

## *How Do Cross-Cultural Studies Impact Upon the Conventional Definition of Art?*

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*While Stephen Davies argues that a debate on cross-cultural aesthetics is possible if we adopt an attitude of mutual respect and forbearance, his fellow symposiasts shed light upon different aspects which merit a closer scrutiny in such a dialogue. Samer Akkach warns that an inclusivistic embrace of difference runs the risk of collapsing the very difference one sought to understand. Julie Nagam underscores that local knowledge carriers and/or the medium should be involved in such a cross-cultural exploration. Enrico Fongaro searches for a way of experiencing cross-cultural art such that it can lead to a transformative experience. Relatedly, Meilin Chinn uses the analogy of friendship to explore the edifying dimension of experiencing an art form. Lastly, John Powell studies whether Dickie's Institutional Theory can be meaningfully used to identify works of art in Western and non-Western traditions.*

Key words: artworld; bodily experience of art; fusion of horizons; garden; Intercultural philosophy; Islam; Kitarō Nishida; musical friendship; otherness; translation; Zhuangzi

### **Can Westerners Understand the Art of Other Cultures and What Might They Learn by Doing So?**

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I write this from the perspective of a Westerner, though much of what is said should be true for non-Western groups who are considering the art of other cultures. My use of the word “art” is not meant to be technical or provocative, though I will not attempt a definition here.<sup>1</sup> The paintings of Rembrandt and Picasso are works of art, as are the compositions of Mozart and Stravinsky, the novels of Dickens and Faulkner, and the plays of Shakespeare and Mamet. And if it becomes an issue, I am happy to include among the class of artworks skillful, high quality entertainments, such as *The Sopranos*.

Some Westerners would deny that other cultures make art, so let's start there. Among the reasons given for such a view are that other cultures lack a word for art, they do not create non-functional items that are for contemplation alone, and their traditions are conservative rather than innovative and rebellious. But these generalizations are false, both in what they assume about Western art and as they apply to the art of other cultures.<sup>2</sup> Much Western art has been conservative and functional: consider medieval religious art and iconography. Some other cultures do have words that seem to correspond to “art.” In any case, one can make art without a term or even a concept for it. The people who made the first art certainly had specific goals in mind but could not have thought of what they made as art, not until the relevant public practice was locally established and eventually named.<sup>3</sup> And many other literate cultures with strong religious or court traditions create non-functional art, intended for contemplation for its own sake, and surround this with elaborate theories and histories. Besides, I do not see why art cannot be functional, as already indicated. And finally, the art-making practices of other cultures sometimes value creative change as much as the Western avant-garde does.<sup>4</sup>

The claim is not that *they* have art if *we* call it that, or that the practices just mentioned are uniform across cultures. Other cultures have established their own, independent art traditions

and conventions. The claim is, rather, that we can see that we share their conception of art because of what arts across the cultures have in common, notwithstanding their manifest differences.

In tribal societies art might not be institutionalized as it is in the West; it might involve the active participation of most people in the group, and it might be closely connected to ritual. But these are not defeating differences. It makes as much sense to say they have art as to say they have cooking, clothing, marriage, and religion, though all of these might be distinguishable from their Western equivalents.

We should acknowledge the existence of non-Western art, then. Indeed, it would be insulting not to, because so fundamental is art to people's identity, denying that they have art comes close to denying their humanity. And we can often recognize such artworks as such, because of the overlap with our art forms. They have singing, dancing, storytelling, acting, painting, and carving. In addition, they might have art forms that are new to us—shadow puppet plays<sup>5</sup>, paper folding, elaborate flower arranging, sand “painting,” and so on. But again, we can see the continuities that link these new art forms to those that overlap more squarely with ours. They involve the same care, skill, rules of appreciation, and the like. In other cases, perhaps, a practice might be sufficiently distant from ours that we cannot be sure whether it should count as an art form—think of Asian calligraphy, martial arts, and tea ceremonies.

The fact that we can identify some of the artworks of other cultures is not to say that we can understand those works appropriately. (Similarly, we can identify foreign languages as such, but without understanding what is said in them.) I subscribe to a view that I call *ontological contextualism*.<sup>6</sup> It holds that artworks take some of their identifying features and contents via relations in which they stand to their art-historical and socio-cultural location. For instance, artworks regularly allude to, quote, repudiate, or satirize previous works in their tradition. They can be full of symbols and codes. As a result, the art of other cultures can be opaque to outsiders.

Take poetry as an example. It can be appreciated only by someone who has a sophisticated grasp of the language, who is familiar with its poetic genres and conventions, and who is aware of all the topics it could embrace, including the society's wider culture, history, ethics, practices, conventions, and so on. Plainly, few foreigners to the society are likely to appreciate its poetry. Nevertheless, they might be able to identify examples of its poetry by their use of regular meters and rhyme schemes.

It is certainly possible, however, to improve one's appreciation of art from an unfamiliar culture, and doing so can be richly rewarding. Even non-literate cultures possess theories and histories of their arts, along with codes for its reception and appreciation.<sup>7</sup> These are matters about which the foreign tourist can learn. Indeed, there are likely to be essays on the topic in her guidebook. And as well, there are local teachers who may instruct her, so that she attains a degree of practical knowledge about the society's art forms.

Of course, we share much in common with other people, whether we belong to their cultures or not. We have the same evolved perceptual systems. We are programmed to organize the manifold of perception—to find pattern, repetition, and closure, to distinguish a subject from its background, to attend to what is new or different. We look for causal relations. We try to explain the present in terms of the past and, in planning, extrapolate from there to the future. This is not to deny that “top down” or learned processes can affect what we see,<sup>8</sup> for instance, by altering what we attend to. And these processes can have a culturally distinct basis.<sup>9</sup>

We also share with others evolved affective and cognitive systems. Of course these are highly plastic and culturally malleable. How we feel about death might depend, for example, on whether it is seen as the extinction of life, as the door to eternal paradise, as a mode of recycling, or as a route to reincarnation. But certain human refrains seem to be universal. When it comes to other people, we look for meaning and intention. We track social relations and keep score. The same themes are familiar across the world and are repeated in countless tales—crime and

punishment, war and peace, pride and prejudice, heaven and hell, alongside love, jealousy, compassion, adventure, revenge, competition, quest, commerce, justice, violence, and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Artworks draw attention to themselves by stimulating these shared systems and universal interests.<sup>11</sup> So, we can expect the art of other cultures often to be accessible in terms of their perceptible structures or thematic contents.

Another consideration is that the challenges of different art media remain constant across cultures. Consider dance. We all know what it is to move our bodies under the force of gravity. That alone places us in a position to have a basic appreciation of the dancer's grace or athleticism, whatever culture she comes from. Virtuosity and skill are prized in all cultures, and we can recognize this in pictorial representation, acting, and carvings of stone or wood. The same usually applies to music, where precision, speed, and expressiveness tend to be valued.

Additionally, the earliest art typically deals with aesthetic properties that have a fairly simple, direct appeal. It uses vivid colors, realistic depiction, symmetrical patterns, stories on basic human themes, plainly recognizable expressive tropes, easily sung tunes, etc. As time passes, it can become more abstract, symbolic, and self-referential, and this can demand connoisseurship on behalf of its audience. But even as this occurs, it is rarely the case that the arcane forms of art extinguish the more basic forms. Some of the art of a culture retains sensuous accessibility of a type that provides a point of entry for the cultural outsider (or for the uninitiated insider).

So, what do we learn when we try (with partial success) to understand the art of other cultures? I claim that art is a window into people's hearts and souls, so we learn from non-Western art both what we share in common and what makes each culture different and unique.

It is clear that other cultures have artistic traditions, classic artworks, and artists (whether heralded or not) that are a match for those in the West. The Mahabharata and Ramayana epics in India and south Asia have a Shakespearean scope, for instance. Architectural styles differ widely, but all permanently settled peoples build large structures with both power and beauty. Virtuoso orators, actors, dancers, and musicians are everywhere, as are skilled storytellers, poets, and picture-makers. So, one can learn from the art of other cultures what one can learn from the art of the West. We value art for its insights and the knowledge that it affords, and non-Western art is valuable for the same reasons.

Though non-Western art, when compared with Western art, does many of the same things and deals with related themes, it is very often different in many of its details and purposes. Not only does it showcase our deep commonalities, it also highlights cultural eccentricity and dissimilarity. From the Japanese, for instance, we can learn the aesthetic interest and value of imperfection,<sup>12</sup> or how to be profound within the constraints imposed by the 5/7/5-syllable structure of the haiku, or how to reconcile high stylization with pictorial realism. Of course, Japan is an artistically and aesthetically rich culture, but I think most cultures, both ancient and modern, are similar. Consider the jade and stone work of the Mayans, the brass castings of Benin<sup>13</sup>, dot paintings of Aborigines of the Western Desert<sup>14</sup>, Turkish rugs, Indonesian shadow-puppetry, the soapstone, ivory and antler carvings of the Inuit, Maori wood-carving<sup>15</sup>. All of these are culturally distinctive, and within each culture there are various periods, schools, and artists with different styles.

Let me use just one simple example. After centuries of experiment, not to mention a great deal of algebra, Western artists mastered the skill of vanishing point perspective in order to represent the three-dimensionality of space. But what we learn from examining the pictures of other cultures is that there are many ways of capturing the spaciness of reality. In Chinese art, the disposition of clouds and mountains achieves the effect. In ancient Egyptian pictures, sometimes a picture contained multiple perspectives—consider Nebamun's garden.<sup>16</sup> Amerindians of the American northwest succeeded in picturing the whole animal by splitting and splaying the image.<sup>17</sup> As should be apparent from the many ways in which a two-dimensional map of the earth can be

projected,<sup>18</sup> many systems are possible and some will be more accurate or convey more information than others.

More systematic comparative studies by experts can help in uncovering what can be learned from the art of other cultures.<sup>19</sup> These comparative studies tend to be offered by anthropologists and ethologists and rest on observation rather than systematic experimentation; that is, they are qualitative rather than quantitative.

