COMMENTARY

# THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF AESTHETICS AND THE DANGERS OF 'MAQUETCENTRISM'

The anthropology of aesthetics can boast only a limited literature.[1] With the publication in 1986 of *The Aesthetic Experience* Jacques Maquet could justifiably claim to be the author of the only two books on the subject. While there are many books devoted to the anthropology of art, and others to the study of particular aesthetic systems, Maquet's *The Aesthetic Experience* and his earlier *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology* (1979 [1971]) are the only ones I know of devoted to the general topic of the anthropology of aesthetics - or, as Maquet prefers to call it, aesthetic anthropology.[2]

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I should like to thank Anthony Shelton for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Except where otherwise specified, page references are to *The Aesthetic Experience* (Maquet 1986).

[1] This is not the place to give an account of the literature that does exist; Flores Fratto 1985 provides an excellent guide.

[2] 'Aesthetic anthropology' does not trip off the tongue as easily as 'economic anthropology' or 'political anthropology' (though it doesn't sound as odd as 'religious anthropology' or 'familial and marital anthropology'). Tom Phillips remarks (1986) that 'aesthetic anthropology' leads one 'to expect a field-worker sporting a green carnation or an aesthete wearing boots'. Flores Fratto (1985: 38 n.2) takes exception not only to 'aesthetic anthropology' but also to 'economic anthropology', 'political anthropology' etc, preferring rather to speak of the anthropology of aesthetics, anthropology of economics etc. I suppose it does not matter much, though it can be said in favour of 'aesthetic anthropology' that as Maquet is the only writer to have used the term so far it might become associated

*The Aesthetic Experience* has now appeared in paperback, this presumably reflecting its success to date and/or its anticipated success at a paperback price. This success, whether actual or anticipated, contrasts markedly with the lack of critical attention the book has received in anthropological journals.[3] However, as a large-format, lavishly (but only in black-and-white) illustrated volume, printed on glossy paper, and published by a leading American publisher, it has attracted considerable attention in non-anthropological periodicals. In Britain it has been reviewed in a leading literary journal, the *Times Literary Supplement* (Phillips 1986), a leading philosophy journal, the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (Crowther 1987), and a leading political weekly, the *New Statesman* (Spurling 1986).[4] While mixed, these reviews are united by an assumption that the book, and Maquet himself, are to be taken as foremost and representative examples of the subject and its practitioners. Phillips comments in the *TLS* that aesthetic anthropologists 'are a tiny tribe, probably as yet no larger than would fill a modest conference hall' and that 'Jacques Maquet is one of the discipline's leading figures and has written the standard introductory work on the subject'. Crowther comments, in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, that Maquet might be 'just the person' to inaugurate a collaborative project between anthropologists and philosophers' (1987: 376), while Spurling in the *New Statesman* remarks that *The Aesthetic Experience* 'should become a classic'.

So here we have the remarkable situation of a book on aesthetics by an anthropologist receiving substantial attention in circles well beyond the anthropological, and yet seemingly ignored by the anthropological journals. This may be because the anthropology of

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with his particular brand of the anthropology of aesthetics, thus usefully distinguishing his approach from the mainstream.

[3] As it happens, the *Introduction* also seems to have received scant attention. The only review of it I have been able to find was in the pages of this Journal (Bowman 1980). Apart from that *JASO* review the most extended comment seems to have been in Toni Flores Fratto's two essays reviewing and defining the anthropology of aesthetics (1978: 130-1; 1985: 27-8). There are occasional references in the literature, but the *Introduction* does not seem to have been widely used. This must be due in part to its having been published, in both editions, in rather obscure series (see the entries in the list of references). Whatever the case, it is clear that the *Introduction* is not, *pace* Phillips (1986), 'the standard introductory work in the subject'.

