

The Core of Art: Making Special

'The Core of Art: Making Special' appears as Chapter 4 in the book *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Came From and Why*, first published in 1992 by Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc. The first paperback version was published in 1995 by The University of Washington Press, and is re-printed here with permission of the publishers.

ELLEN DISSANAYAKE
University of Washington

The word
art not
the Art
itself

When contemporary philosophers of art make the radical and rather astonishing statement that art has existed for only two centuries,¹ they are referring to the insufficiently appreciated fact that the abstract concept "art" is a construction of Western culture and in fact has a discernible historical origin.² It was only in the late eighteenth century—in Enlightenment England and Germany—and subsequently that the subject of aesthetics was named and developed, that "the aesthetic" came to be regarded as a distinctive kind of experience, and that an art world of academies, museums, galleries, dealers, critics, journals, and scholars arose to address a type of human artifact that was made primarily and often specifically for acquisition and display. At the same time, ideas of genius, creative imagination, self-expression, originality, communication, and emotion, having originated in other contexts, became increasingly and even primarily or exclusively associated with the subject of "art." (see Chapter 7) The concepts "primitive" and "natural" that I referred to

The
"meaning"
we put
behind art!

Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies
Volume 1 Number 2 Fall 2003

briefly in the preceding chapters also developed at this time to become part of modern Western cultural consciousness.

Never
for Beauty

Previously, the sorts of objects that in the post-eighteenth century West came to be called art—paintings, sculptures, ceramics, music, dance, poetry, and so forth—were made to embody or to reinforce religious or civic values, and rarely, if ever, for purely aesthetic purposes. Paintings and sculptures served as portraits, illustrations, interior or exterior decoration; ceramics were vessels for use; music and dance were part of a ceremonial or special social occasion; poetry was storytelling or praise or oratory to sway an audience. Even when beauty, skill, or ostentation were important qualities of an object, they did not exist “for their own sake,” but as an enhancement of the object’s ostensible if not actual use. This enhancement would be called beautification or adornment, not art. The word *art* as used before the late eighteenth century meant what we would today call “craft” or “skill” or “well-madeness,” and could characterize any object or activity made or performed by human (rather than natural or divine) agency—for example, the art of medicine, of retailing, of holiday dining.

Ornamentation is not art!

It may be a surprise to realize how peculiar our modern Western notion of art really is—how it is dependent on and intertwined with ideas of commerce, commodity, ownership, history, progress, specialization, and individuality—and to recognize the truth that only a few societies have thought of it even remotely as we do (Alsop, 1982). Of course, in the preindustrial West and elsewhere, people had and continue to have “aesthetic” ideas—notions of what makes something beautiful or excellent-of-its-kind—but such ideas can be held without tacitly assuming that there is a superordinate abstract category, *Art*, to which belong *some* paintings, drawings, or carvings and not *other* paintings, drawings, or carvings.³

As Western aesthetics developed, something was assigned to the category of genuine art if it was deemed capable of providing and sustaining genuine aesthetic experience. Genuine aesthetic experience was defined as something one experienced when contemplating genuine art. Note the circularity of this argument. Moreover, difficulties arose in specifying the cause or location of this genuineness (in the fact of differences of opinion about the validity of individual works or responses). People should have recognized that these difficulties threw the concepts of a pure or singular art itself into doubt.

To be sure, philosophers and artists in the past (for example, Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Leonardo da Vinci) had proposed criteria for beauty or excellence, for example, fitness, clarity, harmony, radiance, a mirror held up to nature. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century thinkers proposed other criteria, such as truth, order, unity in variety, and significant form, as being the defining feature of this mysterious entity “Art.”

But, as every first-year student of Western aesthetics learns, determining what is beauty or truth, not to mention significance or harmony, is no less difficult than defining art in the first place. And in any case, since the Romantic period, artists themselves (influenced by the ever-growing Western cultural emphasis on individualism and originality) have deliberately flouted and contradicted the canonic aesthetic features, as they were described or proposed by philosophers, critics, and other thinkers, as if to demonstrate that art, whatever its essence or validity, is protean, undefinable, and irreducible.

Hence the search for a common denominator, some quality or feature that characterizes all instances of art, that *makes* something “Art,” gradually became both outmoded and a lost cause. Today’s philosophers of art have totally abandoned trying to define the word or the concept. Looking at the plural and radical nature of the arts in our time, aware of the economic ramifications where canvases may be “worth” millions of dollars and where critics, dealers, and museum directors rather than artists or publics largely decide this value, philosophers concerned with art have concluded that art no longer exists (if it ever did) in a vacuum or ideal realm for its own sake, with its sacred essence waiting to be discovered, but must be considered as it appears in and is dependent on a particular social context. In a postindustrial, postmodern society, an art world (or “artworld”) determines what “Art” is and what is “Art.” It exists, if at all, only as a socially and historically conditioned label (see Chapter 7).

The reader must recognize, however, that this position arises from contemporary postmodern Western society, which despite our natural ethnocentrism (referred to also in Chapters 1 and 4) is not, of course, the apogee of humankind’s enterprise and wisdom nor its ultimate destiny. We must not forget that although “Art” as a concept seems to have been born of and continues to be sustained by a commercial society, is therefore only roughly two centuries old, and hence is relative, even discardable, *the arts* have always been with us. And so have ideas of beauty, sublimity, and transcendence, along with the verities of the human condition: love, death, memory, suffering, power, fear, loss, desire, hope, and so forth. These have been the subject matter of and occasion for the arts throughout human history. Thus, when contemporary theory accepts that art is contingent and dependent on “a particular social context,” the mistake should not be made of assuming that the abiding human concerns and the arts that have immemorially been their accompaniment and embodiment are themselves contingent and dependent.

The species-centric view of art recognizes and proclaims as valid and intrinsic the association between what humans have always found to be important and certain ways—called “the arts”—that they have found to grasp, manifest, and reinforce this importance. That the arts in

‘Art’ cannot
be defined
but
why?
↓ ↓
Art always
needs an
audience

postmodern society do not perform these functions, at least to the extent that they do in premodern societies, is not because of some deficiency, or insubstantiality of an abstract concept but because their makers inhabit a world—unprecedented in human history—in which these abiding concerns are artificially disguised, denied, trivialized, ignored, or banished.

An ethological view of art, then, departs from the entrenched position of contemporary aesthetics and reinstates the search for a “common denominator,” although in a manner never dreamed of by philosophers of art. In order to show that a behavior of art is universal and indelible, it is necessary to identify a core behavioral tendency upon which natural selection could act.

In trying to uncover this deep marrow of a behavior of art, we will not be primarily concerned with contemporary society, nor even with earlier civilizations or with traditional or what used to be called ‘primitive’ societies. Rather, we must look for a behavioral tendency that could have been possessed by protohumans, the early hominids who existed one to four million years ago. These, our ancestors, were creatures who walked on two legs and lived in small, nomadic bands on the African Savannah. They hunted, foraged, scavenged, and gathered their food, as hominids did until about 10,000 B.C. when settled agricultural communities began to establish themselves in certain parts of the world. Somewhere in this continuum of hominid evolution will have arisen a behavioral tendency that helped individuals who possessed it (and by extension a social group whose members had it) to survive better than individuals and groups who lacked the tendency. This core or common denominator of art will, however, be a behavioral tendency that is not incompatible with art today and elsewhere, yet can also characterize creatures such as these, our hominid ancestors.

