

A Companion to Aesthetics

Second edition

Edited by

Stephen Davies, Kathleen Marie Higgins,
Robert Hopkins, Robert Stecker,
and David E. Cooper

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A Companion to Aesthetics

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Preface

Welcome to the second edition of *A Companion to Aesthetics*. Like the first edition of 1992, it consists primarily of short entries arranged alphabetically with the aim of covering as many topics and perspectives on aesthetics and the philosophy of art as possible. These include issues and authors prominent in both Anglo-American and Continental traditions and in both Western and non-Western thought about art. The goal is to provide an entrée to whatever issue in this increasingly vibrant field of inquiry a scholar, student, or layperson might desire to explore.

There is also much that is new to this edition and that provides a more systematic understanding of the discipline. Most prominently, there are six overview essays tracing the origins of art in the Paleolithic period and the history of aesthetics in the West from ancient times to the present day. There is also a greatly expanded group of essays on non-Western thought about art including new essays on African, Amerindian, Chinese, Islamic, and Japanese aesthetics as well as an essay on the concept of *rasa*, crucial in Indo-Asian aesthetics. The first edition contained no essays on individual art forms, which is remedied here by 11 new ones. Also new is a table of contents listing all 185 essays so that readers can see at glance what is on offer in this volume and better navigate it.

We have also expanded the list of short entries to reflect recent developments in aesthetics. One of these developments has perhaps shaped this volume more than any other. This is a debate between those who believe that the concept of art is peculiarly Western and relatively recent in origin, arising in the eighteenth century, and those who think that it is found in almost every culture, is ancient in origin, and derives from practices directly tied to human evolution. As well as motivating a new entry on evolutionary aesthetics, the suspicion that the second of these views is more likely true provides one rationale for the scope of the overview essays and the decision to give considerable coverage to non-Western aesthetics. Some proponents of the first view find support for it in the anthropology and sociology of art, while some proponents of the second view appeal to evolutionary psychology. This debate is symptomatic of a wider development in aesthetics, *viz.*, the importation into aesthetics of ideas from the sciences, especially from evolutionary theory, anthropology, psychology, and cognitive studies. This reflects a trend in philosophy generally to take a greater interest in developments in the empirical sciences and to see philosophy as continuous with those disciplines.

A related development since the 1990s is the interaction between aesthetics and other areas of philosophy, including ethics, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind and language. In part because of this interaction, there have been several “growth areas” in the discipline over the last 20 years, including the ontology of art, the multifaceted role of emotion in art, the role of pretense and make-believe in art, the interaction of ethics and aesthetics, feminist perspectives on art and the role of race and gender in art, environmental and everyday aesthetics, the nature of pictorial representation, and the nature of literary interpretation. There has

PREFACE

also been a burst of new work on certain art forms, especially music and cinema. Many new entries analyze these developments.

Finally, we should mention that nearly every entry in the second edition is new in some way. Many of those carried over from the first edition have been revised and the rest have been updated to reflect new work done since their original appearance.

We would like to thank Daniel Wilson and Jennifer Saul, and from Wiley-Blackwell, Jeff Dean, Tiffany Mok, Barbara Duke, Janey Fisher, and Jacqueline Harvey.

Historical Overviews

art of the Paleolithic In 1789 John Frere, a Suffolk landowner, wrote to the Society of Antiquities describing stone implements discovered in a quarry at Hoxne. He did not draw attention to their appearance, focusing presciently on the vast age suggested by their position under a layer of sand and sea shells, and below the fossil remains of a large, unknown animal. They came, he surmised, from “a very remote period indeed, even beyond that of the present world” (Frere 1800). These objects are now known as Acheulean hand axes: tools made, in this case around 400,000 years ago (400k BP). Among them is a piece of worked stone, shaped as an elongated tear drop, roughly symmetrical in two dimensions, with a twist to the symmetry which has retained an embedded fossil. In size and shape it would not have been a useful butchery implement, and is worked on to a degree out of proportion to any likely use. While it may be too much to call it an “early work of art,” it is at least suggestive of an aesthetic sensibility.

The origin of art is generally dated later than this: 360,000 years later. While prehistory is defined simply as that period of human habitation of a place for which there is no written record, studies of prehistoric art have tended to focus on the Upper Paleolithic, that period in European prehistory associated with the entry, around 40k BP, of *Homo sapiens*. The period ends with the Magdalenian culture of 18–10k BP that gave us the cave paintings of northern Spain and southern France. These extraordinary and mysteriously situated products of ice age Europe have generated vast art-historical speculation and are popularly represented as marking the dawn of art.

Later we will look back into the more distant past – as well as giving a brief sideways glance at Neanderthal neighbors – to examine the evidence for aesthetic production in the African

Middle Stone Age, and then at stone artifacts as old as 1 million years before the present. Before doing so I will highlight two issues important for an understanding of the origin of artistic activity, and provide a brief account of human evolution.