Though they might be revealing, cross-cultural empirical studies are rare. Is there any variation across cultures in terms of the ways people comprehend pictures or narratives? When it comes to common, bottom-up physiological processes, we do not know for sure, though, as conceded previously, how things are categorized can affect what gets focused on in pictures.<sup>20</sup>

Psychologists and others have performed experiments with music as the focus. Cross-cultural studies have tended to focus on the interesting question of whether musical expressiveness is cross-culturally recognizable. Obviously, an answer (yes, no, sometimes) could help considerably in the analysis of how music is expressive and what is being perceived when it is so described. Many studies have been done.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, though, there are many problems with this line of research. For instance, it is very difficult to find a culture in which people have not heard Western music, so the studies do not deal with equally naïve listeners. And some musics are more similar—for example, in scales—than others, so there is a danger in generalizing from positive results. Methodological issues fault many of the experiments.<sup>22</sup> For instance, one study,<sup>23</sup> comparing Europeans with people of Indian descent, took its European participants from the University of Manchester and its Indians from a teachers' college in Bradford, and it assumed that musical expressiveness always is a matter of contingent association!

The more careful and interesting studies do suggest that there is significant cross-cultural recognition of coarse-level musical expressiveness (say, sadness, happiness, or anger) in at least some cases. That result can have implications for our theoretical understanding of musical expressiveness, for instance by counting against those views implying that expressiveness depends exclusively on culturally idiosyncratic features.

A skeptic might argue that even if art is universal, it is not all universally good, and that the best, most sophisticated art belongs to the West, so that Westerners cannot expect to learn much of interest from the art of other cultures. But this ignorantly overlooks the rich differences in the ways of life pursued in the world's cultures. And though not everything is to my taste—I'm not a fan of Chinese opera yet—it seems to me that one need not look far to find in every culture art that is not only of astonishing force and quality but also revealing of cultural difference and human variety.

In Chauvet cave (or its replica), examine the individuality of the animals in the “horse panel” or the pent energy and focus shown in the “hunting pride” of cave lions.<sup>24</sup> These images were created by Cro-Magnon *Homo sapiens* hunter-foragers more than 35,000 years ago; that is, by people very culturally distant from us. I predict the viewer will be jaw-dropped by the force of these pictures. Picasso is said to have commented of the parietal art in Altamira cave, which is more than 12,000 years old, “After Altamira, all is decadence.” He might better have decided that art of the highest quality can be found everywhere in our species' history and in its many cultures.

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- 1 An evaluation of current definitions took me an entire book in Davies 1991! For my most recent attempt, see Davies (2015).
- 2 For discussion, see Blocker (1993), Davies (2000), Dutton (2000).
- 3 Davies (2015).
- 4 See Layton 1991, ch. 5. On the fetish for artistic innovation in Balinese culture, see Davies (2007).
- 5 *Wayang Kulit: Kresna*, shadow puppet, Bali. Wikimedia, last modified 3 August 2016, 16:24. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wayang\\_Kulit,\\_Bali.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wayang_Kulit,_Bali.jpg)
- 6 Gracyk (2009).
- 7 For instance, Zemp (1978, 1979) records the elaborate and extensive music theory possessed by the 'Are'are, a people of fewer than 20,000 who live on part of the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands.
- 8 Connolly (2017).
- 9 Nisbett (2003).
- 10 For discussion of human universals, see Brown (1991).
- 11 See Dutton (2001). On universals in music, see Higgins (2006). On universals in literature, see Gottschall and Wilson (2005); Literary Universals Project (<http://literary-universals.uconn.edu>). On connections between art and evolution, see Davies (2012, 2014); Dissanayake (1995).
- 12 Saito (1997). See in the public domain: *Shino chawan (tea bowl)*. Wikimedia, last modified 20 September 2016, 20:53. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shino\\_chawan\\_MBA\\_Lyon\\_E554-146.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shino_chawan_MBA_Lyon_E554-146.jpg)
- 13 See in the public domain: *Benin brass plaque 01*, British Museum, London. Wikimedia, last modified 18 February 2018, 10:59. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benin\\_brass\\_plaque\\_01.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benin_brass_plaque_01.jpg)
- 14 *Coolamon with dot-painting*, softwood coolamon with acrylic paint design, Australian Museum, Sydney. Wikimedia, last modified 7 December 2016, 7:34. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coolamon\\_with\\_dot-painting.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coolamon_with_dot-painting.JPG)
- 15 *Maori wood carving*, Te Whare Runanga Meeting House at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, New Zealand. Wikimedia, last modified 6 January 2018, 5:56. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maori\\_Wood\\_Carving\\_\(3335850391\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maori_Wood_Carving_(3335850391).jpg)
- 16 *The Garden*, painting on plaster, 72 x 62 cm., *fresco* from Nebamun tomb, originally in Thebes, Egypt, now in the British Museum, London. Wikimedia, last modified 5 February 2018, 7:07. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le\\_Jardin\\_de\\_Nébamoun.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_Jardin_de_Nébamoun.jpg)
- 17 For an example, see Robert Davidson's *Split Beaver* (1975).
- 18 Wikipedia, s.v. "Map projection," last modified 25 February 2018, 18:28. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map\\_projection](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map_projection)
- 19 Representative examples would be Anderson (1990), Dissanayake (1995), Layton (1991), and Van Damme (1996).
- 20 See Nisbett 2003 on differences between the ways Asians and Americans think about and thereby see the world. We do know that experts scan pictures differently from novices; see Nodine, Locher, and Krupinski (1993), Massaro, Savazzi, et al. (2012).
- 21 For an overview, see Thompson and Balkwill (2010).
- 22 Davies (2011).
- 23 Gregory and Varney (1996).
- 24 *Chauvet horses*, Chauvet Cave, Ardèche, France. Wikimedia, last modified 1 February 2016, 17:35. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Chauvet\\_Cave#/media/File:Chauvethorses.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Chauvet_Cave#/media/File:Chauvethorses.jpg) and [https://public-media.smithsonianmag.com/filer/08/0f/080fe4c6-241f-467f-9e3c-8062db55f153/apr2015\\_h07\\_chauvetcave.jpg](https://public-media.smithsonianmag.com/filer/08/0f/080fe4c6-241f-467f-9e3c-8062db55f153/apr2015_h07_chauvetcave.jpg)

## On Commonality, Predictability, and Difference

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I am not an art critic or art theorist and I don't normally read the literature on art criticism, art theories, or aesthetics; I am not sure what the "conventional definition of art" is, nor do I know much about the debate among Western art critics/theorists on whether or not other cultures make "art," whatever that is. I thus might not be the right person to contribute to this forum. But the Symposium question is not alien to my work and the discussion can benefit from an informed outsider's perspective. As an intellectual and cultural historian with long-standing interest in pre- and early-modern Islamic tradition, the scope of my research work encompasses history and theory of Islamic art and architecture. I therefore can claim that I know something about a non-Western artistic tradition.<sup>1</sup> But what viewpoint do I represent? I lived, was educated, practiced, and taught in both Western and non-Western cultural contexts for an equally long time, and with such a hybrid background I am unsure how to define my cultural position within Stephen Davies' polarized setting of Westerners and non-Westerners, just as I am unsure what the "conventional definition of art" is. I am assuming, however, that the conventional definition of art is a Western one, since Davies has already identified with it, generously and unreservedly extending it to other cultures on the basis of human commonalities. I am also assuming that wherever I stand, I do have—by virtue of my linguistic skills, cultural upbringing, dedicated studies, and research interests—access to a perspective on art that lies outside the scope of the "conventional definition," which gives me multiple vantage points for cross-cultural reflections. In his theoretical reflections, Davies appears to be standing on firm, well-defined, and self-assuring ground, in contrast to which my unsure position would appear to be shifting, vague, and non-conventional. But no matter how different and elusive my understanding of art might be, it remains *predictable* from Davies' all-encompassing central perspective, which tends to predetermine what "art" is, regardless of context, purpose, experience, and definition.

Notwithstanding the conceptual and cultural differences I have with Davies, our views seem to converge on the rejection of cultural relativism. His response to the Symposium question makes good sense to me, and his forceful argument for an inclusive understanding of art is morally appealing. Yet as much as I enjoyed reading his well-crafted piece, I couldn't help wondering about the urgency and gravity of his central concern: whether or not what other cultures make is "art." While upholding the moral significance of the question, I'm not sure what difference the assertion makes one way or another to the other cultures. How does a layperson's aesthetic experience of, say, an Islamic mosaic pattern differ if it is or isn't regarded as a work of "art?" And why should it be insulting to the non-Westerners if the West refused to accept their cultural products as "art?" If "the claim is not that *they* have art if *we* call it that, or that the practices just mentioned are uniform across cultures," as Davies (2018a) has aptly put it, then why bother with appropriating what others make into a unified Western perspective? Surely there is much to learn from what other people make, write, or present, but is it necessary to appropriate the others' cultural productions into a particular system of thought in order to make them familiar, predictable, and educative? Is this yet another manifestation of the intellectual curiosity peculiar to the Western culture? Or is it an expression of the deep-seated hegemonic Westo-centrism that demands the understanding of the world in its own terms? After all, "art" is an English term with a specific European history—is this the best mode of engagement with other cultures to achieve effective and meaningful cross-cultural understanding?

I'm raising these questions because other cultures don't seem to share the same urge for appropriation even though they have much in common with the West, as Davies has

demonstrated. Does it really matter to the Westerners if non-Westerners don't regard their cultural products as art? When Muslim intellectuals first encountered modern theatrical spectacles in Paris in early nineteenth century, they saw them as expressions of satanic tendencies (Rifa'a al-Tahtawi 2003: 134-42). They did not care whether or not those were new expressions of art. They saw them as worldly distractions from more virtuous human practices. Saudi Arabia still upholds this view and bans theatres and cinemas to this very moment.<sup>2</sup> And when the Taliban destroyed the Buddhas of Bamiyan they did not care whether or not these monumental sculptures were extraordinary works of "art" that carry profound human significance which can be contemplated and learnt from.<sup>3</sup> These "idols" were simply offensive to their religious sensibility.<sup>4</sup> Shocking and inexplicable as this particular case might appear, it reveals a cultural attitude that is fundamentally different from that of Davies, one which regards *difference* as something intrinsic and irreducible to sets of variables projected against a fundamental system of commonalities which enables familiarization, predictability, and appropriation.

