst Bredekamp, *Theorie des Bildakts* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008); 'Der Muschelmensch', in *Transzendenzen des Realen*, ed. Wolfgang Hogrebe (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2013), 13–74.

It is evident that the scrupulous method of this 'building up' would result in nothing less than a representation of history on the scale of 1:1. Davis's great contribution is that he does succeed in distilling general laws and concepts from his reading of historical evidence. As Hegel noted: 'it is from the factual details present in history that the general character of this peculiarity has to be derived'.[11] I wholeheartedly admire Davis's attempt to use a bottom-up approach as a means to develop a 'nomological' vocabulary for art history.[12] The success of Davis's concepts – like succession and replication – is evident, and slowly but surely seeps into art historical discourse. Yet I do wonder whether and how these insights can help to avoid 'culturology' in future 'idiographic' inquiries into historical material. Davis himself notes that 'post-culturalism' is a term that 'might offer a way in to the kind of analytic work that I've been doing'.[13] But does it also serve his 'idiographic' work? To put it differently: how to apply these theoretical insights to the practice of art historical research?

A non-totalizing approach might be 'more economical and plausible analytically',[14] but I wonder how much we lose if we subscribe to this very rigorous analytic standard. I have recently heard Davis himself using formulations such as 'cultural operations' or 'cultural networks' consistently during a lecture on homosexuality – an example for 'macro-sociologies of large established groups', which he is apparently not willing to give up.[15]

I can't think of any art historical text that does not rely, at least to some extent, on the 'totalized activation of socially shared meaning-complexes' that 'post-culturalism' intends to shun. Davis himself hardly avoids referring to such 'meaning-complexes', as is especially obvious in his writings on more 'classic' areas of art history. I will give just two examples from a subject in which we both have a shared interest: eighteenth and nineteenth-century British art.

In a recent essay on Joshua Reynolds, Davis discussed a series of portraits of one of Reynold's most famous sitters, Admiral Keppel, that were made over the course of his life.[16] As the study of the interactions between a painter and his patron, it is what Davis calls the study of 'social dyads: two agents in mutual

11 As quoted by Gombrich, 'In Search of Cultural History', 10.

12 See my review of *A General Theory of Visual Culture* and *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud*, by Whitney Davis, *Kunstchronik* 65 (2012): 489–93.

13 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 238.

14 Ibid., 247.

15 Whitney Davis, 'Imitation and Narcissism: Winckelmann under Psychoanalysis' (lecture, 'Under the Greek Sky: Imitation and Geographies of Art after Winckelmann' conference, King's College London / The Warburg Institute, London, 15–16 June 2017).

16 Whitney Davis, 'Serial Portraiture and the Death of Man', in *A Companion to British Art: 1600 to the Present*, ed. Dana Arnold and David Peters Corbett (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2013), 502–31.

coordination of forms of likeness'.[17] One might call this a traditional art historical inquiry: discussing the agency of sitter and portraitist, patron and painter, and how the latter navigates the fine line between 'likeness' and 'ideal', both changing over the course of the life of both men. As such, it quite naturally assumes that we *know* about the 'conventions of idealization and generalization' which prevailed at that time.[18] It also assumes a lot of knowledge about 'social and ideological factors', such as questions of gender identity.[19] For example, 'women, unlike men, were not usually encouraged to reflect energetically upon the fact of their eventual demise'.[20] Nothing wrong with that – but it assumes that both Reynolds and Keppel, as well as other potential clients shared cultural notions that were held by the wider society.

In another, slightly earlier essay, Davis discussed the making and reception of a famous piece of Victorian sculpture, Ronald Gower's *Shakespeare Memorial*, and especially his controversial statue of the notably sexualised Prince Hal. In a methodological introduction, outlining his 'archaeological' method, Davis writes, that 'cultural ideas […] make sense only in the context of ramified networks of imaginative identificatory apprehension'.[21] What follows is a scrupulous reconstruction of the different horizons of understanding of the artist and the educated public. Again, I do agree with that, as almost every art historian would. The essay is a scrupulous historical study of cultural context, and as such, it is fundamentally 'culturological', assuming certain horizons of understanding which were readily available for 'knowledgeable viewers',[22] some of them entirely in line with the contemporary cultural understanding of Shakespeare ('entirely typical of its time').[23]

To be perfectly clear: this is really good art historical writing. But it is more or less what iconology and reception studies set out to do: reconstructing the horizon of understanding that was available for a given set of beholders. Some have called this a 'complex', context-oriented art history.[24] I am all in for that – but does it really necessitate a new label such as 'post-cultural art history'? I doubt it.

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17 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 243.
18 Davis, 'Serial Portraiture', 506.
19 Ibid., 510.
20 Ibid., 511.
21 Whitney Davis, 'Lord Ronald Gower and "The Offending Adam"', in *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain, c. 1880–1930*, ed. David John Getsy (London: Ashgate, 2004), 63–104.
22 Ibid., 83.
23 Ibid., 70.
24 Wolfgang Kemp, 'Kontexte: Für eine Kunstgeschichte der Komplexität', *Texte zur Kunst* 2 (1991): 89–101.

For epochs such as prehistory, where one simply 'cannot get close enough to individual human agents', Davis advocates drawing on hypothetical scenarios. In a recent essay on 'prehistoric pictoriality', he started, for example, with the assumption that a prehistoric beholder might have experienced a specific 'presence' when looking at a cave painting of a bison – a 'presence' that goes beyond illusionistic pictoriality.[25] He is setting an a priori condition to gain a fundament from which to start his analytical work. Davis would probably qualify this as an exercise in '"counterfactualism" (working analytically with logically possible processes)'.[26]

I wonder whether in such cases 'culturologist' thinking doesn't sneak in through the back door. He does, in any case, accept a certain 'way of seeing' as a hypothetical possibility – a 'way of seeing' that, given the vast number of similar artefacts, would only make sense if shared by a larger group of people, although the individual's reaction will nevertheless be specific. Yet, I am not sure whether this is *that* different to the assumption of a 'period eye', for example that a (generic) Renaissance beholder in Florence *c.*1460 was attracted by a deep blue sky on an altarpiece because he knew that ultramarine was a really expensive pigment. Why should Davis's hypothetical beholder be regarded as an example of 'counterfactualism', while the 'ideal type' of the period eye is 'culturologist'? Such a distinction would be moot and would probably only mean that the latter is better founded in the historical record (that is, less hypothetical) – although in many (Early) Modern cases, the datasets available are also rather thin. No enquiry into almost any historical material can operate without drawing on some 'socially shared meaning-complex[es]' as the necessary starting point for exploring more detailed 'successions of visuality' and horizons of understanding.

III

In all of these articles by Davis, I see little attempt to include 'non-cultural' approaches, although they are certainly informed by his 'nomological' reasoning, influenced by his take on the Wittgensteinian *Sprachspiel*. How to reconcile 'culturological' and 'non-cultural' approaches nevertheless remains a pressing question. One possible solution might lie not in proceeding to 'post-culturalism' but, on the contrary, in going back to *cultural history* proper. That is, to what cultural history once was before the remarkable split into two cultures took place around the time of Windelband.

[25] Whitney Davis, 'A Thin Red Line: Die Präsenz prähistorischer Bildlichkeit', in *Einwegbilder*, ed. Inge Hinterwaldner, Michael Hagner, and Vera Wolff (Munich: Fink, 2016), 55–83.

[26] Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 243.

The original idea of *Kulturgeschichte* might lend itself to making claims similar to those put forward by Davis under the shorthand 'succession to visuality'. The original strength of *Kulturgeschichte* was precisely what a 'post-cultural' approach would claim – namely, that it 'can situate itself in productive and practical ways in relation to *non*-cultural inquiries in art history'. *Kulturgeschichte* was not always as 'culturological' as it may now seem.

