



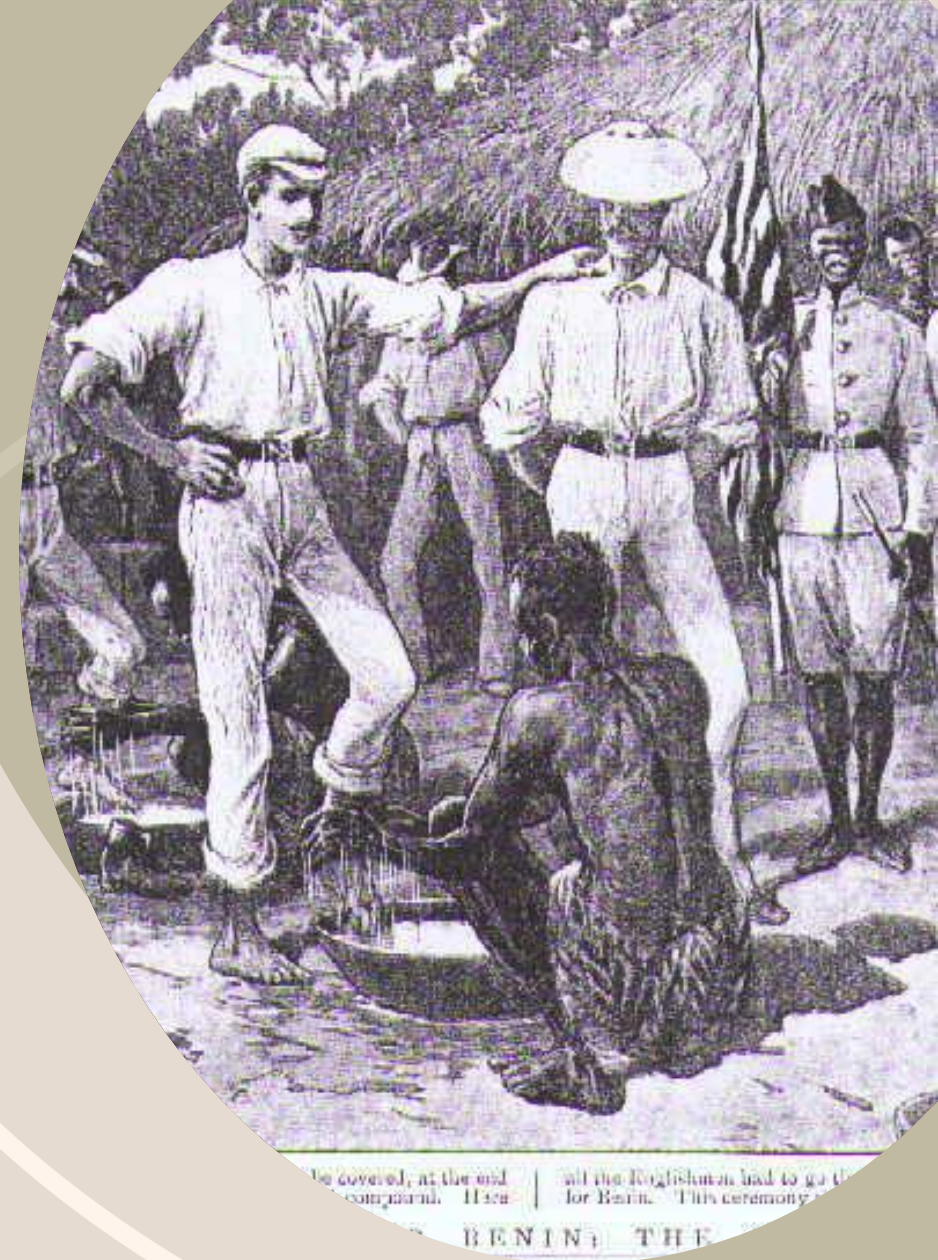
Material Culture in Theory

A Case Study

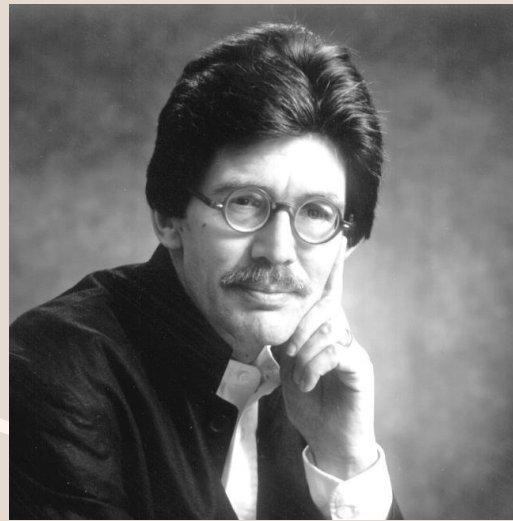


Materialism

- Materiality thrives on flexible definitions and both outlandish and controlled theories.
- Finds its roots in colonialism:
 - Fetishisation of non-Western cultures and the belief that, because they live differently, their technology and skills were not worthy of investigation.
- Contemporary: late 1900s-
 - A change of belief.
 - The function is just as important as its symbolism.
 - Theorised equally by anthropologists like Daniel Miller, Christopher Tilly and Alfred Gell.



Who is Alfred Gell?



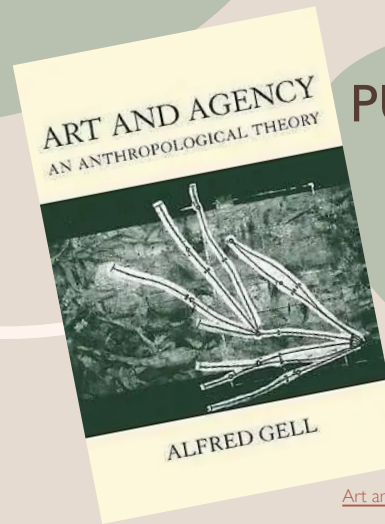
[Alfred Gell | Antropologie.it](http://Antropologie.it)

CAMBRIDGE 1963- BA AND
MPHIL IN SOCIAL
ANTHROPOLOGY

LONDON SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS

DOCTORATE FOCUSED ON
ART AND CULTURE IN
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

DEATH 1997



PUBLICATION OF ART AND
AGENCY: AN
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
THEORY

Theory of Agency:

Secondary Agent

An object that has no will or intention of act of their own accord

Enchantment

An object being compelling enough to cause action and thereby reaction

Redefinition of
abduction

The taking of agency from the maker and storing it in the object

Index

Materials that bear the history of those who make them

The Case Study: My glasses



From Factory to Function



From the company it was created by, in this case, 'Seen @ Work'.

To the shelves of an optician's, in this case, Vision Express.



Robert Layton

- Sympathises with the impact Gell's death had on his book and how that will affect the end product.
- Disagrees with aesthetic value being useless in the analysis of material culture.
- Hughes-Freeland:
 - Lega of Central Africa sees value in the craftsmanship of ivory and well-polished wood items.
- Biebuyck:
 - Disagrees and states that its aesthetic is just as praised.
- Sillitoe:
 - Use of birds of paradise feathers in headdresses for cosmetic purposes rather than to get the agency from the bird.