[4] In the United States of America it has been reviewed, among other places, in the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (Boucouvalas 1986), the *Library Journal* (Lambrecht 1986), *Leonardo* (Shields 1987), as well as in *American Anthropologist* (Johnson 1987) and the quasi-anthropological *African Arts* (Stevens 1986). In light of the negative nature of the present essay, I should perhaps stress that the majority of these 'American' reviews are generally positive, as is Spurling's in the *New Statesman*.

aesthetics - and the anthropology of art - are still considered marginal to the discipline as a whole. Or it may be because anthropologists do not consider it to be a book worthy of attention. Whatever the case, it is surely important that such a rare attempt by an anthropologist to deal at length with the topic of aesthetics should be subject to critical comment - if only to help counteract the danger that *The Aesthetic Experience* might be perceived by the general reader of the *TLS* and the *New Statesman*, the philosophical reader of the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, and perhaps even by the non-specialist anthropologist, as representative of what anthropology has to say about aesthetics.

I shall try to give my view of Maquet's 'look at the visual arts' by presenting an account of how he proceeds in constructing his account of *The Aesthetic Experience*, by criticising his procedure, and finally by considering the book in relation to the anthropology of aesthetics and of art in general.[5] Unfortunately, it is difficult to credit *The Aesthetic Experience* with a coherent argument. I freely admit to having failed here to present a fully convincing account of the argument of the book. I should maintain, however, that this is not all my fault - it is also Maquet's.[6] I begin, though, with some introductory references to Maquet's *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology*, of which *The Aesthetic Experience* might fairly be described as an extended and expanded version.

## *Maquet's Procedure*

Maquet's *Introduction to Aesthetic Anthropology* made a potentially very valuable contribution to the anthropological study of aesthetic phenomena by dismissing the anthropology of art as a valid enterprise and arguing instead for an aesthetic anthropology or an anthropology of aesthetics. Maquet argued that 'focused on the exclusive function of display, granting a privileged status to representation, the notion of art is too narrowly ethnocentric to

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[5] I shall only be concerned here with the contribution of *The Aesthetic Experience* to the anthropology of aesthetics and art. Much of the book is taken up with detailed accounts of Maquet's own experiences (which he universalizes) of looking at art. Others seem to have found these of value - Crowther (1987: 376) speaks of Maquet's 'great sensitivity to art', and Phillips (1986) speaks of the book as 'stimulating' in this aspect - but I shall not be concerned with it as a 'how-to-look-at-art' book.

[6] I am encouraged in this view by Phillips' comment (1986) that the book has 'no identifiable continuous thesis' and by Crowther's comment (1987: 375) that the book is 'bedevilled by an extraordinary degree of philosophical naivety, which leaves many difficulties unnoticed and therefore unanswered'.

define a cross-cultural field of study. There cannot be an anthropology of art' (1979: 45). Maquet's point here is, I think, grounded in the practicalities of the matter. In whichever ways we attempt to define 'art' to make it valid cross-culturally, the notion of display and the centrality of representation to what we take to be art will be there in the background dogging our steps, as, indeed, will the notion that the visual arts - in particular, the fine arts of painting and sculpture - are what we *really* mean by art. 'Aesthetics', however, offers us a cross-culturally valid field of enquiry which partially subsumes 'art' without detracting from the latter's historical and cultural specificity.

Rather than continuing to search for universally valid definitions of art, we can just stop. Freed from the difficulty of saying of the material products of another culture (even before we start to do anything more interesting with them) how they are and are not 'art', it should be easier to treat them in their own terms. This, if accepted, would not necessarily mean that the word 'art' would disappear from anthropological discourse altogether; we should still tend to refer to non-Western (and Western) material products which approximate in one way or another what we in the West call art as 'art' - it is just that we would not necessarily mean much by it.

Art, then, will be subsumed under 'Aesthetics' in a new aesthetic anthropology or anthropology of aesthetics: 'art phenomena are included in the broader and more universal category of aesthetic phenomena' (ibid.). What exactly Maquet means by 'aesthetics' will, I hope, emerge as this discussion progresses.

