

## ART AND AGENCY: TEN YEARS ON

**Date :** October 15, 2008

An interdisciplinary symposium  
15 November 2008  
University of Cambridge

Programme and online registration:

<http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/545>

1998 saw the posthumous publication of Alfred Gell's 'anthropological theory of art', *Art and Agency*. Witty, provocative, and theoretically ambitious, the book soon attained iconic status within anthropology, challenging and reshaping its conceptions of art, objecthood, personhood, agency and sociality. Since then, it has become increasingly influential in various other disciplines, including archaeology, art history, museology, literature, classics and musicology, providing scholars with a compelling analytical framework through which to explore a vast range of material. At the same time, it has fostered much controversy, garnering detractors as easily as it has devotees. The debates surrounding Gell's theory remain topical, lively and unresolved up to the present, making *Art and Agency* one of the most famous and stimulating anthropological works of recent years.

'Art and Agency: Ten Years On' will be a one-day interdisciplinary symposium which aims to encourage reflection, critique and innovation a decade after its publication. It will bring together a number of scholars from different disciplines-including many who knew and worked with Gell-to discuss the legacy and impact of his most famous work, while leaving plenty of room for audience participation and discussion. It aims to critically assess *Art and Agency's* methodological and theoretical influence in various disciplines, its key contributions and shortcomings, and its role in

contemporary thematic and theoretical debates. Its intention is not simply to reflect, however, but also to provoke: to see how much further Gell's theory can be taken ten years on. At a time when *Art and Agency* has become an almost axiomatic reference point in artefact-oriented fields of study, such ruminations promise to be both opportune and productive.

Speakers:

Georgina Born (Professor of Sociology, Anthropology and Music, Cambridge)

Warren Boutcher (Reader in Renaissance Studies, School of English and Drama, Queen Mary University of London)

Chris Gosden (Chair of European Archaeology, School of Archaeology, Oxford)

Eric Hirsch (Reader in Anthropology, Brunel University)

Stephen Hugh-Jones (Professor Emeritus, Department of Social Anthropology, Cambridge)

Susanne Kuechler (Professor of Anthropology, University College London)

Jeremy Tanner (Reader in Classical and Comparative Art, University College London)