The Extra-Ordinary

In my view, the biological core of art, the stain that is deeply dyed in the behavioral marrow of humans everywhere, is something I have elsewhere called “making special.” Like other key phrases used to name or summarize a complex concept (“pleasure principle,” “survival of the fittest”), “making special” can without elaboration or context sound trivial or woolly. Before describing it in more detail, here and in the next chapter, I would like to recount briefly the background of my search for this core tendency that I believe lies behind or within what is today considered to be the impulse toward (the behavioral tendency of) art.

Core
tendency
is
“making
special”
for
humans
↓
To make Art

I. — Play and Ritual

My own earliest attempts to approach art as a behavior began when I first read ethological accounts of play. Play in animals (including humans) is an appealing and quite mysterious behavior. It occurs in many species in which animals play naturally, without being taught. Yet, unlike other behaviors, play seems to be, at the time of playing at least, biologically purposeless and even disadvantageous. The players do not gain a life-serving goal, as they do in other behaviors where they find food, mate, repel an intruder, rest, and so on. In fact, animals at play seem to expend a lot of energy for no useful purpose and risk hurting themselves, attracting predators, or otherwise decreasing their chances of survival. Yet young animals will play indefatigably. They seem to play for play's sake, for sheer enjoyment and intrinsic reward. Thus it would seem that play has hidden survival benefits that outweigh the costs of its energy expenditure and risks.

Play has no
purpose
Yet we
do it?

In play, novelty and unpredictability are actively sought, whereas in real life we do not usually like uncertainty. Wondering whether an untried shortcut will take us to the bank before it closes on the day before a holiday is different from choosing an unknown path just to see where it will lead while on holiday.

Play can be said to be “extra,” something outside normal life. At least normal constraints do not hold. At play, you can be a princess, a mother, or a horse. You can be strong and invincible. You can act *like*, be *like*, a desperado or a soldier. You pretend to fight or pretend to have a tea party, but these are “not for real.” Real weapons (like loaded guns or unsheathed claws) are not used; the teacups may be empty.

✕ But play is marked by constraints nevertheless. One generally finds, even in animals, “rules” of play: special signals (such as wagging the tail or not using claws), postures, facial expressions, and sounds that mean “This is make-believe.” Often, special places are set aside for playing: a stadium, a gymnasium, a park, a recreation room, a ring or circle. There are special times, special clothes, a special mood for play—think of holidays, festivals, vacations, weekends.✕

As I read about play, its similarities to art became obvious. Art, as I know it from aesthetics and art history classes, is “nonutilitarian,” “for its own sake”: Cellini’s saltcellar was art, but not because it held salt better than a clay or glass container. Art, like play, was not “real” but pretend: the actor playing Hamlet did not really stab the actor playing Polonius. Art made exquisite use of surprise and ambiguity. There were special places like museums and concert halls set aside for art, special times, even special clothes for it—such as dark attire for symphony musicians. And there was especially a special mood, which I had learned to describe as “disinterested contemplation”: one did not rush up on stage to help the hero overcome the villain; one did contemplate the skill and subtlety of

We see
what
happens Next!
↓
No Action required

the actors, the craft and language of the playwright. Art, like play, was something extra, an embellishment, an enhancement to life.

As I looked further into the subject, I discovered I was only the latest in a long lineage to have noticed the resemblance between play and art and to have gone on to conclude that art was a derivative of play.⁴ The new contribution I hoped to offer was making this conclusion plausible by means of ethological (rather than, as others had done, from psychological or historical or metaphysical) evidence. I thought that the "metaphorical" nature of both art and play, the make-believe aspect where something is, in reality, something else, was the salient core feature.

Author thinks this is how to connect Art & Play

For an ethologist, the apparent absence of evolutionary purpose is a problem both for play and for art. Because humans everywhere avidly engage in both playful and artistic pursuits, these must serve some purpose, even if it is not immediately evident.

With regard to play, it is generally agreed that although there might not be immediate survival benefits associated with play, young animals in play are practicing (in situations that are not yet "for keeps") skills that eventually enable them to find food, defend themselves, and mate, among other adult necessities. Also—importantly—in play, they learn how to get along with others. Individuals who play, and thereby learn practical and social skills, survive better than individuals who are not inclined to play or who are deprived of play and therefore lack practice with these essential things. As with an insurance policy, the benefits of play are deferred.

have LONG Term benefits

No Purpose BUT Play has benefits to it.

Looking at art, I was aware that it consisted of more than exercise, practice, or socialization. But what? Freud claimed that the function of both play and art was therapy. They allowed for fantasy, for the sublimation or fulfillment of hidden wishes that in real life were denied or tabooed: if you can't get the girl, dream or fantasize or write a story or paint a picture about getting her. As I considered the problem from an ethological point of view, I concluded that art in human evolution must have done something more than give fantasy free rein. How much fantasy did our hominid ancestors practice anyway? Did they need more make-believe than they acquired from play? (It is almost certain that early hominids, like all primates, must have played.) Was it not more important that they accept and comply with reality: the daily "business" of meals, safety, cooperation?⁵ Fantasy and make-believe may well be important safety valves for modern humans mired in the discontents of civilization, but I hoped to find a more plausible reason to explain why early hominids would have developed art as well as or in addition to play. Practice, socialization, recreation, wish-fulfillment—these goals could have satisfied by play without necessitating another sort of behavior that accomplished the same ends. Unless I was willing to accept the idea that art was simply a variety of play, which seemed an inadequate

Play & Art discover the same benefits just different paths together.

explanation, I had to look further into the matter of its ethological origin, nature, and probable selective value.

During the years that I lived in Sri Lanka, the small Buddhist country formerly known as Ceylon, I became acquainted with what sociologists call a traditional society. In such societies, modern technology is still made of bamboo tied together, and people, rather than backhoes and bulldozers, move the earth. Many families still live on the land and are relatively self-sufficient; village houses and utensils are largely made by hand from local materials, and food is grown in the family garden. Custom and authority continue to provide the boundaries within which people lead their lives and find their satisfactions—most marriages are arranged by parents or other relatives, for example, and it is not considered unusual for important decisions to be made only after consulting an astrologer.

People living in traditional societies seem much closer to the verities of life than people living in highly technological societies like our own. Because they have known each other's families for generations, events like weddings and funerals—matters of life and death—are important occasions for socializing. I attended my first funeral and saw a dead body for the first time while in Sri Lanka, and I was initially amazed that babies and small children were also in attendance.

Traditional ceremony and custom thus play a much larger part in the life of a Sri Lankan than in ours. After a person dies in Sri Lanka, the mourners arrive during the course of the day at the home where the deceased is lying in an open coffin on a table in the living room, surrounded by flowers. The bereaved family members greet each visitor at the door, breaking down in sobs with each new arrival as they talk about the circumstances of the death and the merits of the deceased. The guest enters the house and joins other guests; they chat quietly with each other about any subject (I heard discussions about movies, business, and political matters); and after a decent interval, they leave. Eventually the family and close friends go to the place of cremation or burial where Buddhist monks join them and recite the appropriate Pali texts—reflections on birth, death, decay, and reincarnation. Three days after the disposition of the body, the family and priests hold an almsgiving ceremony; other almsgivings in memory of the deceased occur after three months, one year, and at yearly intervals thereafter.