There is no doubt about the powerful agency of art as a unifying cross-cultural force that has the capacity of bringing people together on a common ground of shared values and experiences, especially in today's multicultural societies. But the moral necessity of human togetherness is one thing, while understanding difference through a genuine cross-culture exchange is quite another. Westo-centric views, such as the one promoted by Davies, which seek to sympathize with otherness and to embrace all differences into their unified lifeworld tend, in fact, to undermine effective cross-cultural engagements in three ways: in democratizing difference, in perpetuating Eurocentric conventional understanding, and in reducing otherness to predictable variables. Concerning democratizing difference, modern conditions have caused unprecedented changes, good and bad, in all aspects of life and over a very short span of time, rapidly transforming the once expansive world of undiscovered limits into a small crowded "global village." In this ever-contracting space, commonality and difference have taken on new dimensions. De-placed, mobilized, abstracted, and commodified, difference is no longer about irreducible uniqueness, but, rather ironically, about being the same. This is so in the sense that, in the democratic space of the Western society, we are all equally different, or different in the same way, as a promotional advertisement for multiculturalism aired on the Australian SBS national TV channel has recently put it: "without our differences we wouldn't be the same."<sup>5</sup> Necessary though it may be for the modern multi-cultural society, this egalitarian construction of difference, seen as a positive consequence of modern change, is necessarily projected against a common, uniform base that conceals what make *difference*, any *difference*, really different. This is a Western attitude that is not universally shared by many non-Western cultures.

Concerning perpetuating Eurocentric conventional understanding, the emphasis on commonalities and the flattening of the topographies of difference tend to promote an essentialist position which, in our case here, sees "art" as having been—in essence—always and everywhere the same. This understanding can't account for radical or unpredictable differences in conceptions of art across historical and cultural boundaries that fall outside the universal matrix of constructed commonality. The famous Sri Lankan art historian, Ananda Coomaraswamy, who is known for his profound cross-cultural insights, alerted us to the danger of this view:

We are peculiar people. I say this with reference to the fact that whereas almost all other peoples have called their theory of art or expression a "rhetoric" and have thought of art as a kind of knowledge, we have invented an "aesthetic" and think of art as a kind of feeling (1977: 13).

If Coomaraswamy is right, then Davies' Westo-centric claim that art has always and everywhere been a window to people's heart and soul is inaccurate, in that it is a contemporary Western view which is not widely shared or universally relevant. Thus, while preoccupation with commonalities

might make sense morally in encouraging acceptance of otherness and cultural difference, conceptually and methodologically it can lead to misunderstanding and irrelevance through the perpetuation of Eurocentric conventional understanding.

Elsewhere (Akkach 2005), I discussed this point in detail, showing how a particular radical and unpredictable Muslim view of art and architecture could not be accommodated, accepted, or engaged with from within the established methodology of art history, which is the result of a long engagement of Western art historians with Islamic art and architecture with views and attitudes not dissimilar to those of Davies. My study showed not only how irrelevant some Western interpretations were to certain Muslims, but also the limitations that can become entrenched and perpetuated through dominating Western conceptions and methodologies. True, Davies has clarified that “the fact that we can identify some of the artworks of other cultures is not to say that we can understand those works appropriately,” but what is the use of this caveat when institutionalized Western thoughts and methodologies are dictating what is appropriate and inappropriate, and when Western expertise is setting the expectations in the arts as well as other fields?

This brings me to the issue of reducing otherness to predictable variables and how cross-cultural studies can widen and enrich our understanding of art. In his famous *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004: 352-55) presented an illuminating discussion of three types of encounter between the self and the other, in which prejudice and predictability play an essential role in how we come to terms with difference and how we understand and deal with otherness. The first two modes of encounter he describes are detached and self-related in nature, although they differ in their ways of recognizing and acknowledging otherness. Interest in and sympathy with the other in these modes are predicated on a self-centred attitude that seeks to appropriate otherness for one’s own purposes. In both cases one assumes that he/she knows well what the other has in mind, speaks on their behalf, and puts words into their mouth, so to speak. The other is given no chance to express their views and the relationship remains one-sided, lacking dialogue and reciprocity. Effective cross-cultural exchange takes place in the third mode, wherein one genuinely listens to what the other has to say, recognizes their claim to truth, and experiences them truly as other. Such engagement results in what Gadamer describes as “fusion of horizons.”<sup>6</sup> A “horizon” is a dynamic point of view formed by one’s “system of prejudices,” and otherness necessarily presupposes a “different system of prejudices” that determines its different horizon. When otherness becomes predictable from the view point of one’s system of prejudices, one’s horizon becomes closed. Otherness is nevertheless understood but only superficially as it becomes anticipated and fixed within a single, static, self-contained perspective. When predictability is abandoned as a basis of exchange, however, the unfamiliarity of otherness emerges as an inexhaustible source of ever-changing possibilities that are capable of changing not only one’s understanding of the other but also one’s own self (Snodgrass 2006: 160). In fact, both the self and the other are affected and changed by the new shared understanding. Gadamer (2004: 352) assimilates the approaches that seek predictability of otherness on the basis of knowledge of human nature to the “naive faith in method and in the objectivity that can be attained through it.” It methodically excludes “everything subjective” that constitutes otherness, leading to teleological interpretations of difference.

Fusion of horizons as an enabling mode of cross-cultural understanding does not emerge from a position of familiarity which assumes “that things must always have been just as they are for us, for things are naturally like this” (2004: 352). Rather, it emerges from encounters with the unknown and the unfamiliar in situations capable of expanding our horizons when we are open to the questions they pose for us. As Snodgrass (1991: 39) explains, “every rewarding dialogue is an excursion into the unknown. We enter the unknown for what lies there to be discovered. In dialogue we wander in unexplored territory not with the intent of annexation, but of returning home to our familiar horizons and seeing them in a new way because of what we have seen



elsewhere” (Snodgrass 1991: 39). Cultural products, artistic or otherwise, have the capacity of leading us into such journeys of discovery when we see them as truth-tellers not in a predictable world but in a world yet to be explored and discovered. The cultural horizon they embody would then challenge us to engage with the fundamental difference they represent without recourse to the reductionism of Western universalism or the alienation of cultural relativism.<sup>7</sup>

To achieve a true understanding of the other is to recognize their otherness and to incorporate, in one way or another, that otherness into our own horizon. This does not mean reaching uncritical acceptance, as true understanding of the other can lead to total rejection of what they stand for. Indeed, “what the other has to say can provoke a rejection of his prejudices on some matter, just as, in some cases, it might it might evoke a total rejection of our own” (Snodgrass 1991: 40). Many Muslims and non-Muslims, for example, were united in their rejection of the Taliban’s religious attitude and the condemnation of their actions, which can no longer be sanctioned on the ground of cultural relativism. Thus the discoveries sought in cross-cultural journeys, with respect to art and other topics, should not necessarily lead as a matter of course to identifying with the other or to becoming sympathetic to or even tolerant of their views or actions. The aim is not “to develop a sympathetic fellow-feeling for the other on the basis of the traits and attitudes we have in common and are therefore familiar.” Rather, the aim is to “seek out what is radically different and unfamiliar in the other,” which cannot be predicted and appropriated. Our aim should be to use these dissimilarities and disparities to engage in “a dialogical questioning of our own prejudices and to open up possibilities of changing and expanding our horizon.” (Snodgrass 1991: 40).

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- 1 Although Western and non-Western artistic traditions can be differentiated on the basis of their different nature, histories, cultural conditions, and intellectual scope, the positions of contemporary scholars dealing with these traditions have become more fluid and complex under the forces of globalization and intense cross-cultural exchanges, and hence, less amenable to such differentiation.
  - 2 Although recent liberal reforms in Saudi Arabia have promised to lift these bans in the near future, it is the cultural attitude that has been sustained for over two centuries despite the pressure of modernization that matters here. Of course, Saudi Wahhabism is not representative of all Islamic points of view on this matter, but it remains an Islamic perspective and an influential one that is widely shared even outside Saudi Arabia.
  - 3 The Taliban’s fundamentalism is yet another manifestation of the cultural attitude and Saudi Wahhabism.
  - 4 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhas\\_of\\_Bamiyan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhas_of_Bamiyan) (last accessed on January 24 2018). These historically-formed cultural attitudes matter, notwithstanding that many Islamic countries have later developed interest in modern performing art and sculpture.
  - 5 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPqVxyVGwO0> (last accessed on January 24 2018). There are different versions, this is the latest one.
  - 6 On Gadamer’s concept of “fusion of horizons,” see Snodgrass and Coyne (2006: chapter 8). An earlier version was published by Adrian Snodgrass in 1991. See the Reference list.
  - 7 “Western universalism” and “cultural relativism” are ideological and methodological positions that tend to predetermine the direction and anticipate the outcome of cross-cultural exchanges. By contrast, fusion of horizons seeks to avoid such conceptual rigidity which tends to impede understanding and limit the hermeneutical possibilities; it encourages fluidity and openness to effect shifts in the individual and community systems of prejudices.

## “Knowing the Music” (*zhi yin* 知音) and Other Feats of Understanding

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In one of the most celebrated stories of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, Huizi and Zhuangzi debate what can be known about others, in this case, the fish swimming near them under a bridge over the river Hao. Skeptical of Zhuangzi’s claim to know the fish are happy, Huizi says, “You are not a fish. How do you know that the fish are happy?” Zhuangzi replies, “You are not I. How do you know that I do not know that the fish are happy?” For Huizi, the fact he is not Zhuangzi is irrelevant; all that matters is that Zhuangzi is not a fish and so cannot know their happiness. Zhuangzi’s reply ends the story: “Let’s go back to the beginning of this. You said, ‘How do you know the fish are happy,’ but in asking me this, you already knew that I know it. I know it right here above the Hao.” Zhuangzi’s phenomenological point, delivered with a characteristic semantic twist, is that knowing is possible because of location, not in spite of it. Stephen Davies begins his essay, *Can Westerners understand the art of other cultures and what might they learn by doing so?* with an opening likely to please Zhuangzi. He acknowledges writing from his position as a Westerner while also claiming that much of what he says should be true of any cross-cultural understanding of art. Some might find this claim to universality to be quintessentially Western, especially when it comes to understanding other cultures. I share a general sympathy with this concern and am dispositionally wary toward universal claims about understanding art. However, in this case, I agree that much of what Davies says has wide application, and in fact can be broadened further to examine some unique possibilities that aesthetics and art, especially music, bring to cross-cultural philosophy. I will suggest that friendship provides a helpful analogy for cross-cultural understanding here.