Just a couple of examples from the early years of this approach. In 1857, Henry Thomas Buckle published *The History of Civilisation in England*. The extremely successful book seems, on first sight, to be a staunchly non-cultural approach: the 'physical agents […] namely, Climate, Food, Soil, and the General Aspects of Nature' have a crucial and determining impact on human behaviour.[27] This is a thought already present in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's climate theory, set out at the beginning of his *History of the Art of Antiquity*. Winckelmann describes climate (that is, non-cultural factors) as a pivotal influence on basic cultural processes such as agriculture and habitation, which then in turn influences art-making, symbolism, religious beliefs. From this foundation, Winckelmann develops a complex model of imitation and recursion that seems paradigmatic for Davis's work in many respects. While the sculptors model their works after the bodies of the most beautiful athletes (toned not only by exercise, but also by the benevolent influence of the Greek sky), the young men in the gymnasium take in turn these artworks as the models for their physical self-cultivation.[28]

Buckle developed this into a theory of 'reciprocal modification [from which] all events must necessarily spring': 'we have man modifying nature, and nature modifying man'. The sequence of reciprocal modifications and influences between the natural and social conditions of man might thus originate in a rigidly determined naturalism, but turns, once the dice are rolling, into an essentially cultural account. All in all, one could describe this as a process of replication, recursion, and sequence, not unlike Davis's approach. Only that this is not post-cultural, but the beginning of the very tradition of cultural history (built bottom-up) that the term seemingly aims to overcome.

With regard to this tradition, I would say that there is no need for 'post-cultural' art history. The good old cultural history might be a more robust tool than some might think. In fact, 'post-cultural' approaches are not worlds apart from what

27 Henry Thomas Buckle, *The History of Civilization in England* (London: Richards, 1903), 18, 30.

28 Whitney Davis, 'Queer Beauty: Winckelmann and Kant on the Vicissitudes of the Ideal', in *Queer Beauty: Sexuality and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Freud* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 23–50.

cultural historians like Buckle (and maybe even Gombrich) attempted. In that respect, I tend to agree with Christopher Wood: 'worrying about the name of a discipline is a pastime for bureaucrats'.[29]

Hans Christian Hönes
The Warburg Institute, School of Advanced Study, University of London,
Woburn Square, London WC1H 0AB, UK
Hoenes@bilderfahrzeuge.org

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[29] Christopher Wood, reply to 'Visual Culture Questionnaire', *October* 77 (1996): 68–70.

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A POST-CULTURALIST AESTHETICS? A COMMENTARY ON DAVIS'S 'VISUALITY AND VISION'

JAKUB STEJSKAL

I

'Post-culturalism' names a stance against the reification of culture into a stable explanatory context of artefacts' appearances and meaning.[1] It refuses to be satisfied with the construction of culture as a '"head office" which decrees […] what artefacts will look like'.[2] In art-historical theory, post-culturalism is characterized by two closely related 'post-formalist' tenets: (1) format before form: before asking what meaning an artefact's form 'expresses' or what style it instantiates, one needs to establish what features of the artefact's surface and setting contribute to its salience, or, in other words, with respect to what visual attention is the artefact formatted or situated.[3] (2) Pragmatics before semantics: what makes an artefact visually conspicuous in a certain context may remain

This paper builds on the remarks I made at 'Towards a Post-culturalist Art History', a workshop at the Freie Universität Berlin, on 28 April 2016, which focused on the recent theoretical writings of Whitney Davis. I thank the Dahlem Humanities Center for hosting the event and the Dahlem Research School for providing the funding. I also extend my gratitude to Hans Christian Hönes and Gerhard Wolf, who participated in the workshop, and to *Estetika*'s co-editor, Tereza Hadravová, for her comments and suggestions. Most importantly, thanks are due to Whitney Davis, whose support and participation were instrumental in bringing both the workshop and this section of *Estetika* into existence. Work on this paper was supported by the German Research Foundation Grant STE 2612/1-1.

1 As Davis notes, the term (though not the attitude it describes) emerged during our preparatory discussions prior to the Berlin workshop. See Whitney Davis, 'Visuality and Vision: Questions for a Post-culturalist Art History', this issue of *Estetika*, 238.

2 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 216.

3 For various versions of this idea, see George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 41; Meyer Schapiro, 'On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs', *Semiotica* 1 (1969): 223–42; David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 335–36; Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl, *Bildtheorie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2014), 136–211. The relevant sentiment is captured – here in the context of depiction theory – by Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 166: 'The question of discerning a picture-maker's intentions, then, must be shifted from the spot in which it is commonly asked – the supposed problem of *discerning what the maker's picture means.* It must be refocused on what actually decides that issue, namely, the problem of *discerning what marks the maker effectively intended to preserve* and for what reasons (attending to which aspects of the marks) and purposes (projecting what role these aspects can play).'

invisible until one starts to reconstruct the behavioural patterns it exploits. In different use contexts (sometimes even within the same 'culture'), one and the same artefact can take on different visual aspects.[4] These two principles – or perhaps tendencies within the same post-formalist impulse – are post-culturalist because they repudiate the 'black box' approach to artistic expression as an emanation of culturally established meaning through naturally visible form.

At first glance, these tenets address the question of reconstructing strategies employed to draw visual attention to artefacts, that is, to make them stand out visually for whatever purpose. What may be less apparent is that they also concern the question of reconstructing the standards of success at capturing visual attention. Embodying a meaning, instantiating a style, or any other way of being visually conspicuous may be comparatively more or less successful; sometimes, the bar is set relatively low or not much is at stake socially in failing to reach it. But as the social stakes increase, the question of comparative success or failure and the corresponding ability to tell the difference gain in importance: the ability to 'see' what makes, say, this warrior shield's pattern more fearsome than others or this king's portrait more regal becomes a crucial skill. Yet this question has not figured prominently in post-formalist writings. The following is a plea for an extension of the post-formalist (and by implication, post-culturalist) inquiry to the question of value.

This reluctance to address the topic of evaluation may be a side-effect of an effort to make a clear distinction between the reconstructive task of post-formalist art history and aesthetic inquiry. David Summers, for example, claims: 'works of art […] were *not* made for our aesthetic experience […] at least until it was possible to frame the intention of making "aesthetic" works of art.'[5] And in his writings on the general theory of visual culture and what he calls a 'historical phenomenology of pictures', Whitney Davis has been consistent in explicitly distancing himself from any involvement in explanations of the status of pictures as objects of aesthetic interest.[6] Like Summers, Davis sees questions of aesthetics as being relevant only to a particular form of historically developed sensitivity that has informed artistic practice (at least in the 'fine arts') in the West during the last two centuries and has been codified in an 'aesthetic ideology'. For Davis, aesthetic aspectivity – objects demonstrating aesthetic properties – is a form of

4 Susan Feagin, 'Paintings and Their Places', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1995): 260–68; Summers, *Real Spaces*, 27; Whitney Davis, 'What Is Post-Formalism? (Or, *Das Sehen an sich hat seine* Kunst*geschichte*)', *nonsite.org*, no. 7 (2012), § 5, http://nonsite.org/article/what-is-post-formalism-or-das-sehen-an-sich-hat-seine-kunstgeschichte.

5 Summers, *Real Spaces*, 59.

6 Davis, *General Theory*, 3–5; Whitney Davis, *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Prehistory to Perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

visuality, that is, a visual culture, to which one needs to 'succeed' in order to acquire a sensitivity that makes aesthetic aspects perceptible. It then follows that it would be misleading for an art historian to ascribe aesthetic aspectivity to objects intended for other visualities – unless it can be demonstrated that aesthetic sensibilities were developed within them.

Yet in some respects (and, given the subject matter of the discipline of art history, not surprisingly), questions of aesthetics, that is, very roughly speaking, of privileging artefacts for their looks, are never far from Davis's and Summers's concerns. It could be argued with some justification that Summers's ambitious project of a post-formalist world art history aims at developing tools for the reconstruction of historically specific norms for privileging certain looks of artefacts; these norms are embodied in what he calls the spatiotemporal 'second nature' that informs, and is informed by, the production of art objects.[7] Concerning Davis, one need not look any further than the present essay, where he acknowledges three applications of the term 'aesthetics': as describing proprioception (close to its etymological meaning); as a label for culturally embedded processes of meaningful encounters with works of art (modern aesthetic ideologies); and, finally, as a 'colloquial' term for positive or negative responses to art.[8] Accordingly, one can be said to be aesthetically experiencing a Mondrian (to stick with Davis's example) as soon as one visually registers its surface; or when one's looking at a Mondrian involves the kind of visual-cultural competence in which the category 'abstract painting by Mondrian' makes sense; or when one responds to the work's merits. Davis allows for all three meanings of the term to capture some features of visually encountering a Mondrian within a visual culture (or visual cultures) where things like Mondrian paintings 'look like art'.