BIOLOGY AND CULTURE

There are different kinds of explanations to hand for the innovations we find associated with the growth of art. One view has it that the dramatic changes to artistic and other practices we find in the Upper Paleolithic mark a development in human cognitive capacities consequent on biological change (Klein 2000). Another seeks the explanation in the nonbiological sphere, emphasizing, say, the relationship between increasing group size and such variables as efficiency of innovation or the growth in quantity and quality of children’s pretend play, considered as a training ground for innovative activity. But the simple dichotomy between cognitive and cultural change breaks down if we accept that human cognition is itself partly a function of the environment in which the individual operates; on this view, the functional architecture of mind can change without change in the underlying biology. Michael Tomasello (1999) has argued that the biological difference between a baby human and a baby chimp is small, and that what makes for most of the eventual difference in cognitive power is that the human child is heir to a massive fortune in retained cultural innovation made possible by human tendencies to imitate one another. (Other researchers have recently suggested that chimps have more imitative ability than previously thought, however.) Further, cultural change may itself alter the distribution of genes in a population, as has been the case with increased lactose tolerance among cattle herders. One form that this change

may take is of especial interest. If, for example, changes to group size and pretend play intensify the degree of imaginative innovation in a population, and those who display this capacity in salient ways benefit in terms of survival and reproduction, then individuals born with greater capacities for imagination will benefit in ways they would not have done before the cultural change. This will change the pattern of genes' relative contributions to fitness, and intensify the selection for imagination-relevant genes. This effect – the Baldwin Effect – can look like Lamarckian evolution, since an acquired improvement in some ability can seem to give rise directly to the inheritance of that ability (see Papineau 2005).

Whatever humans do, they must have a biological make-up that allows them to do it, but it is generally not profitable to seek specific associations between biological and cultural change. The point, if there is one, at which we identify the first significant artistic activity may be of no biological significance. Still, as we look further and further back into the evolutionary past, changes to brains and other bodily structures may be of special relevance in explaining the beginning of activities that suggest themselves as precursors of art-making.

ART AND THE AESTHETIC

On visiting Altamira Cave, Picasso is reported to have said “We have learned nothing,” powerfully encapsulating the thought that these great works represent what European art has struggled to achieve in its painful path to – and beyond – pictorial realism. Thus the cave paintings were easily incorporated into a conception of “high art” that spoke to classical and modernist sensibilities. More recent tendencies in art practice and theory have questioned this; to the extent that we take these developments seriously, they undermine the assumptions that make it appropriate to see the products of Upper Paleolithic cultures as art.

In a move which gained its impetus from Duchamp's ready-mades of the early twentieth century, conceptual artists and others have been in revolt against the idea that art involves the production of beautiful or aesthetically pleasing objects, opting instead for activities which are in various ways provocative, especially by way of challenging our assumptions about

art itself. In a philosophical move made partly to accommodate these practices, it has been asserted that what is art depends, not on the look of the object, but on its place in an institutional structure, the “artworld.” A different accommodation is offered by those who argue that art is a historical concept in the sense that what we may legitimately count as art now depends on how the objects in question are related to the art of the past. Is it possible, for instance, to tell a coherent narrative that links this object with the aspirations productive of earlier work? While we may choose carefully among these doctrines, together they offer something like the following challenge: while we can find in the very distant past objects which please us aesthetically and which may have had a similar effect on their makers and audience, we cannot on these grounds assume that these things are art, especially when we do not find either any meaningful historical link between these objects and that which we antecedently recognize as art, or any developed institutions of art in the societies that produced them. Further, there are regular denunciations of the idea that “art” is a concept we may apply to societies very different from our own. These arguments are often directed at our treatment of preliterate societies of the present and recent past, but have been taken up by paleoanthropologists who insist that “‘Art’ as a modern Western construct is anachronistic with the Paleolithic” (Nowell 2006: 244).

This suite of objections cannot be replied to here in detail; instead I will make the following general remarks. First, the separation (if there is one) between the aesthetic and the artistic seems to be extremely recent and it can hardly be a criticism of any theory that it looks for connections between art and the aesthetic in the distant past, when virtually all but the last 50 years of art history reinforces that connection. It is true that our current and recent artistic practices and institutions are different from those of preliterate societies of which we know anything, and doubtless very different from those of prehistory. This cannot be grounds for saying that the concept “art” has no application to other societies. It is allowed that peoples in all conditions and at all times have both technology and religion, though theirs may differ greatly from our own. A culture's technology may be

seen as underpinned by magical forces, or as subject to the will of gods. Religions may be polytheistic and suffused with magical elements in ways that make them far distant from the systematic and official doctrines some of us subscribe to today. Our art is not obviously more distant from that of the Upper Paleolithic than Anglicanism is from the religion of, say, the San people of southern Africa well into the twentieth century – a system of belief that, it has been suggested, is the best model we now have for religion in the Upper Paleolithic (Lewis-Williams 2002). Anyway, opponents of aesthetic approaches to culture find the extreme clash of artistic conceptions they are looking for only by failing to compare like with like: they compare the beliefs and practices common among members of preliterate societies with the notions of a contemporary cultural elite whose formulations correspond hardly at all to conceptions of art, beauty, and the aesthetic in the rest of their populations.

This highly selective suspicion about art and the aesthetic may derive from the thought that appeal to aesthetic values is an explanatory dead end. But ethical ideas and practices are regularly subject to interrogation using economic and other models without their ceasing thereby to count as values. Treating Stone Age objects as aesthetic, and even as art, is not inconsistent with trying to understand them in a broader economic, demographic, cultural, and evolutionary perspective – as we shall see. Sometimes emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of Stone Age cultures is associated with the discredited idea that early people produced these objects to fill their leisure hours (Lewis-Williams 2002: 42). Again, this is by no means a burden that an advocate of the aesthetic approach must carry. Certainly, we ought to question the anthropologist's assumption that the "symbolic" is an explanatory category always to be preferred to the aesthetic, and one which is to be invoked any time we find something with no apparent utilitarian function (d'Errico et al. 2003: 18). It is unclear, for example, why early musical practices or bodily adornments should be assumed to symbolize anything. Depictive paintings such as we find in the Upper Paleolithic represent things, but it is a further step to conclude that they are symbolic. This is a particularly relevant point given that, as we shall see,

there is evidence of aesthetic activity that massively predates any evidence of symbolic behavior.