### 1 Places of Understanding

Davies begins by addressing the Westerner who doubts that other cultures make art. I was surprised at first to see that these doubts still need to be addressed, but less so as I considered the persistent and parallel misconception that philosophy also belongs only to the West. Much belabored debate goes on about whether the Chinese had philosophy before the word was imported. Discussions about the existence and quality of non-Western art and philosophy are not my central interest here, however.<sup>1</sup> Art and philosophy, in other cultures and across borders, goes on just fine, as Wittgenstein might have put it, without sanction from institutional guardians. Similarly, non-experts recognize and even understand the arts and philosophies of other cultures without the naïve mistakes of projection and assimilation that expertise supposedly protects against. This is not to deny “ontological contextualism,” a view Davies’ endorses, as do I, that takes some of the identifying features of artworks to come from their art-historical and socio-cultural location, and therefore to be opaque (at least initially) to outsiders. In fact, I echo Zhuangzi in saying that location is the epistemological ground that allows art and philosophy to proceed without experts.

One promising way to address the challenges involved in understanding the art of another culture while between being situationally located in the world is to appeal to shared structures of embodiment and knowledge. Davies does this by emphasizing that humans across cultures share the same evolved perceptual, affective, and cognitive systems. These systems engage with and are embedded in shared, basic physical realities that define our sensorimotor capacities and expressions. We also share social, emotional, and even existential traits, as Davies notes. Here I would add that these traits support a universal ability for friendship, including across cultures. Why wouldn’t these traits and abilities influence our creative activities in common ways that allow us to

appreciate virtuosity and skill across cultural contexts? For example, “precision, speed, and expressiveness,” which he notes are commonly valued in music of different cultures, are all shaped strongly by our sensorimotor, spatiotemporal, and socio-emotional realities. Here, Davies recognizes the potential for formal studies of cross-cultural musical understanding to contribute to perennial questions about musical expression and perception.

Indeed, music is an excellent starting point for questioning what can be known in the borderlands of cultures and about humans as art makers. Music may be the art with the greatest reputation for cross-cultural understanding (whether this understanding is genuine or not is another matter) and it is also the art to which Davies has given the most considerable philosophical treatment in his other work. In what remains, I draw upon two insights from Davies’ work on music—understanding music in terms of timbre and in comparison to a face-to-face encounter—in order to suggest a model of cross-cultural understanding based on the idea of “musical friendship.”

In “Perceiving Melodies and Perceiving Musical Colors,” Davies argues that timbre is essential to the identity of a musical work and in need of an expanded definition. Not only do we hear particular voices and instruments in music, we also hear the way in which they are used, including the actions required to produce the sound and the responsive gestures elicited from listeners, as well as “qualities of expressive movement inherent to the music itself” (Davies 2010a: 34). As he explains, if the evolutionary purpose of our senses is to furnish information about things in the world, then our senses go beyond light and sound waves to represent their sources and “our phenomenological awareness is more often of these distant causes than of their local effects” (Davies 2010a: 35). Davies is critical of theories of musical formalism that tend to neglect the rich information and identity conditions furnished by timbre. This critique would have been endorsed by many early Chinese philosophers and musicians. Along with tonality and the dimensionality of single notes, the music of their time, especially *guqin* 古琴 music, was heavily centered on timbre or sound quality.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese delight in tonal nuance and the complexity of timbre abided with their interest in resonance, which in turn reflected their more general fascination with music as a means to explore the interactions of things across distances and as a tool for authentically knowing others.

Not surprisingly, there are parallels here between the failure of musical formalism to incorporate timbre’s importance and the failures of cross-cultural philosophizing that applies formalist metaphysics to early Chinese philosophy.

Like understanding timbre, understanding someone face-to-face evades formalization yet is arguably a more powerful way of knowing. In his work on music, Davies has described the phenomenal experience of listening to music as more akin to a face-to-face encounter with someone who “publicly and vividly displays his feelings than it is like hearing a dispassionate description of an emotional state” (Davies 1997: 95).<sup>3</sup> The expressiveness is immediate, direct, and immanent in the music. The comparison between music and a face-to-face encounter is also telling because timbre can be aptly compared to the “look” of a face beyond its objectifiable physical features. If Davies is right that timbre provides rich phenomenological awareness of distant sources, and if music is akin to a face-to-face encounter, then a good deal of optimism about understanding other cultures’ music is warranted, and perhaps this can be extended to other arts.

## 2 Musical Friendship

If the preceding reflections sound naïve about the hermeneutic issues facing cross-cultural understanding or about the critical importance of de-colonizing art and philosophy, allow me to acknowledge the seriousness of this concern as someone who continually struggles with these matters in her own work. At the most difficult impasses, I continually return to friendship as an

analogous model for understanding the art and philosophy of other cultures. Conflating the located, situated nature of knowing with the importance of sameness or similarity in mutual understanding is an easy mistake. But do we (or should we) expect people of our own cultures to be better friends than those of other cultures? Can we not know, befriend, and love people from cultures drastically different from our own? While details may differ, these relationships go on with dynamics of understanding and misunderstanding that have characterized human relationships, within and across cultures, for at least as long as we have made art out of these themes.

One of the crucial features of the opening story from the *Zhuangzi*, and one that might not be known to a reader unfamiliar with this work, is that Huizi and Zhuangzi have an inimitable friendship, despite, or maybe because of, their legendary philosophical differences. When Huizi dies, Zhuangzi laments that he has no longer has anyone he can really talk to. There is another



Circle of Kano Motonobu (狩野元信), *Bo Ya Plays the Qin as Zhong Ziqi Listens* (伯牙彈琴), c.1476–1559, hanging scroll, ink and light color on paper, 165.8 x 87.2 cm, Museum of Metropolitan Art, New York.  
<http://burkecollection.org/catalogue/130-bo-ya-plays-the-qin-as-zhong-ziqi-listens>

friendship in the history of China that also speaks to our ability to know others. During the Spring and Autumn period of early China (771-476 BCE), a remarkable friendship occurred between Bo Ya 伯牙, a *guqin* 古琴 player, and Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期, a woodcutter referred to as “one who knows the music” (知音者). When Bo Ya played his *guqin*, Zhong Ziqi understood perfectly his friend’s meaning. According to the *Qin Shi* 琴史 (History of the Qin) by Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1041-1100), “Bo Ya was good at playing the *qin*, and Zhong Ziqi was good at listening. When Bo Ya intended to convey high mountains, Zhong Ziqi said, “How lofty, like Mount Tai!” When Bo Ya intended to convey flowing streams, Zhong Ziqi said, “How vast, like a great river into the sea!” Whatever Bo Ya was thinking as he played, Zhong Ziqi saw clearly in his heart. Bo Ya said, “Amazing! When you listen, it is as if our hearts are resonating together.” When Ziqi died, Bo Ya split apart his *qin*, broke his strings and never played again. Thus, we have the songs *Gao Shan* (High Mountains) and *Liu Shui* (Flowing Water)” (Zhu Changwen 1977, Folio II, no. 12). The Chinese expression *zhi yin* (知音), “knowing the music,” originated with this story and came to mean a close friendship.

An easy objection to extrapolating from the examples of Huizi and Zhuangzi, and Bo Ya and Zhong Ziqi, is that these friends belong to the same culture, which provides the robust source of shared meanings necessary for mutual understanding. Of course sharing a culture can make understanding one another easier, but the examples of these friendships are compelling in part because they are so improbable. Is it likely that the irreverent and

paradoxical Zhuangzi would find profound mutual understanding with the straightforward and logical Huizi? Or that a woodcutter would be the one to truly friendships crossed obstacles to mutual understanding that may be greater than cultural differences. As the much-rehearsed meaning of the Chinese word *xin* 心 reminds us, the human heartmind does not strictly isolate knowledge from affectivity. The heartmind crosses and blends the boundaries of thinking and feeling, why not the borders of another culture's deepest expressions?

Friendship demonstrates how our universally shared structures of embodiment and knowledge operate in highly particular and located ways. As Zhuangzi put it, he knows from “right here.” Friendship is universal, yet I know my friend through caring for them according to their uniqueness, rather than as the ideal, neutral knower often lauded in epistemology and ethics.<sup>4</sup> I understand my friend much as I understand a face or a piece of music, not merely as a form to be analyzed, but according to their “timbre” and our mutual resonance. Paradoxically, the idiosyncrasies of this dynamic teach general features of friendship and of understanding. Davies (2018a) suggests art is a “window into people’s hearts and souls,” and if so, then the heartmind is place from which we understand their art. This model has much to offer us when considering the art of other cultures and art of any kind.

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<sup>1</sup> Davies presents the Indian Mahabharata and Ramayana as examples of classic artworks that “are a match for those in the West.” Western culture sounds like the default standard of comparison here, but this is likely because Davies is writing for a Western audience. Audience notwithstanding, when it comes to the Mahabharata and Ramayana, the order of precedence should be reversed. Davies attributes a “Shakespearean scope” to these epics, but the comparison does not convey their ancient origins (preceding Shakespeare by at least 1500 years) nor their philosophical power and complexity. Davies (2018a: 4).

<sup>2</sup> In *Science and Civilisation in China*, Joseph Needham (1956: 142) remarks that the Chinese attention to timbre contrasted so sharply with the European emphasis on melody and scale that the first Europeans to experience Chinese music were “baffled.” The great number of fingering techniques for producing nuances of tone on the *guqin*—more than any other known musical instrument—attests to the importance of timbre in Chinese music. These techniques are elaborated in notation with poetic symbolism and philosophical guidelines to convey the requisite internal disposition of the musician, external setting (usually in nature), and qualitative aspects of the sound played.

<sup>3</sup> Davies (1997: 95) compares understanding music to understanding a face in a number of places.

<sup>4</sup> See Vrinda Dalmiya’s *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology, and the Mahabharata* (2016) for an incisive and groundbreaking treatment of the relationship between caring and knowing in a care-based epistemology. The theory of knowing she develops here has much to offer cross-cultural philosophy.