To be sure, Davis's main interest lies in 'aesthetic questions in the ancient etymological sense',[9] more specifically, in how sensory perception integrates, and gets integrated into, 'successions' to and 'recursions' within and between visual cultures; these cultures, as Davis rightly insists, need not be aesthetic in the second sense, that is, need not be of the kind where a Mondrian is made sense of in virtue of its looking like a work of art. But the relationship between the first two senses of aesthetics (pertaining to sensory awareness and pertaining to ideologies of art) and the third, 'colloquial', seems to me also to repay close scrutiny in a post-culturalist inquiry. After all, works of art like Mondrian paintings do not become conspicuous just because they are integrated into 'networks of

7 Summers, *Real Spaces*, 53–55.
8 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 249–50.
9 Davis, *General Theory*, 5; see also his introduction to *Visuality and Virtuality*.

visible and invisible forms of likeness',[10] but also because of their relative success in displaying merited aspects. Works of art are intended to merit a certain response, but for various reasons they may fail even when they are recognized as candidates for appreciation (they are 'boring', 'uninteresting', and so on). They are usually not intended just to attract a specific kind of visual attention, but also to meet or exceed the normative standards inherent to their category – typically in competition with other artefacts in that category.[11] A comprehensive grasp of the reasons for an artefact's appearance – tools for which Davis has been developing – must therefore include a consideration of its comparative standing vis-à-vis other artefacts vying for the same kind of visual attention.

This consideration applies in principle to all objects relying for their visual conspicuousness at least in part on attracting attention to their appearance and in turn being assessed on this merit. Notice that at this level of generalization, such a characterization arguably does not rely on the historically developed preconceptions about artistic expression, medium, or purpose which we normally associate with modern Western art culture. The practices that fit the description may not necessarily aim at providing an intrinsically rewarding experience of the appearance of artefacts[12] and can be found outside the 'aesthetic ideologies of modern art' as well. The fear-inducing designs of warriors' shields of the Asmat of Irian Jaya, for example, would pass for products of such practices, insofar as it would make sense in the given visual culture to exercise sensitivity towards the varying degrees of frightfulness of the shields based on their looks.[13] It may prove difficult and often even impossible to decide whether, when, and for whom an artefact's visual conspicuousness has relied on assessing its appearance. This

10 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 250.

11 On the notion of 'merited response', see John McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities', in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 131–51. For a standard account of categorial anti-formalism, see Kendall Walton, 'Categories of Art', in *Marvellous Images: On Values and the Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 195–219.

12 'Intrinsically rewarding' is the universal characteristic of (good) art according to Stephen Davies, *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 187.

13 Gell uses the example of the richly designed Asmat shields which 'had part in the deadly psychological warfare of headhunting' rather than 'intended to elicit "aesthetic" appreciation' to argue against a 'cross-cultural aesthetics' (*Art and Agency*, ix). Currie objects that the former does not rule out the latter and posits that 'the beauty of the design and execution [of an Asmat shield] add to the sense of confidence and power the piece expresses, and hence contributes to its fearful impression'. But there is a third option: the recognition of the shield's fear-inducing quality requires a normative sensibility that does not lead to any kind of gratification of the senses as Currie seems to imply. See Gregory Currie, 'Art and the Anthropologists', in *Aesthetic Science: Connecting Minds, Brains, and Experience*, ed. Arthur Shimamura and Stephen Palmer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122.

difficulty, however, should be familiar to any bona fide post-culturalist like Davis, for it is just a version of the difficulty that potentially affects any historical research into reasons for the looks of a particular artefact, which tries to scale down to the level of actual beholders' encounters with it.

I have tried to show that a case immune to the misgivings about aesthetic inquiry expressed by Davis and Summers could be built for a post-culturalist reconstruction of evaluative responses to artefacts' appearances, since it would not assume that the range of such responses were somehow linked to the artefacts' potential to provide an intrinsically rewarding gratification of the senses, of the intellect, or of both together.[14] Whether such a broad investigation into the nature of evaluative attitudes towards visually conspicuous artefacts ought to be labelled 'aesthetics' is perhaps less important than the observation that it represents a necessary step towards establishing whether aesthetic appreciation in the more traditional, 'colloquial' sense is aimed at. For a post-culturalist, it cannot be ruled out that the question of what looking at an artefact is '"aesthetically" like in the colloquial sense – that is, pleasant, unpleasant, relaxing, boring'[15] – shows up as relevant in visual cultures that have not developed anything like modern aesthetic ideologies.

II

Instead of further arguing the case for a post-culturalist aesthetics, I want to point to two recent contributions to the aesthetics of pictorial art, each arguably elaborating philosophically on one of the two post-formalist tenets while explicitly situating themselves close to Davis's brand of post-culturalism: Alva Noë's strange-tools theory and Bence Nanay's 'semi-formalist' account of aesthetic attention.[16] The former develops a philosophical argument for the irreplaceable role of evaluating objects' appearances in the development of any human culture as well as for the essential place of art in it. The latter offers philosophical tools for a fine-grained description of strategies for drawing visual attention.

Noë's strange-tools theory of art provides a speculative genealogy of the emergence of art in human culture.[17] Although the theory covers all major branches of the arts, I will briefly comment only on Noë's treatment of pictorial

[14] This is an assumption built into some of the contributions to the recent revival of philosophical interest in the anthropological grounding of 'art behaviour'. See Currie, 'Art and the Anthropologists', and Davies, *Artful Species*.

[15] Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 250.

[16] For Noë's remarks on Davis, see Alva Noë, *Strange Tools: Art and Human Nature* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 231–32; Nanay lists both Summers's *Real Spaces* and Davis's *General Theory* as compatible with his 'semi-formalism'. See Bence Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 106.

[17] In this sense, he is part of the revival mentioned in note 14.

art on which he exemplifies most vividly the process of 'looping down'. For Noë, experiencing pictures (or pictorial seeing) is what enables us to develop what he calls an aesthetic sense. Seeing the world pictorially means seeing it in a state of detachment, seeing it as composed of objects. Aesthetic sense is based on this kind of detached seeing; it is a contemplative, normative attitude that allows us to evaluate and investigate the world around us. Human beings can assume this attitude towards virtually anything, but they learn it by looking at pictures. The invention of pictures is at the same time a paradigm case of art-making, for it captures its essential feature, that of bringing into focus our habitual means of interacting with the world by making them strange (hence the title of his book, *Strange Tools*). Essential to Noë's account is that art pictures also 'loop down'; they inform pictorial practices that in turn shape our visual experiences; art pictures then challenge these habits of seeing and depicting in a new loop, and so on.[18]

Noë's account of looping down bears obvious similarities to Davis's notions of 'succession' and 'recursion', as Noë himself notes.[19] Unlike Davis, however, Noë is writing a theory of art; he identifies a moment in the looping process when a de-familiarizing effect puts picturing (or possibly other) technologies on display. For this reason, he holds that art-making is (or must have been at some point) an essential component of any human culture. At the same time, because pictorial art loops down and influences picture-making and visual attention, for Noë there are in principal no intrinsic symptoms of arthood, since we cannot tell a strange tool (for example, an 'art picture') from a standard one (for example, a picture serving a mere communicative function) unless we grasp what practice it is intended to challenge in the first place.[20] It is this element of the strange-tools theory that relates to the 'pragmatics before semantics' tenet of post-formalism: what makes an artefact a successful work of art in a certain context may remain invisible until one starts to reconstruct the behavioural patterns it exploits.