HUMAN ANCESTRY AND PREHISTORY

The most recent common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees lived some 7 million years ago in Africa. We have evidence for about 20 species on the human side of this divide (the *hominina*); all evolved in Africa, and only one has survived, ours (*Homo sapiens*). Around 2.5 million years ago (2.5m BP) several coexisted; the pathway of our own descent through these species is not well understood. At this time, human species – *Homo ergaster*, called *erectus* in Asia, and *Homo antecessor* – moved into Asia and Europe. Some time around 200k BP anatomically modern humans evolved in Africa. By 80k BP they had moved into the Middle East, and by 40k BP into Europe and Australia. In Europe they lived alongside *Homo Neanderthalis*, a much earlier immigrant species, which disappeared around 30k BP.

Our period is the Old Stone Age, or Paleolithic, which begins around 2.5m BP with the production of crude stone tools created by striking. At this time there were several species of *hominina* living: our own relatively large-brained ancestor *Homo habilis*, together with species of an older genus, *Australopithecus*, which had smaller brains and larger teeth. While it is fair to assume that *Homo habilis* was an early toolmaker, these other species may have been also. Styles of tool-making did not change until around 1.5m BP when *Homo ergaster* introduced the Acheulean technology that involved taking off small flakes from the surface to produce a symmetrical implement. This technology went with the African emigrant communities to Europe and Asia: Frere's hand ax, found in England, is a late example. No clear evidence of culturally determined differences in style is available for the Acheulean industry. Around 300k BP the Acheulean gave way to the Levallois industry marked by the pre-shaping of a stone core from which flakes are successively struck. This time marks the beginning of the Middle Stone Age (called the Middle Paleolithic in Europe), where we find the shaping and marking of shells and soft stone, the making of hafted weapons, and clear indications of cultural variation in production. With the Late Stone Age (Upper Paleolithic in Europe)

from 40k BP, we have increased economy and complexity in stone tool manufacture, evidence of tailored clothing, sophistication in hunting, and greater population density. The Upper Paleolithic begins with the Aurignacian culture in western Europe from about 40–28k BP; this culture has been said both to represent a significant qualitative shift in sophistication (sometimes called the cultural Big Bang) as compared with that of the Middle Stone Age, and to be associated exclusively with the *Homo sapiens* newcomers into Europe. Both of these claims are disputed. The Paleolithic is conventionally reckoned to end about 10k BP after the last glaciation and with the beginnings of farming.

DOES ART BEGIN IN THE UPPER PALEOLITHIC?

Schematic outline depictions of animal parts have been found from times early in the Upper Paleolithic, around 35k BP, in the Aurignacian period. Given that the cave paintings at Altamira and Lascaux are dated around 15k BP, it was once possible to believe that the Upper Paleolithic enclosed the development, over many thousands of years, of pictorial style from crude Aurignacian to mature Magdalenian. But in 1994 paintings were discovered at Chauvet Cave in southern France, many with the same startling realism, fluidity, and individuality of style as those found at Lascaux. Some of the Chauvet cave pictures were quickly dated at 31k BP. These dates have been questioned, largely on the grounds that the depictions in the cave have stylistic features in common with known work from the Magdalenian, while being, it is claimed, at odds with the other evidence available of the Aurignacian (Pettit & Bahn 2003). We await the outcome of this debate; I will assume the dating is correct.

At Chauvet Cave there is a predominance of large, fierce animals that contrasts with the later (Magdalenian) representation of hunted species, creating difficulty for theories that explained cave paintings as ritual invocation of magic to aid hunters: a view associated particularly with Abbé Breuil who, in the first half of the twentieth century, was a dominant figure in the study of prehistoric art. There are groups of animals occluding one another; a group of horses thus displayed has been argued, intriguingly, to represent a single animal at

various times, rather than a series of animals laid out in space. There is a bison with the head twisted to one side, looking out of the picture plane. It has been said that the use of natural surface features of the rock that are suggestive in shape of the animals then painted on them is a feature of later Magdalenian depiction, but this technique is found at Chauvet also. Chauvet was impeccably treated from the moment of its discovery and may deliver important clues to the purpose of the depictions.

At Chauvet, as at other, later, sites, there are puzzling aspects to the execution of the work; figures are sometimes painted one on top of another, with no apparent regard to overall coherence; some depictions are so placed they can hardly be seen at all; elsewhere great trouble has been taken to enhance viewing conditions for a particular work; anamorphic representation occasionally defines a specific viewing point. The animals often have a “floating” quality; the creatures seem to stand in no physical place and legs are generally schematically represented. Nor is there generally any narrative content to the picture, an Aurignacian depiction of two rhinos face to face at Chauvet being a possible exception. Human figures are rare in cave art and, when they occasionally appear, are schematically represented, in marked contrast to the sometimes sharp individuality of the animals. In addition to the depictive representations there are various geometrical markings for which it has been difficult to find an interpretation. Some of these features are addressed by theories to be described later.

It is worth bearing in mind that photographic reproduction gives no idea of what viewing *in situ* is like, sometimes in places very difficult of access, in acoustically resonant chambers, lit only, as they then would have been, by flickering torches. Nor can the effort of these depictive projects be easily exaggerated; the surface of the wall was often elaborately prepared; heat to 1000 °C was needed for certain ochre preparations; at Lascaux, wooden scaffolding has been used to get the artist to the required height.