I realized that this kind of formalized handling of grief, with regular, community-sanctioned opportunities to weep and express one's loss at greater and greater intervals of time, gave to the bereaved a sort of patterned program to follow, a form that could shape and contain their feelings. Instead of having to suppress their grief and sense of loss in the interests of being brave or "realistic," or having to release it haphazardly or in solitude, the bereaved is enabled—compelled—by the ritual of mourning to acknowledge and express it publicly, over and over again,

within a preordained structure. The temporal structure of the mourning ritual, simple as it is, assures that thoughts and feelings about one's loss will be reiterated at prescribed times. Even if one might not consciously have proper mournful feelings, the custom of successive almsgivings ensures that these feelings are elicited. The prescribed formal ceremonies become the occasion for and event the cause of individuals feeling and publicly expressing their sorrow.⁶

It occurred to me that in a very similar way, the arts also are containers for, molders of, feeling. The performance of a play, a dance, or a musical composition manipulates the audience's response: expands, contracts, excites, calms, releases. The rhythm and form of a poem do the same thing. Even nontemporal arts, like painting, sculpture, and architecture, structure the viewer's response and give the form a feeling.

It is well known that in most societies the arts are commonly associated with ceremonial contexts, with rituals. So next I began to try to discover what art and ritual had in common. It was intriguing to learn that "ritualized behavior" in animals, like play, was an important ethological subject and that at least some anthropologists noted real, not just superficial, parallels between ritualized behavior in animals and ceremonial rituals in human (Huxley, 1966; Turner, 1983). Perhaps like ritual (and play), one could call art "a behavior" also.

As I had suspected and hoped, the similarities between ceremonial ritual and art were provocative. For example, both ritual and art are *compelling*. They use various effective means to arouse, capture, and hold attention. Both are fashioned with the intent to affect individuals emotionally—to bring their feelings into awareness, to display them. A large part of the compelling nature of rituals and art is that they are deliberately *nonordinary*. In Sri Lankan—and our own—funeral services, for example, unusual language is used: ancient religious works with their archaic and poetic vocabulary and word order serves as texts for the services, and these texts are intoned or chanted in a voice unlike that employed in normal discourse. Other nonordinary devices for making ritual (and art) compelling include exaggeration (the rhythm of funeral processions may be unusually slow and deliberate), repetition (the Sri Lankan funeral ritual punctuates time with repeated almsgivings), and elaboration (the profusion of flowers, the wearing of special clothing, other extravagances like the gathering of unusually large numbers of people).

The *stylization* of ritual and art also adds to their nonordinary aspect. They are self-consciously performed as if acted. During the ceremonial signing of a bill, the president of the United States speaks highly rhetorical phrases sanctified by use reaching back two hundred years, things like "Thereunto I set this seal." The ballerina or opera singer makes a ritualized—exaggerated, elaborated, formalized—series of bows to acknowledge the applause at the end of her performance (which itself

Just like the environment for a funeral, Art too, manipulates the audience

Art & Funeral express feelings

I do not agree I think we do this as a standard of society.

Bc if we don't do it, we are wrong

=> BECAUSE it's a ritual

Making Special
ELLEN DISSANAYAKE

was composed of exaggerated, elaborated, and formalized movements or vocalizations).

Thus, in general, both rituals and art are *formalized*. Movements—what people do—are prescribed, the order of events is structured, and the individual participants' perceptions, emotions, and interpretations are thereby shaped.

Ritual ceremonies and the arts are *socially reinforcing*, uniting their participants and their audiences in one mood. They both provide an occasion for feelings of individual transcendence of the self—what Victor Turner (1969) calls *communitas* and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1975) calls "flow"—everyone shares in the same occasion of patterned emotion. For a time, the hard edges of their customary isolation from each other are softened or melted together or their everyday taken-for-granted comradeship is reinforced.

Rituals and the arts are *bracketed*, set off from real or ordinary life. A stage of some kind—a circle, a demarcated area, a museum, or platform—sets off the holy from the profane, the performers from the audience, the extra-ordinary from the everyday. And both rituals and the arts make conspicuous *use of symbols*: things have hidden or arcane meanings, reverberations beyond their apparent surface significance.

Ritual ceremonies are universal, found in every human society. They serve numerous social purposes: they state and publicly reinforce the values of a group of people; they unite it in common purpose and belief; they "explain" the inexplicable—birth, death, illness, natural disaster—and attempt to control it and make it bearable. From the ethological perspective, people in social groups that did not have ceremonial rituals would not survive as well as those who did have them. They would be less cohesive and cooperative; they would respond to adversity in individualized, fragmented, unfocused, and ultimately less satisfactory ways.

Apart from the many similarities that ritual and art share as general "behaviors," they are virtually always linked together in practice. During ritual ceremonies one invariably finds the arts: the use of beautiful or arresting objects, the wearing of specially decorated attire, music, visual display, poetic language, dance, performances. It seemed nondebatable to me that an understanding of ceremonial ritual was relevant, even critical, to an ethological understanding of art (see Chapter 4).

Because of the many close connections between art and ritual, I first wondered whether art could be considered as a derivative of ritual, much as I had earlier thought of art as a kind of play.⁷ After struggling to make sense of how and why this might have happened, an idea came to me: art was not a variety of play or ritual, but like them it was concerned with a special order, realm, mood, state of being. In play, ritual, and art things were not ordinary—they are less real or more real than everyday reality. I decided now to try looking there for the behavioral core of art.

I wonder if this works for concerts, sport games etc.

???? like how

escapism

interesting!
I wonder why? must be bc there are benefits to this!

Differentiating Ordinary from Extra-Ordinary

My thesis that the evolution and selective value of a behavior of art arises from a tendency to make special rests on the claim that humans everywhere, in a manner that is unlike that of other animals, differentiate between an order, realm, mood, or state of being that is mundane, ordinary, or "natural," and one that is unusual, extra-ordinary, or "super-natural."

But is this a justifiable claim? In some premodern societies the former and the latter appear to interpenetrate. According to Robert Tonkinson (1978, p. 96), the Mardudjara, an Australian aboriginal group, make no clear distinction between natural and spiritual realms, considering themselves and nonhuman entities and forces to be all equally real inhabitants of their cosmic order.⁸ Other peoples, in Australia and elsewhere, similarly find "natural" and "spiritual" to be more continuous than we do—to consider the spiritual *as* natural. One might wonder whether an "obvious" separation between ordinary and extra-ordinary, like that between profane and sacred, natural and super-natural, nature and culture, body and soul, flesh and spirit, is to be traced to the discontents and artificialities of civilization.