The idea of experiencing art as being parallel to encountering strange objects that one tries to make sense of also makes its way into Bence Nanay's notion of aesthetic attention. The latter is a sub-species of distributed attention unprompted by any pre-determined habit of looking so that one distributes one's attention across the object in order to make sense of it.[21] In aesthetic appreciation of pictures as pictures, Nanay argues, aesthetic attention is typically distributed in a twofold way between its design and scene properties, that is, between the configuration of the picture's surface and what we see in it.[22] In a quasi-Wölfflinian

18 Noë, *Strange Tools*, 51–57.
19 Ibid., 231, 235.
20 Ibid., 99.
21 Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy*, 13–35.
22 Ibid, 59–62.

move, Nanay claims that such an aesthetic attention to design-scene properties has a history that – in Western painting – does not go back further than the mid-sixteenth century. He supports this claim by noting the increased incidence around this time of pictures that rely for their effect on the involvement of twofold attention to design-scene properties (for example, Arcimboldo's portraits/still lifes; the classic 'closed form' paintings of Raphael or Leonardo) and, conversely, by pointing to a conspicuous absence of any reflection of their relevance prior to the sixteenth century.[23] He closes the discussion by suggesting that twofold aesthetic attention to pictures may prove to be a fairly recent phenomenon in the Western history of art appreciation.[24]

I do not want to go into how convincing Nanay's historical reconstruction of sixteenth-century visual attention is. For the present purposes, it suffices to stress that his decision to address the problem of pictorial art appreciation in terms of visual attention complies with the first tenet of post-formalism, 'format before form'. Instead of discussing the historical shift in taste in terms of a changing preference for stylistic or formal choices where the structure of attentive behaviour ('aesthetic attitude') remains the same and what changes are the preferred values (say, 'closed form' versus 'opened'), Nanay treats the shift as one of adjusting the picture's configuration to the demands of a peculiar visual attention.

III

My selective reading of Noë and Nanay, and the fact that both are referenced in Davis's essay,[25] is not meant to suggest that the two tread the same philosophical path (or that their accounts are fully compatible with post-culturalism). For that, the differences are too striking. In fact, the last two possible directions of post-culturalist inquiry Davis lays out at the end of his essay – away and towards visio-centric formalism – inadvertently capture the most relevant difference (at least for a post-culturalist) between the respective philosophical positions. Nanay veers towards what Davis characterizes as 'visio-centric formalism', that is, research into normative stances assumed in response to artworks' visible qualities.[26] Davis has a tendency to frame such attitudes as manifestations of social distinction, or as 'ideologies' such as the philistine or the avant-garde, and that is surely a valid approach. But it cannot tell the whole story, for these normative stances are also exercises of taste *within* visual cultures, including those that are not aesthetic

23 Ibid., 149–56.
24 Ibid., 159.
25 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 238, 246.
26 Ibid., 255.

ideologies in Davis's sense: some works fare better, some worse, even though they may vie for the same kind of recognition. Nanay's visio-centric 'semi-formalism', as he calls his position, provides tools for capturing this side of post-culturalist aesthetics.

According to semi-formalism, the necessary condition of aesthetic attention is that it is aimed towards properties of an artefact which are constituted by but not reduced to visually salient surface properties. It follows that there are more ways one can focus or distribute one's attention in relation to the surface properties of an artefact, the twofold design-scene attention that Nanay sees as central to the appreciation of post-fifteenth-century easel painting being just one. The fact that Nanay is deliberately vague about sufficient requirements for an aesthetic experience should actually be counted as a virtue by the post-culturalist since it makes aesthetic semi-formalism potentially applicable outside the Western art context; this possibility is implied in Nanay's admitting that attention to design-scene properties is not the only form that aesthetic attention to pictures needs to assume.[27]

Noë's strange-tools theory moves in the opposite direction, away from visio-centric formalism. This is largely due to the demanding notion of art Noë defends. Appreciation of an artefact's 'decorative aspects' or 'virtuosity in craftsmanship', for example, is irrelevant to encounters with art proper, in so far as it is not an appreciation of 'the way [these aspects] subvert or undercut or abrogate the authority of what is normally taken for granted'.[28] In Noë's eyes, art is strange and difficult, it puzzles us, 'disrupts business as usual and puts the fact that we carry on business as usual on display'.[29] Understanding art as such a profoundly philosophical praxis would raise the bar for what deserves the label, but it would also raise the stakes for historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists in pursuit of art practices, many of whom have regarded decorative aspects and displays of craftsmanship as sufficient marks of arthood.

To come back to the fear-inducing Asmat shields, when one applies a rigorous version of Noë's strange-tools theory, it may be next to impossible to determine what kind of subversion (if any) they serve, and it likely won't help us understand why some of the shields' designs are considered more fearsome than others. If what we are after is the reason for artefacts' appearances, studying their formatting and the corresponding visual attention – a topic Noë does not really discuss – may put us on a firmer footing heuristically. This reconstructive work

27 See Nanay, *Aesthetics as Philosophy*, 58–59. Nanay, it has to be said, is not too keen on entertaining the possibility of differences in distributed attention across cultures. See ibid., 158–59.

28 Noë, *Strange Tools*, 104.

29 Ibid., 238.

may in effect help track the shields' visual strangeness, only not necessarily one that issues from the philosophical work they do for their audience: an Asmat shield might draw heightened attention to itself as opposed to other shields not because it is a 'strange tool' in Noë's sense, but simply because it is particularly fearsome.[30]

IV

Davis suggests that the implications of post-culturalism he draws for art history may not be mutually consistent.[31] If that were the case with the two tendencies – namely, away and towards visio-centric formalism – a problem would arise for the integrity of post-formalism, which I identified as central to post-culturalist art history and aesthetics. For these two tendencies rely on the two fundamental post-formalist tenets. Are, then, semi-formalist reconstructions of visual attention irreconcilable with anti-formalist reconstructions of an artefact's cultural relevance? The sense of irreconcilability may arise, for example, when the difficulty or strangeness, which Noë makes the distinguishing mark of art, appears to evade any analysis of the strategies of entrapping attention. But that conclusion – as I have suggested – is not inevitable; the possibility of a post-culturalist aesthetic theory that would complement post-culturalist art history remains open. In fact, if I am anywhere near right in my analysis, guarded optimism is appropriate, thanks in no small part to Davis; for it is in conversation with his post-culturalist art history that the two recent philosophical contributions towards such an aesthetics – Noë's and Nanay's – have been advanced.

Jakub Stejskal
jakub.stejskal@fu-berlin.de

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30 I develop a version of this argument in more detail in 'Art's Visual Efficacy: The Case of Anthony Forge's Abelam Corpus', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* (forthcoming).

31 Davis, 'Visuality and Vision', 255.

–––––––. 'Visuality and Vision: Questions for a Post-culturalist Art History.' *Estetika: The Central European Journal of Aesthetics* 54 (2017): 238–57.

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RESPONSES TO STEJSKAL AND HÖNES

WHITNEY DAVIS

My thanks to Jakub Stejskal and Hans Christian Hönes for their thoughtful and challenging comments on the essay to which they have addressed themselves here and on my work more broadly speaking, especially *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (*GTVC*) – the first book in a trilogy of which the second, *Visuality and Virtuality* (*V & V*), will have appeared when the present texts go to print.[1]

I

Stejskal focuses on the ways in which a 'post-culturalist *aesthetics*' could and undoubtedly should complement – in some cases refine, in some cases augment – the 'post-culturalist *art history*' that I provisionally described in my essay as a notional spin-off of a 'general theory' of visibility, virtuality, and visuality or visual culture. His lucid comments motivate me to revise some formulations, which were too strong or too limiting. And his remarks are especially useful because they take a key example – and therefore certain methodological orientations and theoretical propositions – from the 'anthropology of art' advocated by Alfred Gell (in turn partly indebted to the ethnographic aesthetics of Anthony Forge), with which I'd like to see my own approach to be compatible without having so far figured out exactly how it might be and despite having been critical of some ramifications of Gell's model.[2]

Stejskal begins by noticing my reluctance in *GTVC* wholly to assimilate my investigations of what I have called the 'successions' of visuality and its 'recursions' in the visual field (what in *V & V* I more properly call 'visual space'), that is, investigations of the 'aspective' recognizability of the 'look' or 'visual appearance' of artefacts (especially those made to be used *for* such aspects and the visuality they relay), to questions of the aesthetics of 'art'. As he points out, my first and third senses of 'aesthetics' (as he identifies them) must be at the heart of the inquiry into the proprioception ('seeing') of these very same artefacts (first

[1] Whitney Davis, *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), and *Visuality and Virtuality: Images and Pictures from Prehistory to Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). The third volume, *Space, Time, and Depiction*, is currently being finalized.