In addition to their dramatic cave paintings, the Aurignacians provided grave goods for the dead, used bodily adornment, and crafted their

artifacts according to an aesthetic of skillful and sometimes witty representation: a popular item, mass produced by the standards of the day, was a spear-thrower shaped as an animal in the act of defecating. From 34k BP there is an exquisite horse in ivory from Vogelherd, Germany. From 28–30k BP there is a human figure with the head of a lion carved in ivory; from 28–25k BP a tiny limestone figure of a grotesque human female; from 25–23k BP a bas relief in limestone of a woman. Chimeric figures speak of a developed imaginative sense; one depiction at Chauvet seems to be a bison-headed man.

Recent research has chipped away, somewhat, at the artistic uniqueness of the Upper Paleolithic. There is evidence from earlier periods and distant places, as well as intriguing evidence of activity among the Neanderthal people whose habitation of Europe greatly preceded that of *Homo sapiens*. At Blombos Cave (southern Cape) we have perforated shells, which are most likely personal ornaments, as well as many thousands of ochre crayons, two with systematic, apparently abstract markings, all reliably dated at around 74k BP. Perforated shells claimed to have been used as beads have now been reported from north African sites dated to 82k BP and 100–135k BP. Pigments of various kinds are found in layers datable much earlier even than this, possibly around 400k BP, and some scholars are willing to infer their use in aesthetic activity, perhaps bodily adornment.

In one respect the Upper Paleolithic does, on current evidence, cling precariously to a significant first: depiction. Here we need to distinguish between work in two and three dimensions; the situation as regards sculpture is a little ambiguous. The earliest two-dimensional depictions we have in an African context are those from Apollo 11 cave (Namibia): a number of freestanding slabs of rock on which animal figures have been painted: rhinoceros, zebra, large cat. There is a suggestion that the last of these is a hybrid with human legs, but this is far from certain. Dating has been disputed, but 26k BP remains the most likely, compared with 35k BP for the Upper Paleolithic. Agreed dates for the Australian context are hard to find, but there is little direct evidence for depictive marking

before about 20k BP. It is to be emphasized that new discoveries in any of these places could radically alter the picture. Turning to sculpture, a puzzling item is the so-called Berekhat Ram figurine, a small piece of basalt reminiscent of a female head and body, dated prior to 200k BP. The most likely hypothesis is that the natural shape of the rock suggested the human form, and this has been made slightly clearer by deliberate but minimal abrasion and incision (d'Errico & Nowell 2000).

If the Berekhat Ram figurine does represent an early attempt at mimetic representation, the idea does not seem to have caught on; we have no other such objects from the period, or any time before 35k BP. And while sophisticated tool-making in stone and bone is visible in the Middle Stone Age, the various innovations found there were not preserved and accumulated in the way they were in the Upper Paleolithic; they make their appearance and are absent from the later record (Zilhão 2007). What may be distinctive about the Upper Paleolithic are its robust patterns of cultural and technological reproduction, which helped communities to turn individual innovation into sustained practices.

If the Aurignacians had aesthetic precursors they may also have had contemporary competitors. The recent consensus has been that Neanderthal symbolic activity, such as it was, was merely imitation of *Homo sapiens* neighbors. But the argument is put that there are small but significant amounts of ornamental material, such as perforated animal teeth, from the time before *Homo sapiens* entered Europe, and that much in evidence thereafter cannot be explained simply as low-level imitation (Zilhão 2007).

Something needs to be said about arts other than the visual. Pieces of hollow bone with holes in them have been interpreted as wind instruments; in many cases it is likely that the holes were made by carnivores. The earliest instruments we can be confident of are from Isturitz (France) and Geissenklosterle (Germany), some of which have likely dates of 35–30k BP. D'Errico et al. (2003) argue that these instruments are sophisticated and must emerge from a long tradition of musical development of which we currently have no artifactual evidence. Storytelling is undatable earlier than the written record, but if the cave paintings of the

Upper Paleolithic have religious or magical associations as many suppose (see below), narrative must have been in place by then. Indeed, it is probably much older; as old, perhaps, as language. If, as some suppose (Dunbar 1996), language began as social cement, the narrative form may have been in place very early in its development, since gossip – telling A about the doings and motives of B – is naturally conveyed in narrative. Since the function of gossip is as much to manipulate as to inform, the earliest narratives may have included deliberate falsehoods. The ability to construct a plausible but false narrative seems to require imaginative capacities of some kind, but we can only speculate as to how and when the construction of highly elaborated and even avowedly fictional narratives emerged, and what the precise cognitive preconditions for them were.

Returning to the visual domain: Can we find evidence of aesthetic production even earlier than the perforated shells and marked crayons of 70–135k BP? Recalling John Frere and his hand ax, we find evidence of a very deep history of aesthetic production: a history so long that it makes the Upper Paleolithic look positively contemporary. This history extends back long before our species emerged, long before language developed, long – apparently – before any genuinely symbolic activity of any kind.

The first stone tools were made by *Homo habilis*; we find stone artifacts at African sites going back to 2.5m BP, the so-called Oldowan technology. Before about 1.4m BP we do not find anything aesthetic about them; they are simply stones on which a cutting edge has been made, with no attention to anything but practical need. It seems likely that people at this time used both the cores and the flakes cut from them, the cores for dismembering and smashing bones, and the flakes for cutting off meat.