I am prepared to claim, however, that making such a distinction is a characterizing universal predisposition of human behavior and mentality. Moreover, I would argue that it is in this predisposition that we are to look for the core of a behavior of art. Even in human groups that do not articulate an explicit separation between extra-ordinary and ordinary, their actions demonstrate such an awareness. Tonkinson himself says of the Mardudjara: "the Dreamtime [the spiritual dimension or domain in which ancestral beings have their existence] is crucial because it is held to be the source of all power, given in response to ritual performance, but also available to individuals when they are able *briefly to transcend their humanity and tap this reservoir (for example, during dance, trance, visions, dreams, and heightened emotional and religious states.*" (Tonkinson, 1978, p. 16; my italics)

Many anthropological studies describe "other worlds": the mysterious permanent dimension of reality that the Yoruba call *iron* (Drewal & Drewal, 1983); the spirit of the forest of the Ituri forest pygmies (Turnbull, 1961); the *engang*, or unseen world of dead spirits, of the Fang of Gabon (Fernandez, 1973); the Eskimo *sila* or "life force" (Birket-Smith, 1959); the *kore* ("wilderness") of the Gimi, otherworldly compared to *dusa*, the domesticated forms of plants and animals and the constraints of human social existence (Gillison, 1980, p. 144); the transcendent reality of the Umeda which is grasped only through rituals that are the antithesis or opposite of what usually is (Gell, 1975); the "underneath" side of things and words of the Kaluli (Feld, 1982); the

to go
from
∅ → 100

Making
special
is extra
ordinary
super =
natural
instincts

hyperanimacy of the powerful beings that the Kalapalo communally sing into being (Basso, 1985); the *kia* experience of Bushmen (Katz, 1982)—one would be hard-pressed to find an anthropological monograph about a people that did not recognize or manifest by their actions the recognition of a nonordinary if not sacred dimension along with everyday reality.

How and why would evolving humans perceive or create “other worlds” apart from the everyday? As I pointed out in the previous section, the penchant for acknowledging an extra-ordinary realm is inherent in the behavior of play, where actions are “not for real.” The “as-ifness” of play, then, can be thought of as a reservoir from which more flexible, imaginative, innovative behaviors can arise—as when we “play around with” an idea. And in ritual also (both the ritualized behaviors of animals and human ritual ceremonies), ordinary behavior is formalized and exaggerated, thereby (particularly in humans) acquiring a meaning and weight that makes it different from what is usually is: it becomes extra-ordinary. It seems undeniable that at some point, evolving hominids, being acquainted in their daily lives with play and ritual, would have been predisposed (as individuals and eventually as a species) to recognize and even create “meta-” or “as-if” realities.

Yet it must be admitted that at the most fundamental level, being able to distinguish between ordinary and extra-ordinary is not a particularly remarkable ability at all. Every animal is equipped to differentiate the normal from the abnormal, the neutral from the extreme. A salamander or mosquito, as well as more complex forms of life, will know when there is a change that suggests something out of the ordinary might occur: a sudden shadow, a sharp noise, an unexpected movement. Life, after all, depends on reacting (or being ready to react) to changes in habitual existence. Moreover, many nonhuman animals also play, but did not go on to invent arts or imaginative works of any kind. And formalized, ritualized behaviors, analogous to ritual ceremonies in humans in their use of rare and extra-ordinary postures, odors, sounds, and movements (Geist, 1978), are also widespread in other animals but have not given rise in them to anything we can justifiably call art. What was it about humans that provoked or permitted them to recognize and then proceed to further elaborate “other” worlds, special fanciful worlds like those invented in play, invoked in ritual, or fabricated in the arts?

The evolving hominids we are concerned with—say, a quarter of a million years ago—were more intelligent and resourceful than other animals. Their brains were larger and more intricately composed, and the mental and emotional complexity this endowment permitted led to a wider range of thought and feeling. Whereas other animals can be assumed to inhabit a continuous present, generally unconcerned with what happened yesterday and what might happen tomorrow, gradually during the Middle or Early Upper Paleolithic, humans must have

Created religion

This also a form of consciousness

scroos.
ness
or
human
experience

become, as Walter Burkett (1987, p. 172) has remarked with regard to the biological origins of religion, "painfully aware of past and future."

I suggest that the standard and unexceptional animal inclination to differentiate ordinary from extra-ordinary, to recognize specialness, would have been developing over tens of thousands of years, along with other higher-level cognitive abilities that were also evolving, such as planning ahead or assessing causes and their consequences.⁹ At some point in their evolution, humans began deliberately to set out to make things special or extra-ordinary, perhaps for the purpose of influencing the outcome of important events that were perceived as uncertain and troubling, requiring action beyond simple fight or flight, approach or avoidance (see Chapter 4).¹⁰

Needed to
continue to
Solidify the
outcome
of choice!

A Closer Look at Making Special

In *What Is Art For?* I proposed that we could understand the arts ethologically by considering them as ways of making important things and activities "special." That is to say, I emphasized the "behavior" or activity (as described in the last section of Chapter 2 above), rather than, as other art theorists have done, the results: the things and activities themselves as "works of art."

The
"doing"
Not
the
results

I suggested that elements of what we today call the arts (e.g., pattern, vividness) would have existed first in nonaesthetic contexts. But because these elements were inherently gratifying (perceptually, emotionally, cognitively) to humans, humans who had an inherent proclivity for making special would use them—not for their own sake, but instead, in ethological terms, as "enabling mechanisms"—in the performance of other selectively valuable behaviors.

To begin with, I thought that the reason making special first occurred might have been to persuade oneself and others that what was being done was worthwhile and effective. This is a reason for embellishment in other species—notably songbirds, who elaborate their songs much more than is necessary simply to advertise their presence or individuality. My reasoning went something like this. If you are an early human who wants to achieve a goal—to kill an animal, for example, or to cure a sickness—you will take pains, take the activity seriously. If you accidentally or deliberately say or do something extra, and are successful, you may well remember to do the extra something again the next time, just in case, as when a baseball player touches his cap and ear in a certain way before throwing a pitch, or a performer or pilot always carries a particular trinket that has in the past brought her or him good luck.

Rooster
CROW

Super-
stition
rituals
to
gain the
wanted
results

It is clear that taking serious and important activities seriously should be of immense survival value. Every bit of psychological reinforcement would count, for yourself as well as for the others who

observe you. (As I pointed out, people who spent time and trouble to reinforce and elaborate deleterious things would not have survived.)

The idea of making special as persuasion or rhetoric seemed promising. Making life-serving implements (tools, weapons) special both expressed and reinforced their importance to individuals and would have assured their more careful manufacture and use. But equally or more important would have been the contribution of making special to ritual ceremonies. When language was used poetically (with stress, compelling rhythm, rhyme, noteworthy similes or word choice); when costumes or décor were striking and extravagant; when choruses, dances, and recitations allowed vicarious or actual audience participation, the content of the ceremonies would have been more memorable than when left "untreated." Whatever message the ceremony intended to communicate ("In union is strength"; "Death is an end and a beginning"; "We are the best"; "Transitions are scary but unavoidable"; "We need food for the coming season") would be first engendered and then reinforced, acquiring special import by virtue of the special effort and attention expended upon it. At the same time, the fellow-feeling arising from the mutual participation and shared emotion was a microcosmic acting out of the general cooperation and coordination that was essential for small groups to survive in a violent, unpredictable world.¹¹ Groups whose individual members had the tendency to make things special would have had more unifying ritual ceremonies, and thus these individuals and groups would have survived better than individuals and groups that did not.

Very True

i.e. Culture!
or
Community!

In ritual ceremonies, then, one can see that making special could acquire even more importance than in individual occurrences. Because it is used to articulate substantive and vital concerns, it is drawn from, expresses, and engages one's deepest and strongest feelings. This is an important point that I introduced in Chapter 2 and to which I will frequently return in this chapter and the ones that follow.