[2] See Whitney Davis, 'Abducting the Agency of Art', in *Art History and Agency: Alfred Gell and the Anthropology of Art*, ed. Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 199–218.

sense of aesthetics – 'etymological') and into its hedonics and affective qualities (third sense, 'colloquial').

His summary is fair: 'for Davis, aesthetic aspectivity – objects demonstrating aesthetic properties – is a form of visuality, that is, a visual culture, to which one needs to "succeed" in order to acquire a sensitivity that makes aesthetic aspects perceptible. It then follows that it would be misleading for an art historian to ascribe aesthetic aspectivity to objects intended for other visualities – unless it can be demonstrated that aesthetic sensibilities were developed within them'. (Of course, the final qualifying clause tells the whole story in worldwide anthropologial terms; I'm not now committed, if I ever was, to the hard-core position that 'art' is only a product of modern European practices of image and artefact making and of discourses about them.) In *V & V* I've had to make a similar move, though for somewhat different reasons than in *GTVC*: the book concerns itself with depiction (what I call 'pictoriality' and the 'pictorial succession') in such a way that I do not want to be limited to considerations of pictorial *art* insofar as many media historians, anthropologists, and aestheticians would not subsume depiction to art. Indeed, the philosophical psychology of depiction, for instance as pursued by Bence Nanay, is quite distinct from the philosophical psychology of art, for instance as pursued by Alva Noë, though both inquiries find one of their homes in 'aesthetics' and notable aestheticians, such as Richard Wollheim, have made major contributions to both.

In retrospect, I can see that my reluctance in *GTVC* had to do with the particular status (for me) of the *second* sense of 'aesthetics' identified by Stejskal: namely, the modern Western 'ideology of art' that a good swathe of professional philosophical aesthetics in the twentieth century seemed to have assumed in an unduly 'ahistorical' way, 'essentializing' and 'universalizing' it, or at any rate was widely *said* to have so assumed according to a vociferous group of neo-Marxist, social, and so-called new art historians in the 1980s.[3] (The grip of Terry Eagleton's 1988 *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* on students and young scholars of my generation in the humanities would be hard to overestimate.) Moreover, recall that Gell launched *Art and Agency* with an acerbic critique – albeit misguided and exaggerated in some ways – of what he called 'Kantian aesthetics' as the default aesthetics of art history and of an earlier generation of anthropology of art. And already certain postmodern and anti-formalist historians had developed

[3] As a convenient way to track this discussion as it unfolded in institutional, academic, and intellectual terms, compare the first (1998) and second (2014) versions of Moxey's entry on 'Canon' in the *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. See Keith Moxey, 'Politicising the Canon in Art History', in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1:338–41; 'Whither the Art Historical Canon', in Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed. (2014), 1:11–14.

'anti-aesthetic' perspectives in the history, theory, and criticism of art, especially of the putatively critical arts of the modern avant-gardes. They poured cold water on the potential 'aesthetic' inquiries of art historians of my generation – not least on their (or at any rate on my own) interest in philosophical aesthetics in the 'analytic' tradition. To be sure, one was allowed to treat the work of Richard Wollheim (a fully paid-up historian of deep psychodynamic processes and an influential early critic of the advanced art of the 1960s) and Nelson Goodman (a formidable 'constructivist' analyst of the very nature of sign-making) with considerable respect, and Arthur Danto's (as a highly visible member of the New York artworld) with a slight smirk. But who among my cohort of PhD students in art history had ever heard of, let alone read, Kendall Walton or Jerrold Levinson – whose essentially historical definition of art I've appropriated for my own purposes?[4]

Finally, 'visual culture studies' had partly emerged academically as a supposed breaking-free of, a broadening of, art-historical and museological canons allegedly shaped by modern ideologies of art and their putative background aesthetics (for example, Kantian idealism, Hegelian world-historicism, Greenbergian 'formalism') and their putatively sinister connections with art markets and culture industries.[5]

As a subsidiary factor – but crucially important for art historians with research interests like mine – I must mention that in the entrenched professional fields of archaeology in which I was studying one was instructed never to treat the ancient artefacts as 'art'. In opening a book that was actually titled *Prehistoric Art*, the prehistorian Randall White mocked a famous art historian's discussion of paleolithic image-making as 'art'.[6]

One could get bogged down in these endless debates. A lot of art history did.[7]

Rather than burden my own archaeology and anthropology with a constant imperative to engage these issues, then, I bracketed them so far as possible, even though the tide has definitely turned in the emergence of 'world art studies'. In

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4 Levinson's analytic apparatus provided some scaffolding for my *Replications: Archaeology, Art History, Psychoanalysis* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), and I revisit it in 'Radical WAS: The Sense of History in World Art Studies', *World Art* 3 (2010): 201–10. For Levinson's continuing refinements of his model of 'defining art historically', especially 'The Irreducible Historicality of the Concept of Art', see his collection *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

5 For my account, see 'Visual Culture', in Kelly, *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., 6:240–44.

6 Randall White, *Prehistoric Art: The Symbolic Journey of Mankind* (New York: Abrams, 2003).

7 For a fine account, see Sam Rose, 'Fear of Aesthetics in Art and Literary Theory', *New Literary History* (forthcoming).

consequence I took up the somewhat wishy-washy view (which Stejskal pinpoints) that one might treat a visual culture of art-making as one possible *kind* of visual culture, as one *type* of historically emergent visuality or, perhaps, as a certain *range* of practices having 'abductively' similar visualities – perceptual orders, cognitive structures, and social organizations for which I was hoping to offer a more 'general theory'.[8] The sense in which my 'general theory' itself trades on certain 'aesthetics' – and therefore deserves its own developed aesthetic program – was less obvious to me.

But this is all historiography – even autobiography. As *theory* it should increasingly lie in the rear-view mirror, as Stejskal makes plain. Elsewhere I've made some suggestions about epistemologies and ontologies of art that might be viable for the project of a world art studies predicated on the 'panhuman' phenomenon of art.[9]

II

Stejskal is right that 'questions of aesthetics, that is, very roughly speaking, of privileging artefacts for their looks' in the end can never be far from my concerns, or those of pretty much any art historian. Indeed, for me the questions come down to the 'look' of a 'likeness' or, more exactly, a network of 'forms of likeness'. (Of course, as a network it might have no *one* 'look' insofar as each node has its own 'looks' in certain respects.) To recall some of the examples on the table: the look-likeness of the avant-garde 'artness' of Mondrian's 1923 *Composition* (in my example in the essay printed here); the look-likeness of the terrifying power of the warrior, his implacable and impenetrable 'shieldness' (also incorporating other likenesses of terrifying force and fearsome knowledge), in Stejskal's example (borrowed from Gell) of an Asmat carved and painted warshield; and going back to one of the roots of this entire approach in practical structuralism,

8 In this respect, and partly responding to art historians such as David Freedberg and Hans Belting, Gell worked out an analytics that could represent the cognitive overlap between 'nexuses' of the abduction of agency – of the causal structure of a given object (which he called the 'index' of said causal organization) – in the world of 'high fine art' in the modern sense, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, in the worlds of 'fetishism' and 'idol-worship' that had developed in very different histories in the European Middle Ages and in indigenous traditions outside the West. Though the 'anthropology' wasn't surprising in itself – the status of art as 'fetish[ism]', and vice versa, has long been widely rehearsed – his 'Gellograms' of the respective structures of abduction were remarkably clear, and eminently teachable.