It is with the Acheulean industry first attributed to *Homo ergaster* and beginning around 1.4m BP that we see objects with a deliberately and systematically imposed symmetry, created by removing flakes all over the stone's surface. Some are finely shaped, thin and highly symmetrical in three dimensions, with flakes taken off by using, successively, stone, antler, and wooden implements. One elegantly elongated piece in phonolite (green volcanic

lava) from Olduvai is dated at 1.2m BP (British Museum, P&E PRB 1934.12-14.49); another from the same place, dated at 800k BP, is an extraordinarily crafted piece of quartz with amethyst bands, a difficult material to work (British Museum, P&E PRB 1934.12-14.83). Size and shaping are often not consistent with practical use, and indeed many such objects are found with no evidence of wear. There are examples, as with the Hoxne axe, of an apparently intentional twist to the symmetry and a retained fossil. In addition to the standard tear-shaped hand ax there are dagger-like ficrons and cleavers with a transverse cutting blade; a recent find in the UK has located one of each, described as “exquisite, almost flamboyant,” and so placed as to suggest their having been made by the same individual (Wenban-Smith 2004). The obvious question is “why hominids went to all that bother when a simple flake would have sufficed?” (White 2000).

One answer is that hand ax technology was partly an investment in the creation of something pleasurable to look at, and for that a simple flake does not suffice. Now there is another question. When we find creatures investing scarce resources in an activity, we want to know what is adaptive about it. So what is adaptive about making beauty? One answer is that *costly signals* may benefit both parties in a communicative situation when the evident cost of the signal is a reliable indicator of some relevant quality in the signaler. Gazelles pursued by predators may stop their flight to leap in the air; this stotting behavior, which puts the prey at greater risk, indicates the strong likelihood that the prey is healthy enough to escape with a margin for safety; the chase – costly to both in energy and likely get the predator nowhere – may then be broken off.

If overworked hand axes are reliable signals, what do they signal? There is a range of possibilities here: the best known takes us from natural to sexual selection, those forces shaping reproductive advantage by conferring a certain degree of attractiveness as a mate. Ax construction requires significant spatial skills to produce a symmetrical object; skill at resource location; and time, which in turn implies general efficiency and security in social matters. Marak Kohn and Steven Mithen (1999) suggest that symmetrical, aesthetically wrought ax

production was a means of reliably advertising these qualities to prospective mates. Supposing these creatures already possessed a tendency to like their conspecifics better if they did or made likable things, one mechanism to ensure that the maker seems attractive is to ensure that the products themselves are pleasing. None of this assumes that our ancestors *saw* hand axes as signs of fitness; all that is required is that they admire the hand axes in ways that enhance the maker's chance of reproducing. Costly displays may secure other advantages: social power within the group, or better resources from caregivers. While finding direct evidence for any of these hypotheses may be difficult, the important point is that the emergence of capacities for skillful, nonutilitarian production is by no means inconsistent with Darwinism.

Attentiveness to the visual form of artifacts will not explain much about the particular direction that aesthetic styles and genres have subsequently taken; our story is merely one about the source of a river the subsequent detailed course of which cannot be predicted from its starting point. But once a tendency to make pleasing things, and to contemplate the things and their making, is established, other evolved capacities will feed into determining the shape of these activities. Evolutionary psychologists have emphasized the importance of habitat choice in the survival of our species, and it is to be expected that pleasure would accrue to us on contemplating those scenes most likely to have nurtured us during the Pleistocene. A popular form of landscape art is said to be the beneficiary of this preference. What then of our liking for mountainous and inhospitable scenes of the sublime? The situation here parallels the relation between ethical preference and tragedy: we enjoy the good outcomes of comedy but also – in different ways – the bad ones of tragedy. The most we ought to say is that our sense of what is and is not a hospitable environment contributes to the *kind* of pleasure we take in a scene; it does not mark the divide between what is aesthetically pleasing and what is not.

DEPICTION AND THE SYMBOLIC

On current evidence, there was no systematic practice of depiction, in two or three dimensions, before 40k BP. By 30k BP there was carving of

figures, painting, and drawing, with mastery of realist techniques that capture the spirit of fierce lions and gentle horses. There is for this period no record, as yet, of anything like the painful steps toward naturalistic representation that brought Western art to the Renaissance. How did the discovery, or the invention, of depiction come about?

The possibility of depiction depends on the phenomenon of *seeing-in*, our capacity to see a figure or a face in the pattern of lines and colors on a surface (Wollheim 1980: supp. essay V). We can also see a person's face in the shape of a pebble, or a head in a sculptured piece of clay. Seeing-in depends partly on the fact that the human visual system, like any perceptual mechanism, is subject to false positives. The visual system uses the input from the eyes to identify the object seen, and may come up with the answer "person" when there is in fact no person there but instead merely a pattern of lines on a surface or a shaped solid which triggers the visual system's person-recognition capacity. Being able to recognize something goes with being prone to misrecognize it.

This does not mean that pictures create illusions of the presence of depicted objects; it is the visual system, a subpersonal mechanism, that is fooled, not the person in the gallery who possesses the mechanism. The agent knows full well that there is no person really there, and information from the visual system serves merely to help the person recognize the content of what is depicted. Animals are also subject to false-positives; birds and fish will flee when shown the outline shapes of their predators. But this is not seeing-in, since the bird or fish does not realize that this is not really a predator. Great apes are capable, however, of seeing the contents of pictures without always being fooled into thinking that the content is actually present, and some human-reared apes have shown a capacity to sort pictures by subject matter. If the capacity to see things in pictures is one we share with our ape relatives, it is likely to be much older in our lineage than 40,000 years.