— The Relationship of Making Special and Art

As I described in Chapters 1 and 2, I was first led to develop the concept of making special because of my dissatisfaction with Western culture's general perplexity surrounding the notion of art and, reflecting this confusion, the inadequacy of the available speculations about the role of the arts in human evolution. It seemed to me that if evolutionists did not recognize *Homo aestheticus*, that is, could not satisfactorily explain how and why art was a human universal and could view it only as an epiphenomenon, their concept of art itself must aberrant. Something so widespread, pleasurable, and obviously important to those who did it should not be so inexplicable.

Trapped in the confines and presuppositions of my culture's concepts and attitudes regarding art, I too floundered and took circuitous detours around the subject, as when I tried for a time to derive art from play or art from ritual. I continually returned to the quality in the arts of all times and places of being *extra-ordinary*, outside the daily routine and not strictly utilitarian (in a materialistic, ultimate sense)—even when considered “necessary” to their practitioners. That was where evolutionary explanations always broke down because something “nonutilitarian” should not have been selected for. Yet nonetheless it existed.

Basically what she tried to do above but decided NOT to.

The best word for this characteristic of the arts seemed to be special. Extraordinary with a hyphen might have served, but it is too easily read as “astonishing” or “remarkable”—that is, as a synonym for non-hyphenated *extraordinary*. *Unnecessary* and *nonutilitarian* emphasize what the arts are not, and also smack too much of Western ideas of art-for-art's-sake. *Elaboration* used alone disregards the importance of shaping, and like *enhance* suggests, in Western culture at least, the superficial or merely added. While “special” might seem too imprecise and naively simple, or suggest mere decoration, it easily encompassed an array of what is done in making the arts that is generally different from making nonarts: embellishing, exaggerating, patterning, juxtaposing, shaping, and transforming,

“Special” also denotes a positive factor of care and concern that is absent from the other words. It thus suggests that the special object or activity appeals to emotional as well as perceptual and cognitive factors—that is, to all aspects of our mental functioning. Even though all three are inseparable, as I mentioned in the discussion of emotion in Chapter 2, the usual aesthetic nomenclature (“for its own sake,” “beauty,” “harmony,” “contemplation”) tends to overemphasize calm or abstract intellectual satisfactions at the expense of sensory/emotional/physical/pleasurable ones. Hence “special” can indicate that not only are our senses arrested by a thing's perceptual strikingness (specialness), and our intellects intrigued and stimulated by its uncommonness (specialness), but that we make something special because doing so gives us a way of expressing its positive emotional valence for us, and the ways in which we accomplish this specialness not only reflect but give unusual or special gratification and pleasure (i.e. are aesthetic).

It is important to recognize that the elements used for making something aesthetically special are normally themselves inherently pleasing and gratifying to humans and thus can be called “aesthetic” or “protoaesthetic” even when they occur naturally in nonaesthetic contexts. These pleasing characteristics are those that would have been selected-for in human evolution as indicating that something is wholesome and good: for example, visual signs of health, youth, and vitality such as

How we gain our Aesthetics

Why she chose the word “Special”

This is natural

smoothness, glossiness, warm or true colors, cleanness, fineness, or lack of blemish, and vigor, precision, and comeliness of movement.

Thus we find that most, if not all, societies value agility, endurance, and grace in dance; sonority, vividness, and rhythmic or phonic echoing (rhyme and other poetic devices) in language; and resonance and power in percussion. The Wahgi of Papua New Guinea's Western Highlands, for example, explicitly judge body decoration, dancing, drumming, and ensemble performance in terms of their being rich, glossy, glinting, fiery, slashing, shining, flaming, that is, as the converse of dull, dry, flaky, matte, and lusterless (O'Hanlon, 1989; see also Chapter 5).

In the arts of the West, high value has also been given to skillfully made polished marble statuary, implements and ornaments of burnished metal, vivid glowing tempera and oil paintings, and ornately sumptuous or softly diaphanous textiles. Indeed, it is the obvious lack of these inherently pleasurable or "beautiful" features that has made it so difficult for unsophisticated people to accept certain works of art made during the past century or so as "art," for the artists' deliberate choices to defy traditional expectations regarding pleasing characteristics have set their works outside the pale of "recognizable" art.

In addition to elements that appeal to the senses, particularly vision and hearing, there are others that are pleasing to the cognitive faculties: repetition, pattern, continuity, clarity, dexterity, elaboration or variation of a theme, contrast, balance, proportion. These qualities have to do with comprehension, mastery, and hence security, and thus they are recognized as "good," when used outside a utilitarian context, to make something special. Visual prototypes (e.g., fundamental geometric shapes such as circles or other mandala forms like diagonal or upright crosses) also clarify and control untidiness and are thought and felt to be satisfying and good. (These and other "naturally aesthetic" or protoaesthetic elements will be discussed more fully in Chapter 6.)

The responses to "specialness" in the aesthetic sense—"This is (sensorily and emotionally as well as intellectually) gratifying and special"—presumably evolved alongside other responses to "specialness"—"This is dangerous, unprecedented, needs to be dealt with." As I suggested in speaking of salamanders and mosquitoes, not all specialness engenders or results from gratifying "aesthetic" acts or responses.

"Marking" of any kind for utilitarian identification, for example, the X's made by Hindus on the doors of railway cars that carried Moslems during the Indian-Pakistani conflict after independence, is, strictly speaking, making something special, as is the construction by a state security police department of a special room, in a special place, without windows and with unusual equipment, in which to extract confessions from prisoners. But these unpleasant examples of "specialness" should not be included in the notion I am developing here of aesthetic

specialness: The intention to appeal to (that is, to attract and, if successful, to satisfy) another's faculty for apprehending and appreciating a specialness that is more than what is necessary to fulfill a practical end. Additionally the "artist" takes the protoaesthetic elements out of their "natural" context of indicating vitality and goodness, and "domesticates" them—deliberately using them in aesthetic making special. (The idea of domesticating the natural will be discussed at more length in Chapters 4 and 5.)

Thus, in order to be "aesthetically special," the X's made by the Hindus would have to have been made with care as to their proportion, color, and spatial relationship to the size of the door; and the room constructed by the security police would have to be arranged with an eye for visual relationship among the objects in the room, color coordination, or accent—that is, with a sensory/emotional component that originally evolved for enhancement, pleasure, and gratification over and above (or along with) the sheerly informational or purposeful aspects which, in an academic or analytic sense, we can isolate and separate out.

To evolving humans, as to those living in premodern societies today, the "aesthetic pleasure" derived from making special is not perhaps so easily separated from the "message" it packages as it has become in Western art today. Although contemporary aesthetic specialness, to be nonutilitarian or "more than necessary" (hence not understandable as a selectively valuable behavioral tendency in human evolution), in its original context, it *was* necessary and utilitarian. To adapt an anthropological truism, the obligatory was converted—by making it special—into the desirable, and hence it was willingly done.¹³

But even after establishing that aesthetic making special (in the sense of being sensorily and emotionally gratifying and more than strictly necessary) can be differentiated from nonaesthetic making special such as marking or intimidating, it still remains true that even though all art can be included as aesthetic making special, not all aesthetic making special is art. In ritual and play, everyday reality is transformed, as in art, in emotionally and sensorily gratifying ways, and thus can be appreciated apart from use or practical function. I have not always been able to separate instances of making special in "art" from those in "ritual" and "play," as from X's on doors or torture chambers.

