By way of introduction

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“Our world has lately discovered another ... as large, well-peopled, and fruitful as this whereon we live,” writes Montaigne in chapter 6, book 3 of his Essays. The text in question, entitled “Of Coaches,” was written when Montaigne was fifty-four and it rapidly shifts from fairly bland reflections on travel to a clear exposé of Montaigne’s position on the massacres being committed in the recently discovered New World. In chapter 31 of the first volume, “Of Cannibals,” Montaigne had written that Brazilian peoples honored their prisoners by pushing their vengeance to its paroxysm: by killing, roasting, and collectively eating them, as well as sending “some chops to their absent friends.” The mayor of Bordeaux remarked that he could not see—nor consider that any sensible man might see—a greater barbarism in this than in the torture inflicted by Europeans on their living enemies. He also cited the final defiant song of an Amazonian man, before he was killed and eaten by an enemy tribe: “These muscles, this flesh and these veins, are your own; poor silly souls as you are ... notice what you eat, and you will find in it the taste of your own flesh,” testimony to the number of their fellow tribesmen that he had previously consumed.

These will doubtless seem strange considerations with which to introduce an academic text, perhaps inspired by the vague sense we had, when we celebrated the end of the labors that later led to this book, of participating in a cannibal feast. We cruised up the Seine in a bateau-mouche for one final dinner, where we drank and talked and did not neglect to cast the odd wild look at the riverbanks as we passed by. Our world had indeed discovered another, as art historians and anthropologists assured each other in several languages that they shared similar concerns, references, and publishers, which complemented each other like fat and lean, that they devoured one another’s books, frequently carving out a few choice pieces from them, making use of the other’s “fields” to light up pyrotechnic displays, and illustrating the raw and the cooked with artistic nudes. It seemed that as in some
“naked lunch,” and beneath the watchful eye of the nocturnal orb that dies only to be born again, our (inter)disciplinary cannibalism had been consumed.

3 So it was with Montaigne in mind that we came up with the title, *Cannibalismes disciplinaires*. Although perhaps a little provocative, it reflects the substantial, one might even say carnal, relationship that has long united art history and anthropology. Indeed, in his contribution to this collection, Roland Recht notes that “in 1953, the anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber asked an art historian, Meyer Schapiro, to write a chapter on style in his collected volume *Anthropology Today*.” We might add that the cover of Pierre Bonte and Michel Izard’s *Dictionnaire de l’ethnologie et de l’anthropologie* (1991) is adorned with a metal and celluloid mask produced by the artist Anton Pevsner in 1923. And if we must be held to account for the title’s “‘pro-vocation,’” then let it be read etymologically—as a call for the reader to speak back to us. Recall that in 1920 Oswald de Andrade published his *Cannibal Manifesto*, in which he reached beyond national boundaries to highlight the “stuffed” nature of each and every culture, mixed in the same way as South American culture has been by the input of Europeans, Amerindians, and Africans.

More recently, in 2002, the *Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel* in Switzerland turned the traditional perspective on its head in its strikingly named and curated exhibition, “The Cannibal Museum.”

4 The “spirit of geometry,” as Pascal would have it, insists that disciplinary classification amounts to the erecting of barriers beyond which one risks losing one’s soul. And readers who have no particular desire to wander like lost souls may well see little more in this collection of texts than the sum of their differences. Indeed, whereas anthropology has consistently argued for the existence of a double continuity, both within the sphere of artistic activity—allowing for geographical variation—and between this sphere and the rest of human social activity (i.e., “culture” in its wider sense), art history has since the eighteenth century endeavored to grasp the specificity of artistic creation against the changing backdrop of time, as well as vis-à-vis the internal rules of development of an increasingly autonomous (in terms of tradition, innovation, and “best practice”) “art world.”