REASSESSMENT

ROBERT LAYTON

University of Durham

and agency, Alfred Gell presents a theory of art based not on visual communication. Art is defined by the distinctive function of enhancing social relationships through 'the abduction of agency'. A theory of the artist's or model's agency. This article examines Gell's use of the relation to the ritual art that is central to his argument. Focuses on the use of Peirce's term 'index' (out of his triad of index, icon, and symbol). This approach deflects attention from signification towards the link between things to which they refer. I consider what Peirce meant by 'index' and what while Gell makes a good case for the agency of art, I consider distinctive ways in which art objects extend their making. I make detailed revisions before publication. I might have revised some parts of the

Ross Bowden

- Does not hold the same sympathies.
- Disagrees with the idea that each culture idolises the same things in reaction to an object, specifically art.
- Points out that Gell's theory, at least in writing in the book, seems unfinished due to the constant backpedalling and reinvention of his theory to fit his example.

Alfred Gell on *Art & Agency*

Ross Bowden

La Trobe University

ABSTRACT

...nes in detail the argument in Alfred Gell's po
...*anthropological theory*. The review is divided
...argument of each chapter in turn and con
...assumptions and conclusions. In the second
...on three of the more general issues th

Thank you

Bibliography for the photos used:

- [The Adventures of an Anthropology Undergrad: Effects of British Colonialism in West Africa](#)
- [Alfred Gell | Antropologie.it](#)
- [Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory: Alfred Gell: 9780198280149: Amazon.com: Books](#)
- [Seen@Work](#)
- [In pictures: Vision Express unveils £4m revamped Oxford Street flagship - Retail Gazette](#)
- [Art and Agency: A Reassessment on JSTOR](#)
- [Critique of Alfred Gell's Art & Agency](#)
- [DSCN9970.jpg \(640×480\)](#)



[DSCN9970.jpg \(640×480\)](#)