In some ways Maquet might seem to have moved away from this position in *The Aesthetic Experience*, for here he is concerned almost exclusively with art, indeed with the fine visual arts. He does not, however, disown his earlier position. *The Aesthetic Experience* should, therefore, be seen as an attempt to discuss the visual arts from the perspective of aesthetic anthropology. This is a perfectly legitimate subject for enquiry, though perhaps a somewhat surprising choice for an author whose earlier book seemed to deprivilege the arts.

It is more understandable given the second, as I see it, potentially valuable contribution of the *Introduction*, that is, the notion of the aesthetic locus. Maquet argued that

> besides being widely expressed in countless objects, the visual aesthetic concern of a culture at a certain period of time is concentrated, as it were, in certain types of artefacts. It does not seem that a society maintains an equally intense aesthetic interest in all the things made within its borders. There are certain privileged fields where awareness and performance are higher, where expectations and efforts converge. The class or classes of objects that are localized in these areas of heightened aesthetic consciousness constitute the aesthetic locus of a culture (1979: 30).

This might seem obvious, but it does not seem to have been generally recognized. By making the aesthetic locus (or loci) of a culture

the centre of our aesthetic analyses, we avoid the problem of looking for 'art' or discussing whether what we are looking at is or is not 'art'. For example, in studying the aesthetics of the cattle-keeping peoples of the Southern Sudan and East Africa we might, following the interests of the people themselves, concentrate on cattle, and particularly song- and display-oxen, as one locus and, perhaps, body decoration as another. The term 'aesthetic locus', while not necessarily committing us to any particular theoretical position, provides us with a shorthand way of referring to the aesthetic importance of particular areas of life in other cultures. In the West, 'art' is one such locus - though it might well be argued that it is indeed *only* one such locus and that for the majority of people art is really unimportant.

*The Aesthetic Experience* is divided into three parts, with an introductory chapter and an appendix. The three parts consider in order 'Art in Human Experience', 'The Aesthetic Object as Symbolic' and 'The Aesthetic Object as Cultural'. The first two-thirds of the book deal with the human universal and only the last third with the cultural. Maquet opens with some comments on anthropological evidence, anthropology's holistic and cross-cultural approach, and his own phenomenological view.

The discussion of 'Art in Human Experience' begins with art in a particular everyday reality, that of a contemporary city in the West. Maquet analyzes what 'art' means to the inhabitants of contemporary Los Angeles. This involves what art institutions of various sorts do, and some as yet unidentified quality which makes some objects 'really' art and others which lack it not 'really' art. Maquet argues that this quality is the aesthetic quality and that the aesthetic quality has to do with form. The aesthetic experience, then, is the experience of form, but this is not the simple matter it might appear to be. The aesthetic experience involves 'attentive, nonanalytical and disinterested vision' and is of the order of meditation and contemplation. It involves the contemplative mode of consciousness as opposed to the active, cognitive and affective modes. This mode is perhaps rooted in neurophysiological reality (the right side of the brain) and is universal. Aesthetic experience is universal. Art is not.

In Part II, Maquet argues for aesthetic forms having meaning. These meanings have nothing to do with representation or what the forms may refer to - meaning is exclusively in the forms. He refers to the meanings of aesthetic forms as symbolic meanings, that is, they participate in what they signify. High quality resides in design, expressivity in the congruence of form and meaning, and beauty in the excellence of design. Meanings are cross-cultural and universal. Maquet rejects the model of art as communication in favour of art as communion: it is not that the artist has a message to communicate to us, rather we share in the artist's experience as expressed in the symbolic meaning of the work, which we apprehend intuitively.

In Part III, Maquet discusses the cultural component in aesthetic objects. This, of course, has nothing to do with their meanings, for these are cross-cultural and universal, but rather with the influences that other parts of the society have on aesthetic forms

and vice versa. He outlines his own (independently invented) model of cultural materialism. Societal cultures have three levels, the productive, the societal and the ideational, and are divided vertically into segments, the aesthetic segment being one of these. Between the levels are processes of exclusion and conduction (that is, the limiting and favouring of potentialities) and between the segments there are correspondences. Examples of these processes and correspondences are given. In an appendix Maquet briefly discusses some quantitative approaches to art within anthropology and reminds us at the very end that he is a phenomenologist.