The capacity for seeing-in is not enough to make one capable of depiction – something other great apes do not seem to be capable of. You need to be able – and motivated – to produce arrangements of lines or colors within

which things can be seen. Creatures who are able to see things in other things do not need depictions in order to have the experience of seeing-in; we see people's faces in clouds, frost, and many other natural phenomena. Indeed, so prone are humans to recognize a face that a pattern on a pebble very vaguely resembling the arrangement of eyes, nose, and mouth will produce the experience of seeing a face in the pebble's surface. And there are other such stimuli around: footprints and animal hoof marks, which constitute photograph-like impressions of the things of which they are traces; protuberances on cave walls which are in the shape of an animal (as noted, the cave artists exploited these shapes); shadows thrown by sun and firelight (many caves contain "shadow" depictions, where paint has been sprayed on the wall over which a hand has been placed). We may assume that people have a very long history of attending to objects within which things could be seen. It is surprising then that we have not found stones whereon someone has chipped a vaguely face-like arrangement of marks. Yet we know that for 1 million years our ancestors worked skillfully in stone to shape it both for use and – apparently – for aesthetic pleasure (see above). Whitney Davis (1986) has argued that it was the sheer accumulation of nondepictive marks on surfaces that provoked seeing-in and led to the invention of depiction during the Upper Paleolithic. But it is not the experience of seeing-in that needs explaining; that can be assumed to be available, and common, well before the Upper Paleolithic. Rather it is the invention of ways deliberately to create something in which something else can be seen. This seems to have been surprisingly elusive.

Other explanations of depiction focus on cultural developments in the Upper Paleolithic. It has long been suggested that cave art was connected with magical and religious practices. Partly on the basis of ethnographic studies of living hunter-gatherer communities and their shamanistic practices, David Lewis-Williams (2002) has argued that these caves were thought of as boundaries between the natural and supernatural worlds, where the images, often in relief and dramatically illuminated by the movement of a torch, and seen under conditions of altered psychological states, con-

tributed to experiences of magical connection to the other world. Lewis-Williams then suggests that these altered states explain the origin of depiction. These states include ones in which mental images appear to be projected onto external surfaces; people, he suggests, reached out to "touch" and preserve these images, producing image-like marks on soft surfaces – the first depictions. This accounts, says Lewis-Williams, for the strange geometrical markings, which correspond to imagistic experiences typical of such altered states. One question that arises here is whether the development and understanding of a capacity for depiction is likely when the people concerned were taking mind-altering drugs and thought themselves in the presence of magical beings. Lewis-Williams offers a plausible account of some opportunities for seeing-in. But this is not what needs explaining, since, as I have indicated, people would have had such opportunities on many occasions prior to the development of shamanistic culture.

This approach associates the development of pictorial art with the growth of relatively sophisticated cultural practices such as storytelling and religion. An entirely different explanation is offered by Nicholas Humphrey (1998), who notes striking similarities between the paintings at Chauvet (and other Upper Paleolithic sites) and the precocious drawings of a young autistic girl, Nadia, whose depictions have been extensively documented. Like the cave painters, Nadia tended to draw one thing on top of another, and sometimes produced apparently chimerical figures; this may have been due simply to the fact that her focus on detail at the expense of gestalt left her vulnerable to changing tack midway through a picture. Nadia's drawing declined as she acquired language, consistent with the idea that having a language-based schema of knowledge about things derails the attempt to reproduce the way they look, a capacity typically developing children acquire only by painful and culturally scaffolded learning. While it is generally assumed that language was fully developed by the Upper Paleolithic, Dunbar (1996) and Mithen (1996) have suggested that it did not evolve as a whole, but in stages corresponding to the mind's then distinctive modular structure, with "social language" first off the blocks.

Drawing these thoughts together, Humphrey argues that the cave artists, while not autistic, had minds as radically different from ours as Nadia's was from the typically developing child's. Language, he suggests, was at that time only partly developed, being social, and not yet available to the "natural history" module. That way we can see the cave painters as having a Nadia-like capacity for linguistically unencumbered naturalism in depicting the animal world, while the absence of convincing human figures from the corpus is explained by the derailing effect of their intact social (interpersonal) language. Humphrey's suggestion is highly revisionary, since it places a lower bound on fully developed language later than the naturalistic school of cave painting. Also, the supposed transition from a modular to a general-purpose mind cannot now be invoked, as it is by Mithen, to explain the cultural breakthroughs of 40–30k BP (but see Currie 2004: ch. 12). Nonetheless, Humphrey's observation that the pictorial sophistication of cave paintings cannot be proof of the modernity of their makers' minds is well taken. And for reasons I will come to immediately, his challenge to received wisdom is very welcome.

Part of Humphrey's challenge is to the presumption that the Upper Paleolithic represents the transition to a "symbolic" culture wherein decoration of grave sites, cave walls, and implements speaks of a richly meaningful connection to a spiritual world, the values it imparts to us, and the narratives we tell of it – things scarcely possible without a language that integrates thought about the natural and the social. Over the last 100 years there have been regular if not very successful challenges to the idea that cave art and its associated artifacts have spiritual or symbolic meaning. Labeled by its enemies "art for art's sake," and hence woundingly associated with "fin-de-siècle decadence" (Halverson 1987), this challenge has often taken the form of a *general* denial of meaning to these artifacts. While this position does not strike me as obviously wrong, it is important to see that it is the extreme end of a spectrum of views that make explanatory appeal to the idea of the aesthetic. We might hold instead that a certain object provides aesthetic pleasure as well as having some symbolic function (or indeed a function of some other kind),