9 'Panhuman' is the term used by the editors of the influential anthology *World Art Studies: Concepts and Approaches*, ed. Kitty Ziljmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008). For comments, see Whitney Davis, 'World without Art: A Commentary on *World Art Studies*', *Art History* 33 (2010): 710–16; 'World Series: The Unruly Orders of World Art History', *Third Text* 25 (2011): 493–501; and 'Radical WAS'.

the look-likeness of the 'great Gothic cathedral' that was the new Citroën DS (according to Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* of 1957).

In turn, as Stejskal points out, tracing the imbrications of looks and likenesses – their mutual successions to and recursions in the partial consolidation of visualities in the field of what I now call 'bivisibility' (*V & V*, pp. 96–110) – seems to entrain an 'aesthetic' inquiry in two senses that remained undeveloped in my sketch of an art history emerging from *GTVC*, though implied therein.[10] On the one hand, we need an investigation into the competence and success of a given artefact produced for visual use (what Stejskal calls its 'value'), that is, in his words, 'its comparative standing vis-à-vis other artefacts vying for the same kind of visual attention'. On the other hand, and correlatively, we need an investigation into the ways in which artefacts and their makers can coordinate, corral, and capture the requisite 'visual attention' in which this relative success of likenesses-of-looks and looks-of-likeness will transpire as a certain specific order of 'visual conspicuousness', or what Stejskal calls a certain specific order of 'striking visibility'. (In English-language art history, 'visual attention' is a term identified with the later work of Michael Baxandall, which has been fruitfully extended by Nanay among others, as Stejskal observes.)

As *historical* questions, these are, of course, 'chicken-and-egg'. In my terms, the value – the relative success of an artefact in aesthetic terms – flows as much from the unpredictable pragmatics of use and its vagaries, of playing its games, as from the formal norms of an 'indigenous aesthetics', that is, the many counter-cutting criteria of beauty, rarity, force, virtuosity, power, indeterminacy, enigmaticalness, communicability, excess, purity, and what-have-you (whether or not conceived in specifically visual terms) that have been the stocks-in-trade of anthropologies of art attending to 'non-Western aesthetics', in the generation to which Gell responded at any rate (he called it the 'anthropology of art confraternity').[11]

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[10] On 'bivisibility', see also Whitney Davis, 'Bivisibility: Why Art History Is Comparative', in *Comparativism in Art History*, ed. Jaś Elsner (New York: Routledge, 2017), 42–59.

[11] Gell partly had in mind the work of the ethnographers collected, for instance, in *The Anthropology of Art: Readings in Cross-Cultural Aesthetics*, ed. Charlotte Otten (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1971), and *The Traditional Artist in African Societies,* ed. Warren d'Azevedo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), notably such pioneering characterizations of 'indigenous aesthetics' as Robert Farris Thompson's 'Yoruba Art Criticism' (1973) – canonical enough to be anthologized again in *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, ed. Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 242–69. In the latter anthology, Morphy's own 'From Dull to Brilliant: The Aesthetics of Spiritual Power among the Yolngu' (pp. 302–20), originally published in 1992, can also be cited as an exemplary (pre-Gellian) exploration of 'indigenous aesthetics'.

In my terms, the creation of a 'visual conspicuousness' that corrals a certain 'visual attention' which in turn enables the use/value of the artefact in its contexts of historically interacting forms of life rides partly on embedded successions of formality, style/stylisticality, iconography, and pictoriality – counterthrusting successions of appearances, conventions, expectations, and traditions that each retains sufficient 'resistance' as to put 'striking visibility' (Stejskal's category) into constant interplay with an indeterminate (in)visibility (*plus* or *quus*?) that in the end can only be resolved ('sorted') in practice, that is, in the actual playing of the game which is *both* a normative frame ('we play *this* way!') *and* an unpredictable horizon ('are we playing *that* way?'). In *Olympia*, exhibited in the Salon of 1865, Manet might have thought he was making Olympia's 'courtesan-likeness' and 'Titian-allusiveness' and 'prostitute-hood' eminently visible, 'striking', to his expected beholders; he did not succeed (*GTVC*, pp. 216–22).

III

Some historians have been sceptical of 'aesthetic' analysis of diverse world traditions of image- and artefact-making not so much because of the questionable global applicability of a (modern?) concept of art and/or (indigenous?) aesthetic criteria. Their caution has to do with another question that Stejskal himself acknowledges as a possible stumbling block for his own proposals about 'striking visibility'. 'It may prove difficult and often even impossible to decide whether, when, and for whom an artefact's visual conspicuousness has relied on assessing its appearance', as partly distinct from, say, knowing the identity of its maker, understanding the origins of its materials of manufacture, appreciating the significance of its location, or realizing the social restrictions on the very contexts of visibility of its 'appearance'.

I have proposed two lines of methodological ('forensic') approach to this crucial problem of evidence. First, I've argued that the formal, stylistic, and pictorial organization of the use/value of the artefact – of the practical tasks and social work it carries out – will likely be the site of intensive 'replicatory' activity (material and morphological) when the artefact has to be restored, revised, replaced, repeated, or, in general, 're-played' in an evolving form of life and its constitutive 'games'.

Second, more recently I have highlighted the importance of identifying the actual 'standpoint' of the visibility/ies of the artefact(s), whether then or now and here or there: how it 'looks' and what it's 'like' *under a particular visual-spatial angle* which in turn incarnates a human agent's practical resolution of a quest to recognize look/like, though not inherently its *solution* (see *V & V*, pp. 28–50). (To look ahead to my response to Hönes, I would partly ground my 'micro-histories'

here; I can find little or no account of the relevant phenomenology in the 'micro-histories in the vein of Alfred Gell and Bruno Latour' which he suggests have obviated my polemic, though he offers no examples of them.) Without some sense of this datum – usually we don't have it in advance – any talk of 'conspicuous visibility' as a function of 'visual attention' (and vice versa) strikes me as mere handwaving. But getting the datum in place (with a minimum degree of circularity in the reasoning) can be extremely difficult forensically in the case of the many objects whose 'standpoints' we don't know in advance. The objects of aesthetic-historical inquiry have to be carefully selected (after considerable and expert forensic ground-clearing that entrains its own descriptive protocols) to be likely to be archaeologically accessible to analysis in this particular respect, within the time available to scholarship and given its resources. One can't just walk into a museum gallery and say, 'Let's do aesthetics and art history on *that*!' We don't use our most powerful telescopes – built as ultimate protheses for the close looking of the astronomer – to stare at stars that tell us what we already know, or that can't tell us anything at all because we don't know enough. We try to develop guidelines for a pragmatic decision to 'look' at this series *rather than* that.

IV

Stejskal does a service in characterizing two current 'philosophical' projects that take up the two matters of his 'post-culturalist aesthetics' which I've already discussed. First, Noë's 'argument for the irreplaceable role of evaluating objects' appearances in the development of any human culture as well as for the essential place of art in it'. ('*As well as*': there are really *two* arguments there.) Second, Nanay's articulation of analytic 'tools for a fine-grained description of strategies of drawing visual attention'.

Noë claims that art is 'difficult' and 'subversive' – that it cuts against 'business as usual' in one's established navigation of the world. This seems hardly novel; indeed, it is the business as usual of the critical theory and social history of modern art. And anyway, as Stejskal points out, it seems difficult to apply across the board. The history of art repeatedly demonstrates that artworks affirm worlds or forms of life – sometimes precarious, sometimes massively consolidated – not by subverting them but by legitimating them.