I do not think, however, that this difficulty seriously jeopardizes the attempt to treat art—in the sense of making special—as a human behavior. For if we step outside our blinkered Western modernist and post-modernist paradigms where art is either grand, rare, and intimidating or socially constructed, slick, and provocative, it should be possible to accept the larger, more inclusive entity, making special (including art, ritual, and play) as a universal behavior. That is, by expanding our notion from "art" or even "art as making special" to "the faculty for making and expressing specialness," we can understand in a

humanly grounded and relevant way how “the arts” (instances of making special) originally arose and why they not only enhance our individual lives as *Homo aestheticus*, but have been essential for our evolution as a species.

The radical position that I offer here as a species-centered view of art is that it is not art (with all its burden of accreted connotations from the past two centuries) but making special that has been evolutionarily or socially and culturally important. That is to say, until recent times in the West, what has been of social, cultural, and individual evolutionary importance in any art or “work of art” has been its making something special that is important to the species, society, or culture.

There is no need to decide whether a theater or concert performance is “play,” “ritual,” or “art.” The three often interpenetrate, since “metareality” and “specialness” generally presuppose the freedom, unpredictability, make-believe, imagination, and delight that are associated with play (and art), or the formality, stylization, elaboration, and entrancement that characterize ritual (and art).

In *What Is Art For?* I likened the modern Western concept of art to the Victorian notion of “vapours,” an ambiguous ailment that has long since disappeared, or rather has been replaced by a number of particular named maladies: depression, premenstrual syndrome, hypochondria, flu, bad cold, and so forth. The analogy may have appeared to be merely an amusing aside, but I think it deserves further attention. Indeed, I think our understanding of art as a human behavior would improve if we altogether banned the word art in its singular, conceptual form, just as we no longer find it useful to invoke a broad term, *vapours*, for diverse complaints that gain nothing by being clumped together.

Postmodernists, who claim that art is in any case only two centuries old, should have little theoretical difficulty abandoning the word art, although to be sure, it has permeated our thought from a practical point of view and is probably impossible to eliminate. The reader should try to remember, however, that henceforth in this book, reference to a “behavior of art” means “aesthetic making special” as elucidated in this section, which is a broader concept of “art” than is usual.

In Chapter 4, I will describe in more detail how a behavior of art could have developed from the tendency to recognize an extra-ordinary dimension of experience—that is, I will examine what circumstances in the human evolutionary environment could have called forth and refined such a behavioral tendency and hence why it should have been selected-for. Before ending the discussion of making special, however, I think it would be useful to summarize some of its implications for aesthetic theory today.

Implications of Making Special

The concept of making special, in the biobehavioral view of its being the core defining feature of a behavior of art, casts a new light on previously troublesome questions about the nature, origin, purpose, and value of art, and its place in human life.

1. It explains how a concept of art can comprise such variety, even contradiction. Art may be rare and restricted, as modernists believed, or liberating and problematizing, as postmodernists argue. It may be well or poorly done; it may be an individual original creation or a manifestation of a codified historical or regional tradition. It may require talent and long specialized training or be something everyone does naturally much as they learn to swim or cook or hunt. It may be used for anything, and anything can become an occasion for art. It may or may not be beautiful; although making special often results in “making beautiful,” specialness also may consist of strangeness, outrageousness, or extravagance. As making special is protean and illimitable, so is art.
2. If the essential behavioral core is making special, a concern about whether one or another example of it is or is not “art” becomes irrelevant. One can, of course, ask whether one personally wants to take the time and trouble to appreciate or attempt to appreciate its specialness. Funding agencies will no doubt continue to debate whether certain Robert Maplethorpe photographs, for example, are or are not “art” in some restricted culture-centered sense. But from the species-centered perspective with which this book is concerned, what is relevant is that *Homo aestheticus* “needs” to make special and appreciate specialness. Humans and their societies provide the means and parameters within which to do (or not do) this and within which to evaluate the results.
3. At the same time, the idea of making special would not allow the loose declaration (sometimes heard from postmodernists artists, composers, and critics) that art is everything and everything is art. It may be the case that anything is *potentially* art, but in order to be art, there is a requirement, first, of aesthetic intention or regard and secondly, of fashioning in some way—actively making special or imaginatively treating as special. If art is everything and everything is art, or sound is music and music is sound, as I have heard it said, why distinguish these activities by calling them “art” or “music”?
4. Making special emphasizes the idea that the arts, biologically endowed predispositions, have been physically, sensuously, and emotionally satisfying and pleasurable to humans. By using elements that pleased and gratified human senses—elements that themselves arose in nonaesthetic contexts: bright floors; appealing shapes and sounds; rhythmic movement; aural, gestural, and visual contours with emotional

significance¹⁴—and arrange and patterning these elements in unusual, “special” ways, early humans assured the willing participation in, and accurate performance of, ceremonies that united them. The arts “enabled” ceremonies because they made ceremonies feel good. Before they were ever consciously used to make things special, the satisfactions of rhythm, novelty, order, pattern, color, bodily movement, and moving in synchrony with others were fundamental animal pleasure, essential ingredients of life. Using these bodily pleasurable elements to make ceremonies special—elaborating and shaping them—the arts, and art, were born.

5. My theory recognizes that art, or, more accurately, the desire to make some things special, is a biologically endowed need. The impetus to mark as “special” an expression or artifact, even our bodies, is deep-seated and widespread. Quite naturally, we exaggerate, pattern, and otherwise alter our movements or voices or words to indicate that what we are doing is set apart from ordinary movement, intonation, and speech. More essential than the result (the “work of art,” which can be striking or dull, achieved or abandoned) is the behavior or the activity, and more interesting, for our purposes, is the impetus that animates the behavior or activity. Not all things are made special and those that are chosen are usually made special for a reason. That reason throughout our unrecorded evolutionary history, and also for most of recorded human history, was different, more serious and emotionally involving, than the reason or reasons involved with making special in the modern, industrialized, Western or Western-influenced world.

6. My theory reminds us that the desire or need to make special has been throughout human history, until quite recently, primarily in the service of abiding human concerns—ones that engage our feelings in the most profound ways. Until recently, the arts—when they were not play or entertainment (which are legitimate and age-old ways of making human life more than ordinary)—were used to address or at least to suggest or intimate serious concerns. We moderns feel “art” to be a private compulsion, a personal desire to mold or make something out of one’s individual experience. But art actually originated and thrived for most of human history as a communal activity: in the smaller and more interdependent and like-minded societies in which humans evolved, the need to make sense of experience was satisfied in communally valued and validated activities. Much art today is rather like the display of a captive, lone peacock vainly performed for human (not peahen) spectators, or the following by baby geese of a bicycle wheel instead of their mother. When an animal is removed from its natural milieu and deprived of the cues and circumstances to which it is designed by nature to respond, it will respond and behave as best it can but probably in aberrant ways or with reference to aberrant cues and circumstances.

The principal evolutionary context for the origin and development of the arts was in activities concerned with survival. As we look back through the eons, we see abundant evidence of humans making things or experience special. Overwhelmingly what was chosen to be made special was what was considered important: objects and activities that were parts of ceremonies having to do with important transition, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death; finding food, securing abundance, ensuring fertility of women and of the earth; curing the sick; going to war or resolving conflict; and so forth. In the past, things were made special because they were perennially important, while today we consider something (anything) momentarily important because it has been made flashily if transiently special.