I hope that Maquet's procedure is not more confusing in my presentation of it than it is in itself.

## *A Critique*

It might be wondered how all this hangs together. The simple answer is that it does not, except in so far as it is all contained within the pages of a single volume and is presented by a single author in an admirably clear and lucid style. The 'phenomenology' is superfluous, only being mentioned at the outset with a 'reminder' of it at the end. Maquet claims on the last page 'that the phenomenological perspective stated at the beginning of the book, though not mentioned again, was not lost' (p. 251). The only sense in which this might be true is that Maquet was perhaps continually aware of it while writing the book - it certainly makes no difference to his argument and may happily be ignored by the reader.

Phenomenology and cultural materialism are not obvious bedfellows. Of course, being a phenomenologist, Maquet only takes cultural materialism 'as a guiding principle. It is not a philosophic position concerning the ultimate nature of the world; it is simply a useful theory in research and in the construction of reality' (p. 198). The only justification Maquet offers for his adoption of cultural materialism is that he, and some others, have found it useful. It is, therefore, presumably sufficient of an argument against it that I, and some different others - for example, Bowman in his (1980) review of Maquet's *Introduction* - have not.

Cultural materialism, with its 'levels', 'segments', 'processes' and so on, gives a spuriously scientific quality to anthropological understanding of social reality; it turns what is often at best common sense into scientific-seeming hypotheses of superficial profundity though actual banality. Maquet does not present a comprehensive and coherent account of aesthetic phenomena in a single 'societal culture'. Rather, he discusses a number of disconnected examples of exclusion, conduction and correspondence. An example of 'exclusion' is the fact that 'the absence of stone-cutting techniques for hard stone has prevented the development of larger scale three-dimensional forms in the forests and savannahs of sub-Saharan Africa' (p. 193). As for conduction, the cylindrical timber available to African wood-carvers is said to be conducive to elongated vertical shapes. These sorts of examples are no more than

common sense. In his BBC talk on 'Aesthetics', Leach (1956: 26) pointed out that 'people who live in tropical deserts are not likely to be expert wood carvers but they may have an elaborate aesthetic of sand drawing'.[7] I should be surprised if when making this statement Leach regarded himself as a cultural materialist - or that he even thought he needed to talk of levels, segments and so on to make the point.

Examples of correspondence have rather more weight to them, for example, the correspondence between 'mythical time' conceptions and shallow-relief wood-carving in some West African cultures, and between 'historical time' conceptions and deep-relief carving in some others (pp. 232-5).[8] But such correspondences are what all anthropologists seek in their studies - they have nothing particularly to do with cultural materialism, with its emphasis on a causal productive system.

A more extraordinary part of the book, however, is that dealing with what Maquet claims are the symbolic meanings of aesthetic forms. As with his exposition of cultural materialism, we are treated to an explication of his own particular terminology, this time of signification - 'referents', 'indicators', 'images' and 'symbols'. We are only concerned with 'symbols' here. They are defined as 'signs standing for their signifieds by participation'; symbols and their signifieds share connaturality, so that 'undulating lines engraved on a slab of stone symbolize flowing water as wavelike patterns appear both in streams and on the stone' (p. 94). It is in such a way that visual forms are symbols. Perhaps the best example of what Maquet means can be found in Fagg's well-known and oft-repeated discussion of the symbolism of exponential curves and spirals in African art as symbolizing growth and life.[9]

We can best proceed by looking at one of Maquet's examples of

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[7] In this context it is perhaps worth noting that although Leach's talk was entitled 'Aesthetics', it was in fact about art rather than aesthetics as such. In this case, as so often, 'aesthetics' has been used to mean no more than 'talk about art'.

[8] These correspondences were identified by the French poet and student of African art, Jean Laude (1971 [1966]).