I'm attracted to Noë's suggestion that 'human beings can assume [art's] attitude [of "detached seeing"] towards virtually anything, but they *learn it by looking at pictures*' (my emphasis). In *V & V* I've pursued a complementary hypothesis – that pictures can teach us how newly to look at the world, to find fresh 'pictorialized' aspects in it. (Not so much the mountain in the Cézanne as the Cézanne in

the mountain.) Still, if one learns 'detached seeing' by looking at pictures, as Noë proposes, it seems to follow that pictures are looked at – at any rate looked at in a primal moment of succession – *non*detachedly, perhaps in not-at-all-disinterested moments of extraordinary and viscerally involving 'presence' and its interest for us. (Just as it is difficult to make sense of Kant's notion of a 'disinterested' perceptual-noetic relation to an object which is thereby constituted as aesthetic it's difficult to make sense of Noë's doctrine of 'detached' seeing.) How can one start to look at pictures *qua* pictorial, *as* pictures, if they have the 'presence' of something that isn't a picture at all? (See *V & V*, pp. 69–93.) Noë's implied evolutionary-developmental aesthetics seems to run into an archaeological problem. If there can be no 'detached looking' before looking at pictures (which teach us 'detached seeing'), then all 'art' *before* pictures isn't art on Noë's terms. Since I'm not worrying much about 'paleoart' – though it's an exploding field of research these days – I can duck this. He can't.[12]

Alternately, pictures might have intrinsic logical and/or perceptual-cognitive properties *qua* pictorial that promote and even require Noë's detachment and defamiliarization in the looking – in the looking, say, at the 'twofoldness' (Wollheim's term) of a picture's 'design and scene' properties (twins joined at the hip) that the extra-pictorial world doesn't contain, or only contains under the condition of what I call 'radical pictoriality' (*V & V*, pp. 51–68), or will only contain as it were post-pictorially when pictures are present *qua* pictures and confer 'design' on the 'scene' of the world when the 'twin' world (pictured) reorganizes the world seen as 'scene'.

In this respect Nanay's project, indebted to Wollheim's model of seeing-as and seeing-in, does extremely helpful work. Still, the 'distribution of attention' between design and scene properties to which he constantly adverts is not, or it is not only, the phenomenological *ground* of 'conspicuous visibility'. As Nanay's 'history of vision' implies, a particular order of historically specific 'conspicuous visibility' distributes visual attention between design and scene properties in a specifically 'striking' way. (In other words, I'd run the causal connections in a direction inverse to the one Stejskal seems to accept; both causal orders are possible and likely they are entwined in any real case.) I might see the 'missing' hair on Manet's Olympia in *Olympia* when I realize something 'striking': she's a common whore aping Titian's courtesan! Then I go looking for the full flowing hair that should be there – and perhaps actually see it.

[12] For a collection of vigorously diverse international investigations, see *The Genesis of Creativity and the Origin of the Human Mind*, ed. Barbora Půtová and Václav Soukup (Prague: Karolinum, 2015).

At the heart of both philosophical projects, we find determinate narratives of recursions that should be accessible to historical reconstruction.

V

Hönes's deft and incisive blend of compliments and criticisms points out that I don't – and I can't – actually *practise* in full what I preach.

Still, I did mobilize the highly loaded term 'culturology' (among many other terms) to help get my project going dialectically, even though in the end it plays a fairly minor role in my analytics as such, for example, in my models of succession, visuality and analogy, and standpoint in visual space, and since the essay printed here was written I have become more and more inclined to do without it: as Hönes argues, perhaps it doesn't do very much work. In this regard, Hönes's willingness to delve into some of the actual 'cultural histories' I've worked up and published – worked up for many different purposes, intellectual contexts, and political exigencies, inherently generating some degree of general inconsistency – is exemplary. On balance his comments are fair. 'Going forward', as one says, I hope to learn from them.

As I noted, I often try to put 'social dyads' at the centre of my 'cultural history'. (I happily embrace the term in the sense – I believe it is Hönes's as well – of '*history of* culture' as distinct from 'history *as cultural[ist]*'.) My examples have included Sigmund Freud and his patient Sergei Pankejeff, the 'Wolf Man'; Joshua Reynolds and his patron and sitter Augustus Keppel (a project cited by Hönes); Filippo Brunelleschi and his biographer Antonio Manetti, who informs his readers that he had personally tried out the architect's ingenious mirror-demonstration of a perspective picture of the Florentine Baptistery (*V & V*, pp. 264–314); and Ludwig Wittgenstein and his sister Margarethe working out the design and furnishing of a new house for her in Vienna in the mid-1920s.[13] In all these cases, it's true as a matter of course that I assume social contexts and histories of shared 'meaning-complexes' and their disjunctions, though with considerable emphasis on the latter: complexes and disjunctions within which the smaller-scale interactions I focus on cannot *not* be situated (the Wolf Man's awareness of traditional Russian fairy tales pictured and narrated to him in his childhood; the conventions of mid-eighteenth century English gender decorum in portraiture that Reynolds's practice broadly observed; Manetti's awareness of Brunelleschi's reputation in the community at large and within his guild). As

[13] See Whitney Davis, *Drawing the Dream of the Wolves: Homosexuality, Interpretation, and Freud's 'Wolf Man'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and 'Fitted Like a Glove: Wittgenstein's House for His Sister in Vienna, 1926–28', in *Space, Time, and Depiction* (forthcoming).

Hönes is suggesting, at some notional point on this continuum my small units of cultural-historical process – such as the emergence of an interpersonal sexuality (the 'transferential' interaction between Freud and Wolf Man vis-à-vis a single artefact initially shared only between them) – become 'a way of seeing' or a 'visual culture', a 'visuality' – the vast medley or garland of interlocking networks of forms of likeness making up the (un)certainties of a historical form of life (*GTVC*, chap. 8).

My point is not at all to deny this. Rather, it is analytically to explicate *the history that the very fact of the continuum entails:* the historical texture of the culture-building process insofar as it operates in and through individual agents and individuated artefacts in visual space. As Hönes says, who could demur? (Still, when something supposedly 'goes without saying', to use his phrase, one knows there's still a lot to be said!) It is no surprise that I have been influenced by – and have taken some historiographical interest in – the traditions of thought associated with the notion of *Bildung* (in particular J. J. Winckelmann's model of emulation as I have parsed it, cited by Hönes), with concepts of *Lebensform* and *Sprachspiel*, and in more recent philosophy (nevertheless written, in some cases, before Hönes was born!) with models of the emergence of 'conventions' and the problematics of 'rule following'.

Perhaps one way of stating my interest – maybe my instinct or bias – is to zero in, so far as possible, on the bits of the network *being-built* rather than the bits *already-built*. (Sense/*Sinn*, rather than reference/*Bedeutung*; transference rather than communication; mark rather than sign; intermediate switching state rather than functional digital computation…) At the most abstract level, as Hönes's commentary suggests, all this might be a distinction without a difference. But my wager is that at the fine-grained register ('building down' methodologically to the 'building up' that's transpiring empirically) one can make some working historical reconstructions of the successions and recursions that are in play. I don't think this is controversial. And I think Hönes agrees, not least because he seems to believe it's already an ordinary stock-in-trade. Perhaps it isn't even all that interesting, though I hope to have used the model both to re-read 'classic' art-historical theory for some of the resources it could continue to offer and to work out a range of plausible historical examples that instantiate different dimensions of the predicted general 'succession to visuality'.

VI

At the other end of the continuum on which I've placed my analytics and sample histories lies 'culturology', or what in other jargon is sometimes called 'culturalism.' I accept Hönes's point that idiography and culturology shouldn't be conflated,

though we might find them conjoined, in varying respects and degrees, in the practice of any given artwriter. So, and to stick with Baxandall, in explicating Chardin's *Lady Taking Tea* of 1735 this historian who explicitly engaged in 'explaining pictures' was somewhat 'culturological' when he assumed 'the pattern of eighteenth-century Lockeanism' as *we* can understand it now as a totality today, and which we need to understand in order to propose 'historical explanation' of Chardin's painting; he was quite 'idiographic' when he asked how and from whom Chardin got hold of *his* Lockeanism and what he made of it, if anything; and he headed toward his more 'nomological' side when he tried to describe how this visual-culture-in-Chardin's-envisioning played out visually in the painting that is visible to us.[14] All these categorical terms are only helpful, if they are helpful at all, insofar as they'd assist us in reading through the turns and layers of Baxandall's scrupulous reconstruction – especially in teaching it.[15]

On this understanding, one isn't a 'culturologist' or not (as in being, say, a 'geneticist' or a 'Canadian' or not), and I regret having allowed such an implication. I'd rather say now that 'culturology', like 'sociology', is a necessary moment of culture-historical analysis (that is, the assumption of sufficient meanings-shared, rules-followed, and conventions-consolidated to get one's account off the ground) but one to which I'd give the minimally necessary analytic space, given one's limited pages in pursuing a cultural-historical reconstruction (emphasis on the 'historical').