5 These disciplinary practices are like habits that we adopt despite ourselves: the habit of gathering scattered data into an “ontology” (Philippe Descola), of comparative methodology, of examining the ways in which human specificity is rooted in “nature”—understood as the totality of living existence. For anthropologists, this means measuring “changes in the pace of temporality” (Jean-Claude Schmitt), apprehending the “malleable or plastic body” (Recht), and understanding both the variability of taste and the “metamorphosis” of artworks. For art historians, one might say once they have accounted for the turbulence provoked by the encounter of different practices and lines of reasoning, these habits constitute a return to a new state of equilibrium.

6 Historically, both disciplines began with the accumulation and analysis of museum collections, before divergences emerged in the ways in which they considered objects and especially artworks. In their efforts to avoid the ethnographic myopia induced by restricting oneself to a limited field of observation or the simple collection of artifacts, or by only attaching importance to the most obvious aspects of cultural practice, anthropologists stepped back from visible and material culture much earlier than art historians, for whom connoisseurship always acted an antidote to overly dematerialized
approaches to art. But at the same time anthropologists also stepped away from the works of art themselves. They became paladins of meaning, cut off from the realm of the senses and inclined to scorn the collection of objects. Instead, they sought out myths and language, turning away from overly visual artifacts, much as Freud mistrusted the spectacle of the body (Charcot) and emphasized the importance of listening to narratives. The recent anthropological return to artifacts as vectors of meaning and—better yet—as “agents” (Alfred Gell) has brought anthropologists closer to art historians. The latter, meanwhile, have moved from a positivist approach to objects to one that looks at the beliefs and representations that surround artworks both before and after their creation—i.e., at the points of commission and conception, and of reception. This shift towards a social history of artistic processes is much closer to the position of “culturalist” anthropologists.

7 The beating heart of art history interrogates and challenges anthropology. Systole: why do ancient works of art still touch us? How is it that works of art produced in—and deriving their meaning from—particular cultural contexts still resonate in other contexts? Is it not the case that one can only begin to grapple with the “symbolic form” at the heart of another culture’s worldview when one fully understands the equivalent form in one’s own culture? As early as 1927, Panofsky claimed that, “it is essential to ask of artistic periods and regions not only whether they have perspective, but also which perspective they have.” Diastole: how can what was a specific “mental fact”—a work of art born of a given culture—be brought back to life in another land, even if we grant the idea of a sensory-motor humus common to all humanity? How can it be transplanted onto a necessarily “hybrid” (Ruth Philips) network of translations that tie together knowledge of society and knowledge of the laws of development of artistic language? Might this network of translations not constitute a new sort of museum that, just as Sally Price argues it should, ventures even further down the path explored by a new generation of ethnographic museums, which includes the Musée du Quai Branly?

8 The following volume contains five chapters.

9 In highlighting, in chapter 1, the contributions of an art historian, David Freedberg (who wryly observed of his book, The Power of Images (1989), that “this is not an art history book”), and an anthropologist, Philippe Descola (who declares himself dissatisfied with the expression “anthropology of art”), we are not suggesting that the two disciplines no longer exist as such, but—the weak thesis—that all major intellectual adventures emerge from interdisciplinary cross-fertilization, or—the strong thesis—that the analysis of works of art and modes of representation requires the collaboration of art historians and anthropologists (Descola’s academic “neighbors”). Following in the footsteps of Michael Baxandall, Freedberg explores our response to images, presenting the slow evolution of the brain as a paradoxical temporal braking mechanism, responsible both for the invariability of our responses to works of art, which continue to stir us across the centuries, and for the constant interpolation of human practical consciousness by artifacts that are sometimes several thousand years old. Faithful to the comparative method, Descola opts for “an anthropology of representation [figuration] or of processes of ‘image making’ [mise en image]” and evokes four great civilization areas with differing representational systems or ontologies, before tackling the historical question of the shift from an analogical representation-vision to a naturalist representation-vision in Europe at the cusp of the Renaissance and the Age of Reason. He acknowledges the change, but remains as mystified as Heinrich Wölfflin when confronted with the mannerist and
baroque representation of the body and its replacement of the balance and grace of Renaissance art with a ponderous and animated representational style (in architecture and the visual arts).