## Can Westerners Understand the Arts of Other Cultures and What Might They Learn by Doing So? A Long-Distance Dialogue

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I read Professor Davies' paper with benefit and great interest. For the purposes of my response, I have decided to engage with the same topic from my limited point of view, namely my personal relations to Japanese language, arts, and culture. In this paper, I will ask whether westerners (assuming that Professor Davies and I are somehow "westerners," whatever the word westerners could mean) can understand the arts of other cultures, and what might they (we? I?) learn by doing so. Hereby, I will not pretend that my considerations are universal in any way. I simply hope that they can lead to further reflections on part of (critical) readers. I will try to highlight two main problematic issues (at least for me) of Davies' paper: What could "understanding art" mean? And what could happen, when someone understands a form of art that arises from a culture different from ones' own?

### 1 Can Westerners Understand the Arts of Other Cultures?

In approaching his topic, Professor Davies intentionally abstains from developing a definition of "art." Rather, he refers to his book *Definitions of Art* and to the more recent *Defining Art and Artworlds*. In order to develop my own argument, let me start with a definition of art proposed by the Italian scholar of aesthetics Dino Formaggio (1914-2008), who was a philosopher, art critic, and artist himself. Surely one of the leading figures of the Italian post- and anti-Crocean aesthetics in the first decades after World War II, Formaggio was a professor of aesthetics at the University of Pavia, Padua, and Milan. Arguably, his book entitled *Arte* (1973) begins with an apparently odd definition of "art," one which I find very intriguing. Formaggio writes in the first line of his book that art is everything human beings call art (1973: 9, *Arte è tutto ciò che gli uomini chiamano arte*). As curious as this definition may appear at first glance, Formaggio thinks that it is the only passable and verifiable definition of "art" he knows, a definition whose merit lies in its ability to avoid a metaphysical definition of art. This understanding is contrary to what "all poetics through the centuries instead did, by affirming that art is at times intuition or form or idea or prayer, sometimes this, sometimes that, but always accompanied by a really quixotic self-deception, I mean, that only a particular position (and not the others), pierced by the sharpened spear of its own conceptual system, is itself the universality of art, the entire art, and forever" (Formaggio 1973: 9, my translation).

I would like to start my reasoning here by assuming Formaggio's definition. I will use it not to sketch an institutional theory of art, but simply to pose to myself the following question: If, following Formaggio, art is everything human beings call (and called) art, surely such "human beings" call (and called) something "art" not only in different time periods and contexts, but—also obviously—in different languages. If so, one upshot is that the question of what art is takes on the features of an intercultural linguistic problem.

For example, while I am writing these lines about "art," the word I am using in my head is the Italian *arte*. Hereby, I am projecting my understanding of the Italian word on the English one. This projection is not completely unwarranted: the two words are very similar: both refer to the Latin "*ars*." When I use the word *arte* (or *art*), I recall what E. Benveniste writes about *ars* in his book *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes* (1969). The word *ars* is derived from the Indo-European root *-ar*, from which the Vedic *ṛta* descends, that means the "'order' which governs also the orderliness of the universe, the movement of the stars, the regularity of the seasons and the years; and further the relations of gods and men, and finally the relations of men to one other [...]."

Without this principle everything would revert to chaos” (Benveniste 1969: 379-80). According to linguists, “art”—or better, the Latin word *ars/artis*—is a compound of the root *-ar* with *-ti*, which is used to build action nouns. Art, then, seems to relate to the idea of an activity, which aims to create an “order as a harmonious arrangement of the parts of a whole” (Benveniste 1969: 379). In this sense, “art” belongs to the same group of words such as *ἀρμονία* and *Ritus*, “harmony” and “ritual,” two other crucial terms for western aesthetics (Benveniste 1969: 380). With them, it shares the idea of directing a chaotic state to an order, or in other words, to transform a *chaos* into a *cosmos* (or into a “*chaosmos*”, in the Guattari-Deleuzian sense of this concept)<sup>1</sup>. These considerations, in turn, lead me to recollect what Aby Warburg writes about the “anti-chaotic function” of art. In Warburg’s opinion, this function constitutes the original sense of the ritualistic gesture from which art originates.

But when I use the word *arte*, I am equally aware that it is impossible to find a similar term in the old Greek culture, despite the latter’s founding role in western Art History. As is well known, ancient Greeks did not have a single word for what we call “art.” They used at least two different words, *techné* and *choreia*.<sup>2</sup> Given their different relations to theoretical, religious, and cultural contexts, which are in stark contrast to our contemporary ones, we could do well to ask: can contemporary westerners understand old Greek “art,” which was not “art” according to the ancient Greeks themselves? Also, what might contemporary westerners learn by doing so? Moreover, what about cases like the German one in which “art” is *Kunst*, a word that comes from the verb *können*, similar in English to the auxiliary verb *can*, but originally meaning a “spiritual ability,” “knowledge,” “comprehension,” and only later an “ability,” “skill,” that can be achieved by training and practice?<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the German word for “art,” *Kunst*, seems to be somehow similar to the Japanese word *gei*, 芸. Today, this word means “accomplishment” and therefore “art.” But if, in order to try to understand more precisely the sense of such an “accomplishment,” one looks for the etymological sense of the Sino-Japanese ideogram 芸, or in an older form 藝, the “conventional western definition of art” seems to suffer from an intrusion of something which is not expected. As a result, such a “definition” would have to probably transgress the boundaries of words, compelling one to reconsider the search for “definition” itself. Let me explain: The etymon of 芸 is not to be found in a verbal root, i.e. in a sound, like for the Indo-European languages, but in a picture, namely in an image carved in animal bones, turtle shells or bronze artefacts. In the oldest Chinese inscriptions, the “definition” of “art” is a picture.



Shizuka Shirokawa 白川静, *Jitō 字統*, Heibonsha 平凡社, Tōkyō 2002 (6th ed.), p. 243.

It is actually the image of a human being holding “a young tree offered with both hands, and the form of planting a young tree in the earth” (Shirakawa, and Schmitz 2014: 114) using new topsoil. The etymon of *gei* is therefore “to plant,” so that the sense of “art” seems here to be the “ability” of planting and letting something grow up, somehow similar to the Latin word *cultura* or *cultus*. Notably, *gei* is not the act of planting seeds, but the act of “replanting or transplanting” an already formed young tree. It means relocating it to a new soil in order to let it flourish. Such an act is at the same time an offering to the gods or, in other words, an affirmation of life.

So, if art is “what human beings call art,” it means, at least for me, that the definition of “art” produces a scattering of meanings, a babel of untranslatable terms which curiously refer to



each other, while simultaneously excluding the possibility of an ordered unity called “art” (in English). Also, considered in an intercultural context, the “definition” of art itself could lead one to introduce new elements. As in the Chinese or Japanese case, one might have to introduce an element of “visibility” into the traditional linguistic/phonetic realm when we deploy the western idea of “defining” something. In other words, it seems to me that the intercultural encounter with non-western cultures (like Chinese or Japanese) does not simply add some new meanings to the traditional western concept of “art.” Rather, such an encounter indicates that the manner in which art is “defined” and “understood” should be changed, depending on the context.

But what about the sense of the act called “understanding art?”

As I tried to show, in understanding arts of other cultures, one must, first of all, it seems, struggle with a certain linguistic and theoretical complexity. This complexity needs to be analyzed or extricated from translations and research. Let us use the Japanese language here as an example: This kind of act of “understanding” is probably normally expressed by the very common word *rikai*, 理解, very common but—for me at least—not very easy to “understand.” *Rikai* means, if we consider the two ideograms separately, to *toku* (解, or *kai*), “to untie, undo, solve” (similar to “analyze” in the Greek sense of the word), the *ri* (理), the “true principle,” of something—assuming that it is possible to translate *ri* in such a way. The word *ri* is, in fact, one of the most characteristic and deep-rooted concepts of traditional Chinese thought. *Ri* refers originally to “the polishing up of jade revealing the veins at the surface of the jade” (Shirakawa, and Schmitz 2014: 444), so that the veins of jade are brought to light as the immanent feature of the mineral. It is impossible for me to elucidate better the sense of the word *ri* here. Allow me to suggest that the Japanese word *rikai* means “understand” in the sense of revealing and analyzing the immanent frame or feature of something. To understand the meanings of “art” in different cultures, in the sense of the Japanese word *rikai*, one should then endeavor to untangle the complexity of interrelations by dwelling upon the interrelations that constitute the scattered sense of “art.”

But the Japanese language also possesses other words to say “understand” that are perhaps even more suitable to describe the “understanding of art.” When I translated the first book of the Japanese philosopher Kitarō Nishida (1870-1945), *An Inquiry into the Good*, into Italian, I was very surprised to find other terms to say “understand,” that made my translation work very complicated. For example, Nishida uses the word *rikai* 理会, that sounds like the previous *rikai*, but is made not by *ri* and *toku*, but *ri* and *au* (会, or *kai*), that means “to meet.” So 理会 is “understanding” in the sense of “meeting the *ri*,” the theoretical frame or true principle of something. “To meet” means, in this sense, to enter in direct contact with the thing one wants to understand, and Nishida sometimes also uses the word *etoku* (会得) in this sense. Here, he means “to gain by meeting” (*e*, 会, and *toku*, 得, or *eru*, “to earn, gain, obtain”), or even—very surprisingly for me—*taitoku* (体得), “to gain by body” (*tai*, 体, or *karada*, “body”).

According to my personal experience in Japan and with Japanese traditional arts (the so called *geidō* 芸道, the Way(s) of *gei*, or *budō* 武道, the Way(s) of the ancient Japanese warriors’ class), I would suggest therefore that there could be another way of “understanding” the art of a different culture that does not only go through linguistic analysis or theoretical definitions. This understanding, rather, tries to “understand” art as in the sense of the Japanese word *taitoku*, i.e., by a direct experience and practice of it through engaging bodily in that art over a sustained time period. In the Japanese *geidō* or *budō*, *taitoku* would mean not simply to enjoy art by having an aesthetic experience of it, but rather to practice it bodily through *keiko* 稽古, (“training,” “exercise,” literally: to think [稽る, *kangaeru*] about ancient times [古, *inishie*]) under the direct guidance of a teacher. Under the teacher’s watchful eye, one should practice it daily with other people. In this case, it should be probably possible to say in Japanese that one does not simply have an “experience” (経験, *keiken*) of that art, but a *taiken* (体験), a “bodily experience” of it. This latter experience would possibly enable one to “gain” an understanding of the art in question “by bodily encountering.” In light of this, I would suggest that a “westerner” (as I probably am) should not



try to “understand” art of a different culture by simply trying to answer the traditional question: what is it? What is non-western art? Despite its pretension of universality, such a verbal definition promises in fact to be partial and incomplete at the very least because it excludes the “visibility” at the core of other linguistic systems. Rather, the “westerner” should try to understand non-western art “interculturally,” i.e. by combining the two kinds of *rikai*, the study and translation of the different cultures and languages, and by bodily practicing art together with others.