Thus, for example, I find Richard Neer most persuasive not so much when he unpacks the 'Greekness' of Archaic Greek *kouroi* (though he does so brilliantly) as a virtually 'pornographic' pan-Hellenic iconography of aristocratic masculine superpower in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE – a visual culture instantiated by thousands of statues and beholders. Rather, I'd highlight how he explicates one 'late' and anomalous *kouros* (maybe not quite a *kouros*), the 'Kritios Boy' (*c*.479–75 BCE) set up on the Acropolis of Athens, as figuring a 'new way of

14 Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), esp. 103.

15 I agree with Hönes that Baxandall's model of 'period eye' is outdated, though it seems to be robust in many classrooms. I have urged that we should complicate Baxandall's procedure by running the causal connections that he made between 'social history' and 'pictorial style' in virtually the opposite direction (*GTVC*, pp. 14–15, 158–60; *V & V*, p. 10). Still, Baxandall's procedure of 'inferential criticism' continues to command respect, as witness the diverse responses of a collocation of art, cultural, and intellectual historians in *Michael Baxandall, Vision and the Work of Words*, ed. Peter Mack and Robert Williams (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015) – and as held out by two commentators on art-historical method as one of the best ways to 'do' art history. See Margaret Iversen and Stephen Melville, *Writing Art History: Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), with my review in *caa.reviews*, 9 February 2012, doi:10.3202/caa.reviews.2012.19.

yielding' to certain male beholders' homoerotic engagement and imagination that would only become a 'classical' norm in replication *after* its reception. The Kritios Boy might have been quite 'queer' in its visual-cultural context, as I've tried to argue in pursuing Neer's insight. Not quite 'looking like' anything determinate at all, not really 'succeeding' to a definite complex of shared/shareable 'meaning', it was probably quite weird 'culturally' and it was quite literally out-of-step despite the way in which its style of *contrapposto* would become canonical (how?) within the next half-century.[16]

Hönes is right to remind us of Gombrich's jeremiad (expressed most forcefully in his *In Search of Cultural History*) against what, for him in his day and given his intellectual trajectory, was 'culturology' – namely, what he called 'Hegelian historicism', with more or less specific reference to the Second Vienna School of Art History. As we all know, for more than two centuries philosophical anthropology has used general notions of 'culture', though with distinctive inflections within the major European languages: Jacob Burckhardt's *die Cultur*, usually rendered in English as 'civilization'; the *Kultur* of the *Kulturgeschichte* that Hönes cites as a possible resource for us at the moment; E. B. Tylor's 'culture', 'that complex whole' (the predominant definition in English); Leslie White's 'science of culture', which he took to be a translation of '*Kulturwissenschaft*' and to which he gave the name 'culturology';[17] etc., etc. Because I write – and I usually think – in English, it's not surprising that the Tylorian connotation is prominent in mind.

In very virtue of this historiographical fact, every generation, Hönes's not excepted, re-evaluates the 'culturological' dimension (in my sense) of cultural history (in his and mine) – that is, the relative weight one wants to give to a total system as a fact of cultural history, of ontology, not as a posture of analysis, of epistemology. I've already mentioned Gombrich. For his student Baxandall, a culturology he resisted in writing *Patterns of Intention* was what he called 'high iconography' – the assumption of subtle theologies and humanist allegorics among Renaissance painters, reconstructed by the art historian and attributed to them. When I entered the professional discipline of art history as a student, the most trendy florescence of culturology could be found in a pansemiotic/postmodern cultural studies. And so on.

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16 Richard Neer, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), chap. 1, esp. 50–52; Whitney Davis, 'Queering Classical Art' (Rumble Fund Lecture in Classical Art, King's College London, March 2016).

17 Leslie A. White, *The Science of Culture: A Study of Man and Civilization* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1949). I mention White because in writing *GTVC* I'd completely forgotten about his vocabulary, despite having studied his cultural evolutionism at length.

Taking us into the present moment, Hönes makes the interesting suggestion that a '(computer-aided) "distant reading" of texts and increasingly of visual artefacts as well' may be an emerging species of culturology, though I myself also have in mind an equally widespread interest in repeatable actions ('replications') as vehicles of the transmission of meaning (as distinct from its mutation and evolution).[18] And he is also right that 'anthropological and sociological approaches in the vein of Alfred Gell or Bruno Latour have since lured the field to prioritize micro-historical inquiries into the social relations between humans and objects'. I'm all for them, just as I'm all for *macro-histories* (such as David Summers's) that give an actual *account* of succession in what Summers calls the 'spatial arts'. But I'm all for them on my terms – otherwise why have one's own terms at all? I'd reserve the option to dispute the idea, for example, that just because one writes out a 'Gellogram' of the abduction of agency vested in an artefact one has got the successions of its visibility, virtuality, and visuality into the right kind of focus. In fact, there's a fair chance one has not; as I've argued elsewhere, Gell's approach can hijack agency in art as much as locate it. And, at the macro-historical level, I'd reserve the option to conclude that Summers's principle of succession in the refinement of facture as 'abstraction to the notional' – a highly productive organizing quasi-Aristotelian principle for his 'world art history' – nevertheless isn't sufficiently attentive to irresolvable 'resistances' in said succession, at least in his hands (*V & V*, pp. 213–18).[19]

VII

I have no special attachment to 'post-culturalist', though I did say that 'I quite like it' as a framing conceit which Stejskal and I identified for our conversations at Dahlem. In the context of one of the themes of the present discussion, namely, the intersection of art history with renewed 'sciences of art' and naturalistic aesthetics (a topic neither commentator really takes up), it is accurate at a literal level. I'd see the term less as 'bureaucratic' than as mildly polemical; Hönes himself agrees that the seemingly endless debate between the *Natur-* and *Geisteswissenschaften* has in no wise abated, and philosophers like Noë and Nanay (Stejskal's examples) are both right in the thick of it. Indeed, I'd say it has entered an especially fraught period of potentially deep institutional realignments in relation to scarce resources. (Paradoxically this is partly in virtue of the supposedly

[18] For a useful review of investigations in sociology, textual studies, and other areas, see Rein Raud, *Meaning in Action: Outline of an Integral Theory of Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

[19] On Gell, see Davis, 'Abducting the Agency of Art'; on Summers, see my 'Abstraction to the Notional: David Summers's Principle of Art History' (lecture, McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia, April 2015).

emergent possibility of newly energized 'interdisciplinary' interactions between, say, cultural history and physiological aesthetics.) Certainly the debate has gained in depth, sophistication, and diversity. Compared to a relatively recent period in which evolutionary aesthetics and its like would often have been dismissed in one word by many art and cultural historians as simply 'reductive', Matthew Rampley (a sceptic) has trenchantly parsed the issues at book length, as I noted in my essay, while James Herbert (a cautious advocate) has mobilized emergence and complexity theory (emanating from biology and philosophical psychology) to redescribe the way in which 'subjects' and 'subjectivity' are constituted in painting. Obviously one could go on.[20]

If I read him right, Hönes finds me inconsistent, or at any rate not living up to my own agenda, because I don't much use 'nomological' models, evidence, and methods in my own histories of visual-culture building – if by 'nomological' we designate the neo-Darwinian and the neurophysiological approaches to vision, artefacts, art, and/or depiction that have been the most highly visible 'post-culturalist' aesthetics/art histories. Fair enough, but I've never made the claim that that's what I'm trying to do. I merely take my project to be fairly compatible – or would hope to make it increasingly compatible – with these sciences while at the same time proposing a vocabulary that's attentive to specifically art-historical/visual-cultural phenomena which I take to be uniquely or at any rate newly described in my terms (such as 'stylistic succession' in *GTVC* and 'imaging point of pictoriality' in *V & V*).

Whitney Davis
Department of History of Art, University of California at Berkeley,
416 Doe Library #6020, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA
wmdavis@berkeley.edu

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[20] James Herbert, *Brushstroke and Emergence: Courbet, Impressionism, Picasso* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

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