[9] Maquet discusses this (pp. 105-8) in connection with the volutes on Napoleon's tomb. He well knows that the point was first made by Fagg in his studies of African art - it is a point which Fagg has discussed many times (e.g. 1973). In the body of Maquet's text we are referred to a note to which we turn expecting to find a reference to Fagg. Instead we are referred to another publication by Maquet himself. The unsuspecting reader may be led to believe that this interesting idea about spirals and curves was thought up by Maquet himself. The fact that in the work of Maquet's to which we are referred there is a proper reference to Fagg does not excuse the present omission. This is a particular case of Maquet's general failure to engage with the anthropological literature.

aesthetic meaning. He discusses Picasso's *Guernica* as follows:

> The configuration of forms...has such expressivity. Angular contours, grey monochromatism, three-part composition centred in an upward triangle, and lighter shapes on the darker area of the ground forcefully convey meaning perceived by this beholder: war is cruel and absurd (p. 128).

Are we really meant to accept this? Is Maquet really saying that even if he knew nothing about the subject-matter of *Guernica* - about Spanish history and culture, about Picasso - he would still apprehend the meaning 'war is cruel and absurd' from the aesthetic forms alone? And the implication seems to be that any painting (or visual experience) exhibiting 'angular contours, grey monochromatism, three-part composition centred in an upward triangle, and lighter shapes on the darker area of the ground' would convey the same meaning. Worse still, he insists that such meanings are not culture-specific but are cross-cultural and universal, and can therefore be apprehended by anyone from any culture.

Such aesthetic meanings are not confined to works of art. Natural phenomena also have such universal meanings in their aesthetic forms. Even a momentary scene such as a street after an air raid has an aesthetic meaning. Maquet describes such a scene he witnessed and says: 'everything I saw meant the absurdity and cruelty of war' (p. 138). Of course, but it did so because it was a result of the cruelty and absurdity of war, not because, as he claims, of the particular organization and patterning of light, broken glass and (dead) bodies. The same scene could have been produced by a peacetime catastrophe - a gas-main exploding, for example. Would it then have had the same meaning? The street might have been the headquarters of the Gestapo and the dead bodies those of Nazi torturers. Would it then have meant 'the absurdity and cruelty of war'?

A few pages later Maquet remarks of African sculpture exhibited in the West in the early years of this century that it 'has made some of the basic values of traditional Black Africa appreciated and respected in the industrialized West' (p. 144). He does not mean, as one might expect and *might* agree for argument's sake, that along with the sculpture came informed knowledge of the socio-cultural background in which the objects were produced, and of African moral and ethical systems. No, he means that African values can be apprehended directly by anyone who looks at African sculpture. He writes: 'a traditional African carving symbolizing sex or death, joy or fear, friendship or hierarchy may be directly apprehended by non-African beholders as standing for these ideas' (p. 176). This will come as quite a surprise to those Africanist anthropologists and art historians who struggle to gain sufficient knowledge of the socio-cultural context in which African sculptures are produced in order to allow approximately valid apprehensions. There are numerous examples of misapprehensions in the literature on African art which one could cite. One example must suffice.

In a recent publication of the New York Center for African Art, William Rubin, Director of the Painting and Sculpture Department of the New York Museum of Modern Art, discusses his response to a

particularly fine Makonde helmet-mask beautifully illustrated on the page opposite that from which these remarks are taken. He says (1987: 52) that it 'is one of the few truly frightening and alien pieces of art I've ever seen', and goes on: 'it expresses something about the inherent violence of the human mind'. He locates this 'meaning' in 'the expression of the face and the shape of the head, and this is reinforced by the scarifications'. And he comments of the mask's mouth: 'That mouth is something else! It's almost like an animal mouth.' I am not able to say what precise meaning this particular mask had for the Makonde who made it, wore it and watched it perform. What I can say is that the sort of scarification it depicts and the sharpened teeth of the mouth are in fact part of the normal appearance of any adult Makonde. Sharpened teeth did not make them look like animals, and facial scarification certainly has nothing to do with 'the inherent violence of the human mind' - rather, it is how ordinary human beings, i.e. Makonde, appear. I would defy anyone to remain so sure of their first response to such a mask once they are given even such minimal information about the culture in which it was produced. Anthropologists know, or should know, better than anyone the degree to which knowledge of the socio-cultural background is essential for understanding any art form.