## 2 What Might Westerners Learn by Doing So?

Let us now turn to our second question: what would happen in this case? What would the “westerner” learn by doing so? What would take place is probably what G. Pasqualotto calls a “transformative praxis” “with three interdependent variables” (Pasqualotto 2011: 66)—in this case, the westerner him/herself, his/her own culture, and the other culture, all three equally involved in a transformation or translation (transplantation?), which reveals that every cultural identity always exists only in interrelation with others. In other words, as Pasqualotto writes, “every culture exists only as intercultural” (Pasqualotto 2011: 90), both in a synchronic and diachronic sense of its interrelations with others. Understood in this sense, art could be a privileged field to experience such a transformative praxis by placing ourselves into it, allowing us to be transformed by the bodily praxis of an intercultural encounter that lasts through the lifetime of the person involved in it. The peculiarity of understanding different cultures through art, seems to me to reside in the possibility art gives. More easily than other disciplines, art allows one to “understand” otherness directly through the body like in the Japanese sense of *taitoku*. This could, perhaps, be the reason why learning arts of different cultures or epochs is a fascinating exercise.

So, I agree with Professor Davies that westerners can “understand” art of different cultures. However, I have in this short reply tried to define the task of understanding in two different ways. Because humans speak and write differently, the understanding of art cannot but be “ambiguous” in the Latin sense of the verb *ambigere* (amb-agere, “to lead around”), that is, exposed to an endless circular movement around its object without the possibility of defining it definitively. Furthermore, because humans have bodies, they can “understand” art by letting themselves be bodily involved in the practice of an art, where its “definition” is not captured by words, but by some gestures or movements that express it as an occurrence. The combination of these two ways of understanding art inevitably produces a transformation of “identities,” which are, as living plants, constantly re- and transplanted by a gesture that could be described as “artistic,” at least in the sense of the Chinese pictorial definition of “art.”

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<sup>1</sup> “*Chaosmos*” is a word of James Joyce, Deleuze, and Guattari use to define the function of art. They write that “art is not chaos but a composition of chaos that yields the vision or sensation, so that it constitutes, as Joyce says, a chaosmos, a composed chaos” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 204).

<sup>2</sup> As W. Tatarkiewicz described them in his *History of Aesthetics* (1970).

<sup>3</sup> See the words *Kunst* and *können* in Duden (2007).

## Centering Indigenous Visual Culture Inside the Art Historical Canon

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In response to Davis's overall question of whether critics working in a western framework are able to decode artwork by artists working through another cultural lens, my thoughts move towards my location as an Indigenous scholar. I have specific insight into Indigenous critical writing, scholarship, and art production. Decoding artwork requires the geographical, historical, cultural, and societal knowledge necessary to understand the message portrayed in the work. As when one travels internationally, scholars working outside their specific knowledge base of critical analysis need to rely on the local knowledge carriers of the area and/or medium they find themselves in. In my own travels and international cultural exchange, I have learned a great deal about working cross-culturally, and about the geographic space or distance between nations and their ontologies and epistemologies. Building relationships with knowledge carriers, as well as reading related material through cross-cultural exchange with my Indigenous colleagues across the oceans, enables an analysis that would not otherwise be possible without this collaboration. The ability to share stories and intergenerational knowledge lies at the heart of this exchange, providing the opportunity to critically engage with this new material culture.

Throughout my career as a scholar, it is often assumed that because I trained in a western institution (a university), I should be well versed in these areas of western scholarship. To translate or critically engage with any work, a person needs to apply their research and analytical skills to working with new sites of investigation. The assumption that Indigenous scholars and curators need to be masters of their own fields as well as be extremely knowledgeable about western art theory—when this canon has been almost exclusively written by western art historians—creates a double standard for western critics who assume that they cannot decipher our creative practices. It can be done if scholars commit to spending the time necessary to develop the depth of knowledge needed to analyze the artwork in question. But the categories of non-western art or pre-history continue to create divisions, centring western art and placing all other art forms and histories on the periphery. This is extremely problematic for Indigenous people and people of color. Scholars and art critics need to commit to studying multiple art histories from across the globe, and create terms that destabilize Eurocentrism. Once scholars commit to learning this cultural knowledge and become aware of geographically specific aesthetics, then the question changes to one of the ethics of untrained critics writing about art and visual culture.

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## Definitions: Challenges and Dangers \*

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In this essay, I reverse the question the symposium asks and consider how a particular definition of art may be usefully employed cross-culturally to identify examples of Western and non-Western art in art forms which, in the West, may be loosely referred to as the fine arts. In particular, I want to explore the curious state of affairs in which a recent, seminal definition of art in the Western analytic tradition appears to exclude many non-Western art forms, and has even been used by one analytic philosopher to deny arthood to the garden, an important art form found universally in all settled cultures, ancient and modern. I argue that this state of affairs is not the result of a faulty definition; rather, it has come about because of what I consider a misunderstanding of the definition and an ungenerous assessment of the satisfying of its conditions for membership of the category of “art.”

The definition I have in mind was first published by the analytic philosopher and art critic George Dickie in the 1970s and is generally referred to as the Institutional Theory of art. (I discuss below whether Dickie’s “theory” might be more properly called a “definition.” According to Stephen Davies [2010b], the distinction is an important one and, in what follows, I will refer to Dickie’s theory as a definition.)

Dickie’s definition was developed in part to accommodate seemingly non-art objects and events that appeared increasingly during the twentieth century, exemplified by notorious works such as Cage’s “silent” composition, *4’33”*, Warhol’s arrangement of laundry powder cartons called *Brillo Boxes* (1964), and the urinal Duchamp exhibited as *Fountain*. However, the definition’s target category, “art,” was not intended to be limited to such objects and events. It aimed to include, as definitions do, all known forms and types of art.

Dickie presented his definition more than once. An early version of it stated that something becomes an artwork if “some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain institution (the artworld)” designate it “a candidate for appreciation” (Dickie 1971: 101). And a later version of it resulted in five interlocking sub-definitions of (1) an artist, (2) a work of art, (3) a public, (4) the artworld, and (5) an artworld system. I quote this version here in full because I believe a close reading of it supports the claims I make below regarding it and its inclusiveness of (almost) all art and artforms:

An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art.

A work of art is an artefact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public.

A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them.

The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems.

An artworld system is a framework for a presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public. (Dickie 1984: 80-2)

Attention has appropriately been drawn to the definition’s circularity—for example, “art” is what the “artworld” presents and what the “artworld” presents” is “art”—and the definition is therefore inadequate in terms of Davies’ requirements, outlined in the paragraph below, for a definition of art. (However, such is the importance and influence of the definition that I believe discussion of it is warranted.) More importantly for my purposes, attention has also been drawn to Dickie’s use of terms such as “artworld” and “artworld public.” Such terms may seem to favour contemporary

Berlin or New York over, say, Australia's Outback and, consequently, the definition may appear to exclude the traditional, ancient and continuing, sometimes impermanent "art" activities of some of the indigenous peoples of Australia's desert areas.<sup>1</sup> I argue below that those perceptions stem from an unreasonably narrow interpretation of Dickie's definition and, perhaps, a less than generous assessment of his intent.

The Symposium's title—how do cross-cultural studies impact upon the conventional definition of art?—invites a further question: what is a definition? In his Symposium essay, Davies makes two apparently conflicting claims. The apparent conflict hinges on what is meant by "definition." First, he (rightly) claims that art "of astonishing force and quality" is to be found in all cultures. Second, he points out that the earliest painters, singers, poets, and so on, could not have been artists producing art because the concepts of "artist" and "art" had not yet evolved. To help clarify this apparent conflict, it is useful to refer to Davies' own distinction between "definition" and "theory." In "Essential Distinctions for Art Theorists," Davies makes it clear that, in the field of aesthetics, a distinction should be observed between "definition" and "theory" (Davies 2010b). He writes that "[a] successful definition [of art] must specify a set of properties all and only artworks possess and in virtue of which they are artworks," whereas "a theory of art can be more general in discussing what is typical or normative for works of art," and "is bound to reflect on art's significance within human lives and affairs" (Davies 2010b: 32). This distinction is not just academic. I agree with Davies that it has implications for any arguments and claims, including the title of this Symposium, that may be mounted on the basis of one or other of the terms. Davies' statement in his essay that "[a]rt is a window into people's hearts and souls, so that we learn from non-Western art what we share in common and what makes each culture different and unique," clearly falls into the theory-not-definition of "art" category; whereas, his claim that the earliest "artists" should be disqualified from that title is based on a definition-not-theory of "art."

However, definitions do matter. For most of the period since about 1800, aesthetics in the Western world has been assumed to be concerned primarily with art, and one important part of that concern has been held to be the definition of "art." Although aesthetics is now much wider in scope, the definition of "art," that is, of primarily "Western art," has remained one of its preoccupations. Determining whether an artform or work satisfies a *de minimis* art definitional condition is, surely, for most people, of less moment than investigating and celebrating the unique and essential characteristics art actually possesses; nevertheless, philosophers do play a role in establishing what things are and it is therefore important that the definitions they develop are congruent with laypersons' usage, ordinary intuitions, and dictionary definitions. At the same time, a concentration on *de minimis* art definitional conditions can have outcomes that may make some logical sense but which appear to lack common sense and, possibly, were never intended by the definition's deviser.