and that its characteristics are not explicable in terms of just one of these factors. Nor is it mandatory to hold that the symbolic must have primacy over the aesthetic, in the sense of carrying the greater explanatory burden, or corresponding to a deeper, more urgent, or phylogenetically older motivation. If the evidence of the Acheulean technology is anything to go by, the order of priority is likely to be the other way around. Indeed, aesthetic sensibility may play its part in explaining the development of symbolic culture. If aesthetic sense is a sensitivity to "good making," as the costly signaling hypothesis suggests, the design-like features of the natural world can be expected to trigger aesthetic responses and to create illusions of purpose, leading to ideas of magic and religion. Nor, finally, is the idea of an irreducibly aesthetic motive to be written off as a romantic belief in our enduring recognition of the value of beauty. Aesthetic preference may be basic – people seeking aesthetic experience simply for the pleasure it brings – and at the same time fully and naturalistically explicable in terms of, say, the entirely contingent way that sexual selection has shaped our tendencies to be delighted.

ART AND THE AESTHETIC

Implicit in the above account is a budget of problems to which philosophers of art may contribute some clarification, but which are empirical and on which we shall expect the sciences to lead the way. Among them are questions about what explains, and what is explained by, the aesthetic sensibilities of Stone Age peoples. Other questions concern the ways in which aesthetic activity was organized, understood, and integrated with other activities. What sense, within this framework, should we give to the familiar question "When did art begin?" If we allow that not all aesthetic making is art-making, we might try to decide whether there is some significant shift in the pattern of human aesthetic activity which identifies a point at which "art" becomes a sensible label to apply. Given the contested nature of the concept "art," agreement on this will not be easily found. I suggest we take our cue from the two sets of questions distinguished above, and look at the archaeological record for evidence that aesthetic activity has, at certain

times and places, become a community practice, reflected upon in communal discourse and to some extent institutionalized through division of labor. It is likely always to remain a matter of very indirect inference as to whether such conditions were met in the Upper Paleolithic or Late Stone Age.

For information on the Acheulean industry and a digital archive of images see <http://antiquity.ac.uk/ProjGall/marshall/marshall.html>. For Blombos see <http://www.svf.uib.no/sfu/blombos/>. For Apollo 11 see http://images.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=http://www.klausdierks.com/images/Namibia_Karas_ApolloXI_4.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.klausdierks.com/Chronology/1.htm&h=629&w=799&sz=199&hl=en&start=40&um=1&tbnid=Od2Z-c2KOVJV_M:&tbnh=113&tbnw=143&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dapollo%2B11%2Bcave%2B%26start%3D20%26ndsp%3D20%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26safe%3Dactive%26sa%3DN. For Chauvet see <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/arcnat/chauvet/en/>. For Lascaux see <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/arcnat/lascaux/en/>. For Altamira see <http://museodealtamira.mcu.es/ingles/index.html>.

See also “ARTWORLD”; COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND ART; DEFINITION OF “ART”; EVOLUTION, ART, AND AESTHETICS; FUNCTION OF ART; PICTURE PERCEPTION; UNIVERSALS IN ART.

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GREGORY CURRIE

aesthetics in antiquity Although “aesthetics” is a word of Greek derivation (*aisthêtikos*, adj.: “relating to perception”), there is no specific ancient usage, nor any explicit branch of ancient thought, which corresponds to the modern sense of the term. When Baumgarten coined the word for the sensory cognition of beauty, he was aware of a Greek philosophical contrast between the perceptual and the “noetic” or intellectual. But that contrast is employed by thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle without any

necessary reference either to beauty or to the group of arts (poetry, music, painting, etc.) that have become central to modern aesthetics. To conclude from this, however, that there was no aesthetics *tout court* in antiquity would be premature.

Greco-Roman culture produced, in fact, a complex tradition of reflections both on beauty and on the principles of poetic, musical, and figurative art forms. These reflections emerged within and between various frameworks of thought: poetics, rhetorical theory, cultural critique, systems of metaphysics, as well as technical treatises (outside the scope of this article) on painting, music, and architecture. On any nondoctrinaire understanding of the concept, antiquity plays a formative, influential role in the history of aesthetics. The challenge is to trace the ancient phases of this history in a spirit that can identify affinities and continuities without forcing the past into the mold of the present, and to recognize that the status of ancient aesthetics is important in part precisely because of its refusal to constitute a single domain of thought.

ARCHAIC ORIGINS

Many of the questions, problems, and ideas which stimulated ancient impulses in aesthetics were generated by the “song culture” of archaic Greece (eighth to sixth centuries BCE) – a culture in which poetry, music, and dance were a major means of expressing religious, political, ethical, and erotic values, often in special social contexts such as festivals and feasts. Homeric epic, with its narrative of a distant world of heroic myth, contains resonant images of the psychological potency of song. These include the remarkable scene where Odysseus, though paradoxically overcome by “grief” when hearing a song about his own prominence as a warrior, feels a profound need to repeat the experience (*Odyssey* 8.62–92, 485–531): song reveals his life to him in a new light. In archaic Greece generally, song at its finest is regarded as a gift from the gods: a gift, often, of “inspiration” by the Muses (which can still leave room, however, for human skill), but also a quality of radiant loveliness (sometimes called *charis*, inadequately translated “grace”) which emanates from anything touched by the divine. Whatever its sources,

song has the capacity to induce states of rapt enthralment, even quasi-magical “enchantment.” Such emotional intensity, sometimes conceived as a quasi-erotic longing in response to the beauty of words and music, defies easy definition and can involve a mixture of pleasure and pain: Sappho’s songs of “bittersweet” erotic memory and desire are a salient illustration of this sensibility. In early Greece, musico-poetic performances themselves frequently incorporate reflections on their own seductive power.