This is an important difference and points up, I think, why in the contemporary West we have been so preoccupied with and confused about art, seduced by it, expecting miracles from it, alternatively feeling elevated or dispirited by it, feeling somewhat betrayed if not altogether scorned by it.

In Wallace Steven's poem "Anecdote of the Jar," a round jar is placed on a hill in Tennessee and the "slovenly wilderness" surrounding it immediately seems to fall into place. The jar becomes a kind of focus or center—"it took dominion everywhere"—that gives meaning or relevance to what before was wild, haphazard, and insignificant. In my ethological terms, placing the jar in that unlikely place was "making it special": an instance, if you will, of artistic behavior. Steven's poem that tells the story also makes the deed (real or imagined) special by choosing unusual word order ("and round it was upon that hill"), strange phrases ("and of a port in air," "it did not give of bird or bush"), and rhyme (round/ground; air/bare/where) for the telling. A beautiful and successful poem in the high modernist tradition, "Anecdote of the Jar" is an exemplum of what a modern or postmodern painter or sculptor does when she or he chooses a subject and material and shapes and elaborates them, making special what before her or his action and vision would have been ordinary and unremarkable.

Yet, in premodern society, the hill, though slovenly and wild, would most likely have been already somehow important: it would have been the abode of a spirit, or the place where a valued person was killed, or the site where a vision had occurred. Or perhaps the jar itself would have been important—because of some sacredness involved in its making or some magical marks added to its surface—so that placing it on the hill would have been a way of bringing human or divine presence to the hill or imparting a power to it. While such motives may still be the impetus behind some artistic acts today, they need not be. The act alone, for its own sake, is enough, and we have learned to respond to the act and its result quite apart from the intention or idea that gave rise to the act.

Human evolution may have involved gratuitous acts of making special, but it is difficult to see how these would have made sufficient difference to the survival of individuals or groups to have been retained by natural selection as a genetic predisposition (except perhaps insofar as they are considered part of the general behavior of play, whose motivation is quite different from acknowledging or creating or celebrating importance). I admit that making special manifested as playfulness or idiosyncrasy can be pleasurable and rewarding, but I doubt whether in themselves they would have led before modern times to the creations that have been enshrined as our most representative examples of “art.”

7. To suggest that making important things special was the original impetus for a “behavior of art” accounts for the close association in historic times as well as in prehistory between the arts and religion—more accurately, the ritual expression of religion.

The earliest anthropological observers noted the importance of religion in human societies everywhere. Emile Durkheim, the great French founder of sociology, called religion a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things—things set apart and forbidden (1964, p. 62). These beliefs, practices, and things belong to a realm called by different authors the numinous (Dodds, 1973), the serious (Shils, 1966), the supernatural—all suggesting the extra-ordinary, outside ordinary life.

In the next chapter I will show that the origins of religious beliefs and practices and the arts must have been inseparable and that the ceremonies that have arisen in every human society for the purpose of dealing with vital, emotionally significant, archetypal concerns expressed these by means of arts. Yet before doing this I should remind the reader that today in the modern West very little is, in Durkheim’s words, set apart or forbidden. Indeed, being considered forbidden or taboo seems cause and justification for being openly discussed and displayed.¹⁶

What is more, in the modern world, as Kaplan (1978, p. 86) has pithily remarked, the interesting is no longer important, and the important is no longer interesting. It seems worth asking whether the confusing and unsatisfying state of art in our world has anything to do with the fact that we no longer care about important things. In our predominantly affluent and hedonistic society, survival is no longer paramount for most of us, and spiritual concerns, while perhaps given public lip service, are less and less privately validated. Our experience of the extra-ordinary tends to be an ever-growing involvement with such things as gambling, violent films, and mood-altering drugs. Caring deeply about vital things is out of fashion, and, in any case, who has the time (or allows the time) to care and to mark one’s caring?¹⁷ Human history has demonstrated that people can endure surprising amounts of hardship and suffering—conditions that usually elicit a serious and religious attitude toward life. Whether people are as well equipped to

thrive under conditions of unprecedented leisure, comfort, and plenty is a question that is being tested on a large scale in our present circumstances: the answer does not appear to be promising.

Notes

1. Paul Mattick, comment made during presentation in panel entitled "The Institutions of Art/2" (Forty-Seventh Annual Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, 24-28 October 1989, New York City).
2. My account concerns Western aesthetics and does not attempt to address aesthetic concepts in other civilizations or how they relate to those in the West.
3. While my discussion in the text uses examples primarily from the visual arts, the history, criticism, and theory of the other arts are much the same. For example, Lydia Goehr (1989) makes a point similar to mine in her analysis of the development of an abstract concept of a musical "work."
4. "Play" theories of art are most commonly associated with Friedrich Schiller (1795/1967), Herbert Spencer (1880-82), Sigmund Freud (1908/1959), and Johan Huizinga (1949).
5. Richard Alexander (1989) explains human social play as leading "to an expanding ability and tendency to elaborate and internalize social-intellectual-physical scenarios," which itself underlies the evolutionary development of the human psyche—a neat combination of the human appreciation of fantasy and reality. See my discussion of Alexander at the end of Chapter 4.
6. Radcliffe-Brown (1922/1948) in his monograph on the Andaman Islanders, stresses that ceremonies produce changes in or structure feelings. They "maintain and transmit from one generation to another the *emotional dispositions on which the society depends for its existence*" (p. 234, my italics). Being obligatory, they compel participants to act as though they felt certain emotions and thereby to some extent actually serve to induce those emotions in them. See also the section on ritual and dramatic performance in Chapter 5.
7. It was also intriguing for me to realize that play is often ritualized, as in sport, with its special arena, costumes, ways of behaving, structure in time. In rituals people often pretend (play or act "as if"): Australian aborigines, for example, imitate animals or pretend to kill them, and the Yanomamo Indians of South America do battle with spirits. Our "plays" and performances in general, can be considered simultaneously as art, as ritual, and as play.
8. Peter Sutton (1988, pp. 18-19) also states that in traditional Aboriginal thought, there is no nature without culture. He quotes W. E. H. Stanner (*On Aboriginal Religion* [1963, p. 277]: "Anyone who...has moved in the Australian bush with Aboriginal associates becomes aware...[that he] moves not in a landscape but in a humanized realm saturated with significations."
9. Evidence of deliberate foresight and planning has been claimed for Middle Paleolithic early *sapiens* hominids more than 100,000 years ago in

their cooperative hunting strategies (Chase, 1989); in their hafting of stone tools, which implies the ability to predict the likelihood of recurring tasks requiring a particular tool (Shea, 1989); and in their transporting artifactual material from afar to be used at home (Deacon, 1989). Hayden and Bonifay (1991, p. 6) marshal data that “provide overwhelming support for the notion that Neanderthals were curating lithic tools, exhibiting planning and foresight similar to Upper Paleolithic people, and acting in economically rational fashions.