A recent issue of *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, a journal which may reasonably be considered a bastion of Western philosophical aesthetics, contains an article by Kathleen Higgins entitled "Global Aesthetics—What Can We Do?" (Higgins 2017). Higgins ends her article with some advice for aestheticians, particularly those in the Western, analytic tradition. She proposes that we do some unusual things: use humour, be generous, think beyond philosophy, make "friends" with other art traditions, and (at least sometimes) "reject the goal of the achievement of firm conclusions" (Higgins 2017: 344-45). To some hard-core analytic aestheticians, following Higgins' exhortations may seem tantamount to being encouraged to go "soft in the head!" However, I will take that risk and, with Higgins' advice in mind, return to Dickie's definition of art and consider whether, taking a generous approach, and contrary to the conclusion of an important work on the philosophy of gardens, the definition can indeed be used to locate ancient and modern, Western and non-Western (art) gardens in the category of "art."

Mara Miller's seminal work, *The Garden as an Art*, is generously cross-cultural with respect to the gardens it presents and the sources it cites. In it, she writes: "Ironically, the garden has to be rejected as an artkind precisely on the theory designed to be the most generous and inclusive—George Dickie's 'institutional' definition of art" (Miller 1993: 70). And further: "If gardens are works of art, as it now seems they are, they are so in spite of the fact that they do not fit our definitions of art" (Miller 1993: 178).

Miller claims that Dickie's definition is inadequate because it cannot account for what she understands to be the downgrading of gardens from art to non-art status.<sup>2</sup> She then goes on to invoke the "inadequate" definition to claim that gardens are not now art because members of the contemporary artworld do not present them as candidates for appreciation. I now consider this second claim.

Dickie's Institutional Definition is a procedural definition of art. In other words, any object or event, be it *Messiah* or *4'33*, *Mona Lisa* or Duchamp's urinal, can be deemed to be "art" only if it is presented in accordance with certain procedures. Whatever aspects, functions, and qualities an object or event may have, or lack, are irrelevant to its belonging to the category of "art." Therefore, in what some might see as test cases, it is the procedures and agents of the artworld, not the object or event, that need to be scrutinized.

There are two important, over-arching questions to be asked about the nature of Dickie's artworld. First, does the artworld exist only as a single, ahistorical, catholic institution, or does it admit geographical, historical, societal, and other variants? And, second, does Dickie allow that the artworld may consist of multiple, or parallel, status-conferring institutions? Miller's answers to these two questions appear to be "no." If, however, the answers to these questions turns out to be "yes," then we have a definition that, in spite of its faults, neatly encompasses arts from all cultures and (almost) all times.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps we may even imagine an artworld into existence in ancient times, thereby enabling cave paintings of animals to be seen as art rather than as the equivalent of the shopping lists and menu ideas that we stick onto our fridge doors.

According to the Institutional Definition, an object or event has art status conferred on it by the procedures of the artworld institution. In this way, the institution of art is similar to other institutions, such as, for example, marriage. A woman and man achieve the status of being married, not because of any particular features they might possess, but because that status is conferred on them by members of an appropriately sanctioned institution, such as a church or a court of law. Membership of conferring institutions inevitably changes over time, the preferences and requirements of conferring institutions change, institutions may have culturally divergent views of what constitutes marriage, and society may force changes in the conferring institutions. For example, members of some "marriageworlds" confer the status of marriage on bigamists and others do not, and members of others used to but no longer do. Members of some "marriageworlds" confer the status of marriage on same-sex couples and others do not, some do on parent-arranged marriages and some do not. I argue that changes such as these in the membership, procedures, and preferences of the "marriageworld" have an equivalence in the membership, procedures, and preferences of any artworld.<sup>4</sup>

Miller's first claim is that gardens are not art because members of the artworld do not present them for appreciation. In making this claim, Miller is treating the artworld institution as an unchanging, ahistorical, catholic institution when in fact it may be allowed to be similar in its dynamism to many other institutions in society, which frequently revise or change their membership, procedures, and preferences. Instead of gardens not being art, it may simply be the case that membership of the artworld has changed in such a way that gardens, although they used to be art, are no longer of interest to current members of the artworld. Perhaps the new membership has different interests and priorities. Or, perhaps gardens themselves have changed, or not changed, in ways that make them no longer of interest to the current artworld. Or, perhaps (some) members of the artworld may be ignorant of contemporary garden-making for a range of

reasons, such as geography or lack of reproductions, or because they harbour, say, a social prejudice against them.

Whatever composition the artworld institution may have, does Dickie's artworld allow for multiple, or parallel, status-conferring institutions? Miller would argue no, thereby excluding gardens from the category of art, because the artworld as she understands it does not focus on gardens. However, I believe that she is mistaken in making this claim for, although contemporary gardens do not command the stellar art status of eighteenth-century gardens, it remains the case that throughout the twentieth century, and continuing up to today, there continues to be a thriving "artworld" whose members enthusiastically appreciate, discuss, influence, curate, write, research, and lecture about contemporary and historical gardens. This "artworld" has its own procedures, trends, preoccupations, conceptions, heroes, scandals, and so on.<sup>5</sup> I believe the only question to be debated is whether that garden artworld is part of *the* artworld, or whether it is an artworld on its own account. And, according to Dickie, such a question is irrelevant because "the artworld is the totality of all artworld systems" (Dickie 1984: 81). However, whether the question is deemed relevant or not, whichever way it is answered, it will still entail that appropriate contemporary and ancient, Western and non-Western, gardens may all be deemed "art."

The conclusions I have reached above with respect to gardens and the garden-artworlds may well apply, *mutatis mutandi*, to all artforms in all geographical, cultural, and most historical settings. And, with an imaginative projection which Higgins would surely encourage, they may even be applied retrospectively to the earliest "art," "artists" and "artworld." Although Dickie's procedural definition tells us nothing about why art matters, what experiencing it entails, and what pleasures we might derive from it, it will, if applied with an open mind and generous intent, remain a useful, cross-cultural, philosophical tool for classifying what is and isn't "art."

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<sup>1</sup> For some indigenous peoples, the label "art" entails a not necessarily desirable commodification of their objects and practices. In my text, "art" here refers to conceptualizing those objects and practices in the contexts of Western definitions and theories of art.

<sup>2</sup> I consider, and reject, this claim elsewhere. See Powell (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Dickie was clear that the artworld comprised "the totality of all artworld systems" (Dickie 1984: 81), not just what was going on in, say, New York and at the time he was writing. He also suggested early on that anyone who considered herself to be part of the artworld, or acted as if she were part of the artworld, *was* in fact part of the artworld. The very breadth of that interpretation raises its own, separate problems for the definition.

<sup>4</sup> Dickie himself describes the artworld as an "ongoing cultural enterprise" (Dickie 1984: 81).

<sup>5</sup> In my own Western cultural setting, gardens and gardening are enormously popular. Television programs directed at the home gardener and the armchair traveler abound. Garden-making competitions are commonplace. Professional bodies monitor standards, garden tourism thrives, and large numbers of gardening books, blogs, and magazines, and a small number of academic journals, are produced and consumed. A number of these media and activities are concerned directly or indirectly with the artfulness of gardens.

## Reflections On Whether a Person Can Understand the Art of Another Culture

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Typically, the dominant, colonizing culture acknowledges other cultures by appropriating what it wants from them and then relegating the remainder to the margins. So I can imagine the annoyance and frustration of a non-Westerner who has her culture West-splained<sup>1</sup> to her. And I understand that the offer of dialogue might be viewed with suspicion. But I think that a fruitful exchange about cross-cultural aesthetics is possible if we start with mutual respect and forbearance.

I am an Anglo-American analytic philosopher and write in the terms of my discipline, the style of which may seem abstract and detached. So let me explain where I'm coming from in trying to talk about the possibilities for cross-cultural aesthetics.

My first degrees were in musicology and ethnomusicology. (I got to philosophy via a deviant route!) As an ethnomusicologist, I've always had an interest in a broad spectrum of ethnic musics. (I prefer this term to "world music," which has taken on connotations of musical hybridization.) Many years ago, as a student in Australia, I played for a time in a central Javanese gamelan. Much later I became more focused on the very different culture, aesthetics, and arts of Bali. I have published scholarly articles on these topics, as well as on Balinese musicians' assessments of recorded performances and, in some detail, on the history and current status of the emblematic and unique legong dance genre.

In order to do this, I have watched hundreds of hours of live performances (for tourists, in temple ceremonies, at the annual arts festival, and commissioned). I studied the Indonesian language at university for three years. I interviewed leading Balinese musicians and dance teachers and read dozens of theses written by Balinese tertiary students of the arts. My collection of Balinese DVDs, VCDs, and CDs numbers in the hundreds....

Do I appreciate Balinese music and dance? Better than many cultural tourists. But of course I would claim only a limited comprehension. Naturally, my knowledge and appreciation of the arts of my home culture are greater, but they too are very restricted and partial. In any culture, there is so much to learn!

My point is this: I have a first-hand appreciation of the challenges and rewards of trying (imperfectly and within limits) to appreciate the art of another culture. Writing about this is not for me a purely theoretical exercise. I am aware of just how difficult it can be to become informed about the history, form, technicalities, and practical demands of an initially unfamiliar foreign art genre. And I also know how pleasurable it can be to make some progress toward the kind of appreciation that it rewards if one finds that art form to be captivating and intriguing.

I am grateful to the symposiasts for thinking about my ideas. I take their articles in order.

Professor Samer Akkach is not a sympathetic critic of my views. He suggests that my perspective "predetermines what 'art' is, regardless of context, purpose, experience, and definition" (Akkach 2018). That is not what I intended. I want to put aside abstruse debates about art's definition in order to discover and build on those aspects that are common to our understandings of the notion. I do so with the aim of tracking what is shared and what is not between conceptions of art held in different cultures and, on that basis, of exploring the extent to which a person can attain an appropriate appreciation of art from outside her home culture, assuming she wants to.

Professor Akkach continues: "Westo-centric views, such as the one promoted by Davies [...] undermine effective cross-cultural engagements in three ways: in democratizing difference, in perpetuating Eurocentric conventional understanding, and in reducing otherness to predictable variables" (Akkach 2018).

Regarding the first we get: "difference is no longer about irreducible uniqueness, but, rather

ironically, about being the same” (Akkach 2018). I do not see this either as a goal or as a consequence of my views. I write: “we learn from non-Western art both what we share in common and what makes each culture different and unique. [...] Not only does it showcase our deep commonalities, it also highlights cultural eccentricity and dissimilarity” (Davies 2018a). Where is the reduction to sameness implied in this?