Maquet claims that aesthetic forms have meanings which 'are clearly in the forms' (p. 156). He recognizes that different individuals may attribute different meanings to an object but maintains that these are not projections - they are *all* in the forms. There seems to me to be an important point here, but it is not the one Maquet makes.

He is constrained by his practice of referring to aesthetic quality as residing in objects and by starting his analysis with objects. The objects are, in my view, not themselves aesthetic - aesthetics resides in the minds of the beholders. It is in this sense only that objects can be said to have meanings which are clearly in the forms, for the forms are those the viewer sees. He or she sees them as there and responds accordingly: so Rubin sees 'violence' where a Makonde sees a fairly naturalistic representation of a fellow Makonde. No one can regard an object without bringing to bear the culturally determined aspects of his perception. No matter how long or deep the contemplation, one sees the object through cultural eyes. The explication of the differences between different cultures' ways of seeing should, I suggest, be the primary task of the anthropology of aesthetics. This is not a new idea. Mauss (1947: 72) warned the enquirer into aesthetic phenomena: 'Dans cette enquête plus encore dans toute autre, l'observateur européen se méfiera de ses impressions personnelles. Le total de la forme doit être analysé par l'indigène avec sons sens visuel.'[10]

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[10] 'In this enquiry more than in any other, the European observer should mistrust his personal impressions. The total form must be analyzed by the native with his visual sense' (my translation). I am grateful to Anthony Shelton for drawing my attention to Mauss's discussion of aesthetics in the *Manuel* from which this quote comes.

No amount of looking alone will enable one to see an object in the way a member of another culture does: talk, experience and study go some way towards achieving this. Looking alone does little. To make what is now a familiar reference, no amount of looking will enable one to appreciate the fifteenth-century Florentine merchants' way of seeing paintings of the period - Baxandall's account (1974 [1972]; cf. Geertz 1976) goes some way towards enabling us to do so. Forge (1970: 286) touches on this point in one of his papers on the art of the Abelam:

> What do the Abelam see? Quite obviously there can be no absolute answer to this question: it is impossible to see through the eyes of another man, let alone perceive with his brain. Yet if we are to consider the place of art in any society...we must beware of assuming that they see what we see and vice versa.

Aesthetics, we can agree with Maquet, is about form (including, of course, colour), but what constitutes form in one culture may not do so in another. Or to put it more accurately, perhaps, which forms are preferred, valued, elaborated and developed varies from culture to culture. Before we do anything else in our aesthetic anthropology we should attempt to explicate how the people we study see the world, which forms they prefer, seek out, elaborate and develop.

By presenting the way *he* sees the world as a contribution to aesthetic anthropology, Maquet undermines the anthropological enterprise. The way Maquet sees the world is of no greater, nor lesser value, anthropologically speaking, than the way anyone else does. It is in revealing the cultural bias in the way different people see the world that anthropology has much to offer - to philosophers, art historians, art critics and artists. Maquet takes the way he sees the world for granted and short-circuits the anthropological effort. The open nature of our contemporary aesthetic attitude, where we accept as valuable the material products of other cultures, perhaps underlies Maquet's approach here. But we should not be fooled by our attitude of openness to foreign works into thinking that we appreciate the forms - let alone the meanings - that their producers and original consumers see in them.