10. The earliest archaeological evidence for body ornaments seems to date from the transition from the Middle Paleolithic to the Upper Paleolithic, that is, from around 35,000 B. P. It is interesting that these ornaments were made primarily from exotic (i.e., “special”) materials, such as shell, soft stone, teeth, and tusks, that had been brought sometimes from hundreds of kilometers away from where they were excavated. Randall White (1989b) suggests that the ornaments were used for social display and were perhaps symbolic of social distinctions. Whatever their use or significance, it is interesting to see that when making themselves special, individuals also used special materials.
11. In *The Creative Explosion* (1982), John Pfeiffer presented a similar reconstruction of art and ceremony in the Upper Paleolithic. His concern was to elucidate the remarkable flowering of cultural behavior at that time, and not to address ethologically art’s earlier origins and putative selective value.
12. It was both amusing and gratifying to later discover that Arthur Danto (1986, p. 21), who was not concerned with selective value or ethology, argued that “the structure of artworks is of a piece with the structure of rhetoric,” and that “it is the office of rhetoric to modify the minds and then the actions of men and women by coopting their feelings.” Danto’s idea of “the transfiguration of the commonplace” in contemporary Western art (1981) is also congruent with a notion of making the ordinary extra-ordinary or “making special.”
13. See note 6, this chapter. In his classic monograph (1922/1948), Radcliffe-Brown explicitly states that ceremonies (in which, of course, objects and activities are made special) transmit feelings. More recent anthropologists have been generally concerned with ceremonies primarily as a means of transmitting information, traditions and symbols.
14. See Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1989a; 1989b) for additional and fascinating examples of appealing and arresting bioaesthetic elements arising from human perception and behavior.
15. Even in the gestural sign language of the deaf, poetic statements are signed in a different manner than everyday conversation. Rather than using a dominant hand, the two hands are balanced; a smoothness of movement is imposed on the signs; and they are given a rhythmic temporal pattern and an enlarged “designed” spatial pattern, with exaggerations of representational or pantomime aspects (Klima and Bellugi, 1983).
16. In some areas of modern life disclosure and open discussion are still frowned upon,—e.g., military, government, and industrial affairs—but the information associated with these realms does not really correspond

to the kinds of information formerly considered numinous. Revealing military or industrial secrets is considered far more deplorable than exposing personal emotional or spiritually significant matters.

17. It is not only that we are too "busy" or sated to care. Caring usually involves acting upon what one cares about (see Chapter 4). In our pluralistic and impersonal society, we cannot usually affect change, or by trying to do so, we may at the same time be going against other important personal or group interests. Thus, not caring is self-protective and a way of coping with impotence.

References

- Alexander, R. D. (1989). The evolution of the human psyche. In P. Mellars & C. Stringer, (Eds.), *The human revolution* (pp. 455-513). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Alsop, J. (1982). *The rare art traditions: The history of art collecting and its linked phenomena*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Basso, E. B. (1985). *A musical view of the universe: Kalapalo myth and ritual performances*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Birket-Smith, K. (1959). *The Eskimos*. London: Methuen. (Original work published 1927)
- Burket, W. (1987). The problem of ritual killing. In R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, (Ed.), *Violent origins: Ritual killing and cultural formation* (pp. 149-76). Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Chase, P. G. (1989). How different was Middle Palaeolithic subsistence? A zooarchaeological perspective on the Middle to Upper Palaeolithic transition. In P. Mellars & C. Stringer, (Eds.), *The Human Revolution: Behavioural and Biological Perspectives in the Origins of Modern Humans* (pp. 321-337). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Danto, A. (1981). *The transfiguration of the commonplace*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Deacon, H. J. (1989). Late Pleistocene palaeontology and archaeology in the Southern Cape, South Africa. In P. Mellars & C. Stringer, (Eds.), (pp. 547-564).
- Dodds, E. R. (1973). *The Greeks and the irrational*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. (Original work published 1951)
- Drewal, H. J., & Drewal, M. T. (1983). *Gèlèdè: Art and female power among the Yoruba*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1964). The dualism of human nature and its social

- conditions. In K. H. Wolff (Ed.), (C. Blend, Trans.), *Essays on sociology and philosophy by Emile Durkheim et al.* (pp. 325-340). New York: Harper and Row. (Original work published 1914)
- Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1989a). *Human ethology* (Pauline Wiessner-Larsen & A. Heunemann, Trans.). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I. (1989b). The biological foundation of aesthetics. In I. Rentschler, B. Herzberger, & D. Epstein, (Eds.), *Beauty and the brain: Biological aspects of aesthetics*, (pp. 29-68). Basel, Switzerland: Birkhauser.
- Feld, Steven. (1982). *Sound and sentiment: Birds, weeping, poetics, and song in Kaluli expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fernandez, J. W. (1973). The exposition and imposition of order: Artistic expression in Fang culture. In W. L. d'Azevedo, (Ed.), *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, Proceedings of the 1965 SSRC-ACLS Lake Tahoe Conference (pp. 194-220). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Geist, V. (1978). *Life strategies, human evolution, environmental design*. New York: Springer.
- Gell, A. (1975). *Metamorphosis of the Cassowaries*. London: Athlone.
- Gillison, G. (1980). Images of nature in Gimi thought. In C. P. MacCormack & M. Strathern, (Eds.), *Nature, Culture, Gender* (pp. 143-173). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goehr, L. (1989). Being true to the work. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47(1), 55-67.
- Hayden B., & Bonifay, E. (1991). *The Neanderthal nadir*. (Unpublished manuscript.)
- Huxley, J. (Ed.) (1966). A discussion on ritualization of behaviour in animals and man. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences*, 251 (December), 247-526.
- Huzinga, J. (1949). *Homo ludens* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Kaplan, S. (1978). Attention and fascination: The search for cognitive clarity. In S. Kaplan & R. Kaplan (Eds.), *Humanscape: Environments for people* (pp. 84-90). North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press.
- Katz, R. (1982). *Boiling energy: Community healing among the Kalahari Kung*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Klima, E. S., & Bellugi, U. (1983). Poetry without sound. In J. Rothenberg & D. Rothenberg (Eds.), *Symposium of the whole. A range of discourse toward an ethnopoetics* (pp. 291-302). Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.
- O'Hanlon, M. (1989). *Reading the skin: Adornment, display, and society among the Wahgi*. London: British Museum Publications.
- Pfeiffer, J. E. (1982). *The creative explosion*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Radcliff-Brown, A.R. (1948). *The Andaman Islanders*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press. (Original work published 1922)

- Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. (1948). *The Andaman Islanders*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press. (Original work published 1922)
- Schiller, F. (1967). Fourteenth letter. E. H. Wilkinson & L. A. Willoughby (Eds.). *Letters on the aesthetic education of man* (p. 420). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1975)
- Shea, J. J. (1989). A functional study of the lithic industries associated with hominid fossils in the Kebara and Qafzeh caves, Israel. In P. Mellars & C. Stringer, (Eds.), *The Human Revolution: Behavioural and Biological Perspectives on the Origins and Dispersal of Modern Humans*, Vol. 1 (pp. 611-625). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shils, E. (1966). Ritual and crisis. In J. Huxley (Ed.), (pp. 447-450).
- Spencer, H. (1880-82). The aesthetic sentiments. In *Principles of psychology*, 2 (2).
- Sutton, P., (Ed.) (1988). *Dreamings: The art of aboriginal Australia*. New York: B Braziller.
- Tomkinson, R. (1978). *The Mardudjara aborigines: Living the dream in Australia's desert*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Turnbull, C. M. (1961). *The forest people*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Turner, V. (1983). Body, brain, and culture. *Zygon*, 18 (September), 221-45.
- White, R. (1989). Visual thinking in the Ice Age. *Scientific American*, July, 92-99.