The second: “Concerning perpetuating Eurocentric conventional understanding, the emphasis on commonalities and the flattening of the topographies of difference tend to promote an essentialist position which, in our case here, sees ‘art’ as having been—in essence—always and everywhere the same” (Akkach 2018). In my paper I write no such thing and nothing I say entails or implies this. I think some elements and kinds of art are shared across cultures, as are some appreciative practices, but I also believe there are significant dissimilarities between the artworks and art forms of different cultures.

“Reducing otherness to predictable variables”—that is the third way in which cross-cultural understanding is said to be undermined by my Westo-centric view—involves assuming that “he/she knows well what the other has in mind, speaks on their behalf, and puts words into their mouth, so to speak” (Akkach 2018). But that seems to be exactly what Professor Akkach is doing to me! It is not a view expressed or defended in my paper.

In brief, Professor Akkach claims to identify what is wrong with Western ways of thinking in general. As my paper is an example of such thought, it must be wrong in the ways that all such thought is. A critique on these *a priori* grounds shows no interest in the particularities of my argument, in what I actually wrote, or in the issue I was trying to address. Had his approach been more open-minded, Professor Akkach might have found in my paper support for his positive view, which advocates the fusion of horizons in a fashion that is non-appropriating and accepting of difference.

Formalism has been widely held within Anglo-American philosophy of music. It maintains that music is an abstract sound-structure that should be approached without regard to the business of bodying it forth from musical instruments or to the nuances of sound that are characteristic of different instruments. I have argued against this view. Additionally, in trying to capture the phenomenology of the listener’s experience of musical expressiveness, I have described this as more like a direct encounter with a person who is feeling an emotion and vividly displaying it than it is like reading about such a person. Expressiveness is present in the music itself, not something to which the music refers or that it symbolizes.

Professor Meilin Chinn kindly identifies these observations as aligning my account of music with one presented in Chinese thought. And she suggests that such characteristics of music—and perhaps also of equivalents in the other arts—suit it to bridging the differences between cultures, thereby fostering friendship and, with it, mutual understanding. “Friendship is universal, yet I know my friend through caring for them according to their uniqueness, rather than as the ideal, neutral knower often lauded in epistemology and ethics. I understand my friend much as I understand a face or a piece of music, not merely as a form to be analyzed, but according to their ‘timbre’ and our mutual resonance” (Chinn 2018).

This idea harmonizes very nicely with the thoughts that motivated my paper for this symposium. Though I did not take up this issue, we can ask about the social consequences that might follow from a person undertaking the arduous task of appreciating the art of another culture. I stressed the direct benefits to her, in the form of knowledge. But this is not a task she can undertake alone. Hers is bound to be a shared enterprise with unique, embodied persons. And it involves the kind of sharing that leads to friendship and mutual respect. Learning from culturally different others about their art and why they care for it should prevent the reduction and simplification of those others and should promote friendship with them.



An excellent account of this process is presented by my friend Kathy Higgins—who is quoted and praised in Professor Powell’s contribution to the symposium (Higgins 2012).

Professor Enrico Fongaro provides an elegant summary of his conclusions: “Because humans speak and write differently, the understanding of art cannot but be ‘ambiguous’ in the Latin sense of the verb *ambigere* (amb-agere, ‘to lead around’), that is, exposed to an endless circular movement around its object without the possibility of defining it definitively. Furthermore, because humans have bodies, they can ‘understand’ art by letting themselves be bodily involved in the practice of an art, where its ‘definition’ is not captured by words, but by some gestures or movements that express it as an occurrence” (Fongaro 2018).

I do not doubt the difficulties of translating from one language to another or of conveying all the nuances of meaning that might be present. On this basis, it might be suggested that we can never fully understand the other’s meaning. We might even claim this for conversations conducted within a shared language. I regard these proposals as exaggerated, however. We do succeed in communicating fairly well, even in translation, and words in a given language do have shared, public meanings recorded in dictionaries, which would be impossible if attempts at communication led us in endless circles due to some irremovable ambiguity in language. Besides, Professor Fongaro here is discussing the possibility of defining art, of saying what it is, and that is a topic I explicitly avoided addressing in my paper. I have had plenty to say about that subject elsewhere.

Professor Fongaro takes up the issue of understanding art. He puts the words in scare quotes, as if my use of them is strange or provocative. So I welcome the opportunity to re-emphasize what I had in mind. By *understanding art* I mean *appreciating particular artworks according to the appropriate standards and conventions, these being the ones that practiced art appreciators of the artwork’s cultural home would use*. A person would have a well-developed understanding of an artwork from a culture that is foreign to her if she could identify the artwork, indicate its appreciable features, and explain what their appreciation involves and leads to, all in a way that would allow her to discuss these matters with a member of the artwork’s culture who is skilled in the appreciation of that kind of art. This discussion could be in either’s language, but if it calls for the use of art-technical terms it would be easier in the language of the culture to which the work belongs.

Professor Fongaro draws attention to a mode of understanding that I did not discuss: that in which a person learns in practical terms (under the direction of a resident artist) how to make the art in question. I agree that this is a useful route to understanding, and often makes clear very quickly the skills required to succeed in the art form. Philosophers distinguish *knowing that*—propositional or discursive knowledge—from *knowing how*—practical or applied knowledge. Mostly I was discussing the former but it is certainly appropriate also to consider the latter.

In her concise piece Professor Julie Nagam does not engage directly with my paper. She says: “Decoding artwork requires the geographical, historical, cultural, and societal knowledge necessary to understand the message portrayed in the work” (Nagam 2018).

This is the view I defended under the heading of “ontological contextualism” (Davies 2018a). Before a person can appreciate an artwork for the work that it is she must first locate it, so to speak. Artworks take their contents and identities in part via relations in which they stand to the art tradition within which they are created: to its works, history, genres, conventions, institutions, and practices. Accordingly, locating the artwork presupposes background knowledge of such matters. Cultural outsiders do not have this knowledge, whereas those raised within the relevant culture most often do. So without learning about the culture in question, the cultural outsider is not placed to identify and appreciate its artworks. The questions then become about how the cultural outsider sets about this learning and whether she can acquire sufficient cultural knowledge to be placed eventually to appreciate the work. My suggestion is that, with help, these goals can often be met.

Professor Nagam also objects that indigenous art scholars, like her, are held to an unreasonable double standard in being expected to be expert about the art both of their home culture and of the Western artworld. She may be right about this. But as I indicated at the beginning of this response, I think that any individual's art-knowledge is likely to be partial and incomplete, even about the art of her home culture.

Professor John Powell defends the position—orthogonal to the topic in hand, as he acknowledges—that George Dickie's institutional definition can enfranchise gardens as art, given a sufficiently generous notion of what an artworld is. The artworld as described by Dickie is an informal institution within which items attain art status as a result of their treatment. The (membership of the) artworld in which gardens are successfully presented as art is distinct from the (membership of the) artworld in which works of fine art are successfully presented as art, according to Professor Powell. Nevertheless, the roles and practices in both are sufficiently similar that some of the members in each world have the authority to confer art-status on its products.

The query that must be posed asks how Professor Powell is sure that he has identified an *artworld* in which gardens are art, as opposed to a *gardenworld* in which they are not. In responding, I think he is right to look for parallels in structure, function, and appreciative practices between the two. It might also be necessary, however, to make a comparison with the worlds of craft beers and cupcakes, because these too can involve public judging and appreciation but would not normally be classed as artworks or art forms.

Extending Dickie's definition to the art of other cultures reveals a problem with it. His account makes art relative to an artworld (and he has in mind the Western one). If there are many autonomous artworlds—one at least for each culture that makes art—then his definition is incomplete unless it goes on to explain what makes these somewhat different, independently operating artworlds all *artworlds*.

As I observed in the paper that opens this symposium, in tribal societies art might not be as highly institutionalized as it is in the West. Is that also a problem for Dickie's definition? Quite possibly. In any case, the very first artworks surely were created prior to any art institutions, which would have emerged only later as the practice of art-making became more regularized, so those artworks are not art in the way that Dickie's definition specifies.

Having just mentioned the very first artworks, I'd like to correct a misunderstanding of my view. Professor Powell writes: “[Davies] points out that the earliest painters, singers, poets, and so on, could not have been artists producing art because the concepts of ‘artist’ and ‘art’ had not yet evolved” (Powell 2018). But that is not my position. I claim they could and did produce art without having the concept. I wrote: “In any case, one can make art without a term or even a concept for it. The people who made the first art certainly had specific goals in mind but could not have thought of what they made as art, not until the relevant public practice was locally established and eventually named” (Davies 2018a).

What I suggest is that the early cave painters—let us assume that they are the first art-makers—did succeed in making art, because the goals they had in mind, when suitably executed, resulted in the production of art. What they could not do until the concept was in place, along with suitable linguistic terms, was to formulate their intentions or achievements as art-making ones. Similarly, the chef who made the first pizza intended to combine various ingredients thus and so, and thereby to make what people later recognized as the first pizza. But if the noun did not preexist the dish, then the chef did not (and could not) do what she did under the concept of pizza-making. She could make the first pizza but she couldn't describe what she did in those terms until they became available later.

In summary: Professor Akkach attributes to me a Western-centric view of art that I do not hold. I am interested in mutual, respectful communication across cultural boundaries, not in imposing

a reductive, essentialist perspective on others. My position is akin to that of Professor Chinn, who writes of fostering cross-cultural friendships. As well, I agree with Professor Nagam that artworks should be approached with appropriate knowledge of their cultural home—that is, of the art tradition they presuppose—because that shapes the identity and content of those works. Unlike Professor Powell, I am not sure whether the institutions of Western fine art should be seen as encompassing gardens, and I have reservations about George Dickie’s theory of art, on which he relies. I allow that conceptions of art differ in important respects from culture to culture, but unlike Professor Fongaro I predict we can find sufficient in common to start a cross-cultural conversation in which we might learn from the other about her artworks and art forms.

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<sup>1</sup> This is my term. I mean by it the cultural equivalent of *mansplaining*, the condescending and patronizing tendency of men to explain to women what the women already know and are likely to know better than the men do.

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