It is not until page 169 of the 251 pages of *The Aesthetic Experience* that 'the cultural component' in the analysis of the aesthetic experience is introduced. For the first two-thirds we are concerned with the human, that is, the universal component. Anthropology does sometimes concern itself with the universal - anthropologists sometimes like to discuss what they know, or what they think they know, about universal human characteristics. In doing so, however, they may, to their great advantage over most other disciplines, seek the universal through their knowledge and experience of others, thus avoiding as well as they can the dangers of ethnocentrism. Maquet takes another course. His discussion throughout the volume deals almost exclusively with the art forms of the West and the high civilizations of the East. He

concentrates on Western art and on twentieth-century modern art in particular. He bases his discussion of art in the reality of Western urban life, particularly that of Los Angeles, where he lives. He bases his account of the aesthetic experience in himself: Maquet, resident of Los Angeles, inhabitant of an urban community in a twentieth-century Western nation-state. If the universal exists, it can be found anywhere, but it does help to look beyond your own doorstep. That, rather than this 'Maquetcentrism', is surely the point of anthropology, and of being an anthropologist.

The presuppositions, attitudes and pretensions of twentieth-century man (I use the word advisedly) are made the sounding-board of the universal man and woman. Maquet looks into his own experience to find the universal. Not only, therefore, does he effectively underplay the cultural - that is, the very aspect of art and aesthetics which anthropologists are best equipped to study - he also bases his account of the universal, not on an informed knowledge of other expressions of aesthetic experience, but on his own 'intuition', a concept he seems to regard as unproblematic. The fact that 'intuitions' may be culture-bound does not seem to have occurred to him.

It may be that as human beings we react to certain perceived forms in certain predictable ways. But these forms and our reactions to them are likely to be so general as to tell us little about the meaning of such complex things as works of art.[11] As anthropologists, we are struck by the variety of aesthetic experience and aesthetic expression and the seemingly endless variety of aesthetic forms. We can come to have some understanding of other people's experience of aesthetic forms and some appreciation of them, but this is as a result of experience, discussion and study - not by mere 'intuition'. We can discover little about an art form merely by looking at it.

I remarked earlier that Maquet's dismissal, in the *Introduction*, of the anthropology of art as a valid enterprise was a valuable conribution to the anthropological study of aesthetic phenomena. Having considered the major part of Maquet's *The Aesthetic Experience*, two questions occur. What are the grounds for claiming the aesthetic quality as universal? And why, if Maquet believes this, does he devote *The Aesthetic Experience* to a consideration of the visual arts?

The price we pay for following Maquet's arguments for distinguishing art from aesthetics is that we have to adopt his model of

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[11] Even the at times ethnocentric Rudolf Arnheim, who has done much to identify universals in perception and response, stressed the importance of subject-matter; see, for example, his discussion of Cézanne's *Mme Cézanne in a Yellow Chair* (1974 [1954]: 37-41). One might expect an anthropologist to pay at least as much attention as Arnheim to such cultural matters.

four modes of consciousness, with one of these modes defining the aesthetic experience. Flores Fratto rightly claims (1978: 130-1) that this is to introduce false and unnecessary distinctions. Contemplation is a human potential, and we do sometimes, even often, look at the world (and art) in an attentive, non-analytical, disinterested way. But this is only one of the potential ways we have of looking at the world. Its importance varies from culture to culture, as Maquet's own discussion of Eastern meditative traditions makes clear (pp. 51-8). Indeed, Maquet recognizes that the 'contemplative mode of consciousness' is not so 'noticeable' in the West. (This might make us wonder, when the contemplative is so rare, why the West has produced so much art of high aesthetic quality.) We might, however, ask for some evidence that the potentiality is actualized elsewhere (Crowther 1987: 375). It is for Maquet, however, frequent even in everyday life:

> Each time we become aware of the visual quality of a dress or a tree, a billboard or a way to walk, the sky at sundown or the lights of a city, there is an aesthetic repose of a few seconds or a few minutes. During these fleeting encounters with things as good to look at, the contemplative mode dominates our consciousness (p. 56).

While such moments might seem very different from 'an engrossing experience of art' (p. 31), they are on a continuum with such an experience, Maquet argues.

