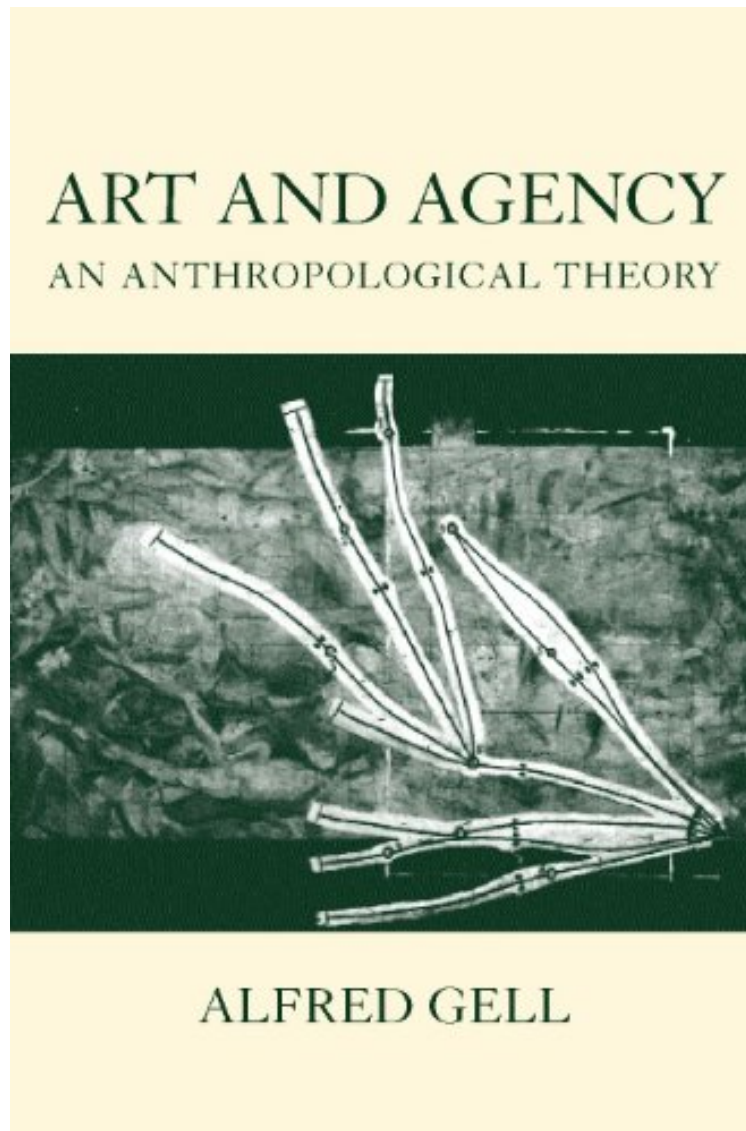



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Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory

Alfred Gell

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Alfred Gell : Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. great bookBy David Morgandifficult, occasionally quite wrong, but enormously helpful and suggestive, and a major piece of work shaping the conversation. Strongly recommend for those interested in objects and their agencies1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Too abstractBy J. VAN OOIJENUnlike many others, I am not enthusiastic about this book. I think it is too abstract and its ideas are difficult to translate or apply. The book seems to be highly influential, but it strikes me that many references made to this book are even more abstract and vague than the book itself. To me this is an indication that it has become, in certain fields

of study, almost obligatory to refer to Gell but hardly anyone seems to fully grasp what exactly he is talking about.¹⁵ of 17 people found the following review helpful. Funny, dense, important approach
By Limbic Browser
Reading this book modified my self-image and expanded my understanding of the image-making industry. The text is a little disjointed because it's a rough draft (the author did not live to see it edited or published), but Gell's brilliance and humor are nonetheless transmitted by the book. Hang in there. Although some conflicting portions of the text have since been pointed out by scholars, Gell's case is solid enough to serve as a springboard for a theory of "understanding" art that could be applicable globally. Who else has done that? The lowest common denominator Gell found looks pretty math-like (we put math models in space capsules because it's a "universal" language), but the book is NOT math-boring. Delightful, eclectic examples illustrate his ideas. I recommend this book for humanities students, artists, art historians and those who are searching for a connection between math and the arts.

Alfred Gell puts forward a new anthropological theory of visual art, seen as a form of instrumental action: the making of things as a means of influencing the thoughts and actions of others. He argues that existing anthropological and aesthetic theories take an overwhelmingly passive point of view, and questions the criteria that accord art status only to a certain class of objects and not to others. The anthropology of art is here reformulated as the anthropology of a category of action: Gell shows how art objects embody complex intentionalities and mediate social agency. He explores the psychology of patterns and perceptions, art and personhood, the control of knowledge, and the interpretation of meaning, drawing upon a diversity of artistic traditions—European, Indian, Polynesian, Melanesian, and Australian. *Art and Agency* was completed just before Alfred Gell's death at the age of 51 in January 1997. It embodies the intellectual bravura, lively wit, vigour, and erudition for which he was admired, and will stand as an enduring testament to one of the most gifted anthropologists of his generation.

"[This] is not only a contribution to anthropology but a subtle and original counterweight to the banalities of globalization theory."--Times Literary Supplement
About the Author
Alfred Gell is a former Reader in Anthropology in the London School of Economics.