Ideas of rapt absorption and deep emotional engagement remain a premise of most ancient forms of aesthetics; notions of aesthetic distance, detachment, or “disinterested” judgment are largely foreign to antiquity. From an early date, Greek culture also looks to the power of song to disclose some kind of “truth.” But this is a problematic expectation: in Hesiod, perhaps contemporary with Homer, the Muses proclaim that “we know how to tell many falsehoods that resemble the truth, and we know, when we choose, how to utter the truth” (*Theogony* 27–8). These much debated lines elude stable interpretation; they imply the difficulty, for human singers and audiences, of knowing where “inspired” truth begins and ends. Moreover, they suggest that even “falsehoods” may have the divine power to draw audiences into engrossing world-like *semblances* of truth. Archaic Greece laid the basis for a lasting tension between an aesthetics of truth and an aesthetics of compelling fiction.

By around 500 BCE, comparisons between poetic and figurative art emerge as one means of articulating proto-aesthetic considerations about representation and expression. The poet Simonides described poetry as “speaking painting,” painting as “silent poetry” (Plutarch, *Moralia* 346f). Such comparisons, positing a shared category of image-making but marking differences of capacity between verbal and visual media, became common (e.g., Plato, *Republic* 10 and Aristotle, *Poetics* 25 employed them) and later gave rise to the tradition of *ut pictura poesis*, “just as with painting, so with poetry” (the Latin phrase from Horace, *Ars Poetica* 361), the tradition which Lessing’s *Laocoön* set itself to overhaul. Convergence on a cohesive concept of representational art was strengthened by the idea of mimesis, whose origins are obscure but which came to be

applied to pictorial, poetic, choreographic, musical, and some other kinds of representation. The translation “imitation,” though standard, does scant justice to the ways in which Greeks used interpretations of mimesis to wrestle with problems, in modern terms, both of representation and of expression. The status of mimesis intersects, moreover, with issues of truth and falsehood/fiction, especially in poetry, and different versions of mimesis cover a spectrum stretching from “world-reflecting” realism to “world-creating” idealism (Halliwell 2002).

While much of archaic Greek culture was prepared to ascribe special truth-telling powers to poets, whether resulting from divine support or human insight (or both), some philosophers raised objections. Heraclitus poured scorn on the belief that Homer and Hesiod possessed any authentic wisdom; Xenophanes (a rare Greek critic of polytheism), writing in verse himself, complained that these same poets had attributed gross immorality to the gods. The importance of such polemics is twofold: they imply that representational art is open to scrutiny on epistemological and ethical grounds, and they show the development of what Plato would later call “the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (*Republic* 10.607b).

CLASSICAL FRAMEWORKS AND DEBATES

In the classical period (fifth to fourth centuries BCE), Greek attitudes to poetry, music, painting, and sculpture did not lose contact with their archaic roots but became open to new forms of (partly) rationalistic theorizing and judgment. There is an increasing tendency to recognize a family of figurative and musico-poetic practices, each of which typically counts as a *technê* or specialized expertise (see below) and whose common feature is mimetic depiction, simulation, or enactment of world-like properties (things “resembling the truth,” in the Greek phrase). This is apparent in the classification of mimesis in the opening chapters of Aristotle’s *Poetics*; and when in that work Aristotle aligns poetry with “the other mimetic arts” (8.1451a30), he clearly assumes familiarity with a well-established category. It was also possible to characterize part of this category with the term *mousikê*, literally “art of the Muses,” a word which could denote music per se but also a larger consortium of musico-

poetic arts. This use of the term is particularly prominent in Plato’s *Republic*, but it is not original there. In Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, for instance, the creative activity of tragic playwrights is called *mousikê*.

The nature and implications of mimesis are most extensively and intricately explored in this period by Plato and Aristotle. But there are traces of a wider culture of discussion on the subject. In Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.10.1–8, a partly fictionalized collection of memories of Socrates, the latter asks the painter Parrhasius whether his “imaging of the visible” can include depiction of strictly nonsensory qualities such as a person’s “character”: Parrhasius at first resists but is brought round by a suggestion that such qualities might be shown “through” physical expressions, especially on the face. In a further conversation, Socrates asks the sculptor Cleiton how he “renders the sense of life” in his figures. In both cases, the philosopher probes the (blurred) boundary between representation and expression. He asks how “colors and shapes” can be seen as conveying nonsensory properties and meanings; and there are intimations of a view which will be spelt out in a later period (see below on Philostratus), that mimetic effects require imaginative cooperation from viewers prepared to project significance onto the appearances of a work. Mimesis uses material media to produce readable semblances of a world (whether real or fictive), a process that could be either celebrated for what Greeks sometimes called its “soul-drawing” allure (*psychagôgia*) or distrusted for its speciousness.

Too much should not be made of the linguistic fact that the sense in which poetry, music, and painting could count as “arts,” *technai* (plural of *technê*), does not coincide with the generalized modern usage of “art.” It is true that the concept of *technê*, a skill or expertise based on rationally expoundable principles, can be used of activities as diverse as shoemaking and medicine. But its implication of mastery of materials and practices in a particular domain does still contribute one strand of modern usage; beyond that, modern usage itself is problematic, since it masks widespread disagreement about what constitutes “art.” Furthermore, the unitary notion of art that emerged in the eighteenth century is a synthesis