But recognizing that humans experience things as good to look at is not obviously a reason for delimiting a field of anthropology to be concerned with good-to-look-at qualities and experiences. We do not divide up anthropology by reference to modes of consciousness (though one can imagine an argument which linked the active mode to politics and economics, the cognitive mode to religion and philosophy, the affective to kinship and the contemplative to aesthetics). All areas of socio-cultural life involve acting, thinking, emotion and contemplation. To divide the study of social life according to these modes (even if they *could* be shown to be grounded in neurophysiological fact and not just analytically distinguishable) would be to impose a false picture unrelated to our actual experience. Artists operate in all four modes; so too do viewers. Making one mode essential is to distort reality. It may well be that residents of Los Angeles regard aesthetic, that is formal, qualities as essential to art, but I should be surprised if they do not regard active skill, rational thought and emotion as essential components also - and even if they did not, this would only tell us something about the way residents of Los Angeles regard art and aesthetics, not necessarily anything about how anthropologists should study them.

Moreover, even our experience of natural phenomena such as sunsets is not purely aesthetic. We do not appreciate sunsets for their visual form alone. Associations of romance, the cyclical nature of time, ends and beginnings, and so on, are also involved. And these are not the *meaning* of the sunset - they would not necessarily occur to people from other cultures (though some of them

might); they are Western associations which influence our seeing of the sunset in the same way that our knowledge of art history, Spanish history, the life and work of Picasso, etc., affect our experience of *Guernica*.

Concentration on form is essential. It has been undervalued in anthropological studies of art and aesthetics. Whole works have been devoted to the artistic products of other cultures without any discussion of form. But unless we discover what is recognized as form in another culture we will not even be seeing - though we will be perceiving - the same objects.

I found it difficult at first to understand why Maquet should dismiss the anthropology of art as a valid enterprise in one book, only to devote a whole other book to looking at the visual arts. But I think it is now clear why. He removed art from its true location in social and political activity, only to re-present it in its supposed 'essence' - the aesthetic quality - as the highest form of symbolic expression above and beyond the mundane world of economics, politics and religion. In *The Aesthetic Experience* he has, as it were, reprivileged art by making it the epitome of aesthetic activity and the source of the greatest aesthetic experience.

As well as privileging art, Maquet, in quite an extraordinary way, privileges his own views. He signally fails to engage with the anthropological literature, even where, as in the case of Fagg's ideas (see note 9, above), he directly draws on other people's work. He makes some reference to the writings of philosophers and critics where their pronouncements suit his purpose, but scant reference to the anthropological literature. This procedure is supposedly justified in this case by the use of the indefinite article in the book's sub-title: *An Anthropologist Looks at the Visual Arts*. But his claim that 'situating [his] system in relation to other [anthropological] perspectives of interpretation is not necessary. It would even be somewhat presumptuous' (p. xi) is either disingenuous or a cop-out or both. Fifteen years after he first developed his basic argument in the *Introduction*, he can hardly claim that his ideas are still too tentative to engage in debate with other anthropologists. Phillips comments in his review (1986) that 'if there is genuine discourse in the world of aesthetic anthropology Maquet does not demonstrate it'. It would be wrong to exaggerate the extent of the discourse that does exist, but Maquet should surely be expected to promote such debate as there is, if not in *The Aesthetic Experience*, perhaps, at least elsewhere. Ignoring other people's work is not helpful.

His procedure is instead to call on everyday reality, intuition, the 'experts' (i.e. philosophers and critics) without ever subjecting his ideas to the sort of critical thought which engagement with the literature helps the academic writer to achieve. By not engaging in such a debate with other anthropologists Maquet may give (unintentionally, perhaps) the impression that his is the voice of aesthetic anthropology. I hope that specialists in other disciplines

and general readers of *The Aesthetic Experience* will take very seriously the indefinite article of the book's title.

Maquet has presented his ideas. He admits, on the opening page of *The Aesthetic Experience*, to not knowing what the rest of anthropology will make of them.

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