Chapter 2, “Parcours de savants,” is an overlapping history of the two disciplines, which shows how they have borrowed from one another, examines key debates and stumbling blocks, and looks at those academics who have managed to straddle the disciplinary boundaries. Jaynie Anderson, currently president of the International Committee of Art History (CIHA), shows how scholars in the European art history tradition, such as Kenneth Clark, were responsible for creating the first collections of—and scholarship surrounding—Australian aboriginal art. Alain Schnapp and Pierre Lemonnier examine the “parallel lives” of André Leroi-Gourhan and Pierre Francastel, describing the former working away amid “a veritable Wunderkammer of objects or sketches, of files and a few select reference books, all meticulously annotated and sorted” and the latter, an armchair scholar but just as much an adept of scrupulous filing, forging his social approach to “representational thought.” Both men adopted the Maussian definition of the roles of technique and of sociability in artistic creation, although Leroi-Gourhan continued to adhere to an evolutionist paradigm rejected by Francastel. Martial Guédron, in his analysis of nineteenth-century anthropological pioneers and art historians, looks at the cross-contamination—if we can allow ourselves such a term—of anthropological and aesthetic criteria for establishing physical and artistic norms with the goal of defining the ideal and its degeneration into caricature. Looking at his principal field site, India, Raphaël Rousseleau shows how Verrier Elwin contrived to invent an ideal-type, that of Indian “tribal art.” Rousseleau demonstrates that his reasons for doing so were unsound and connected to an unscientific essentialism, but that he put it to good use in a context where a leveling of the population by the colonial power was replaced by a post-independence India in which Hindus constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. The tendency to “unhitch art from history” (Rémi Labrusse) has often produced analyses of creativity that ascribe a determining role to race, class, and, nowadays, even neuropsychic makeup. In the light of these ideas, Dominique Jarassé looks at the resurgence of Gobinism, which can even be observed in the recent wave of exhibitions and sometimes institutions that locate the artistic salvation of an uninspired and creatively impotent West in “l’art de la friche” (Amselle)—i.e., “art from the margins/wasteland/fallow land.” In this vision, the road to regeneration lies in the act of sprinkling an anemic “art world” with a few drops of invigorating alter-art(exotic art). Rémi Labrusse, meanwhile, lays bare the fascinating intellectual rivalry (and its wake) between Alois Rieggl, champion of a philological and historical vision of the emerging discipline of art history, and Josef Strzygowski, vocal advocate of a culturalist and antagonistic anthropology.

Chapter 3 interrogates both the universality of the aesthetic function and its subordination to historical change, as anthropologists and historians dance an intricate “pas de deux.” Roland Recht notes that anthropology begins when “we go beyond the narrow margins of texts and oral records. Even when people can no longer speak because of absence or death, or when there are no archives, there are still witnesses to interrogate: art and technologies.” It is precisely undocumented art—or, rather, art that is its own documentation—that is most useful for anthropologists and art historians. Thus for Recht, the historian of sculpture’s field, in the sense of an anthropological “field,” is the locus, a specific instantiation of space, the social space where a work of art is situated.
The way in which sculpture operates, by creating a form of visual unity with place or by inscribing its own organic unity upon the place, bears witness to a particular relationship with society and its representations, as for instance in medieval depictions of drapery. Jean-Claude Schmitt looks at the phenomenon of medieval conversion, touching on the key question of the historical relationship between the continuity of images and temporal change. He tackles questions of acculturation and hybridity, as well as the negotiation of symbolic violence, by showing how a sixth-century Arian building in Ravenna was converted, in much the same way as a person—it retained certain traces of the pre-conversio state, which thereby made the reconciliatio visible. Georges Didi-Huberman sums up the “anthropological tenor of images” in the phrase “no image without imagination,” inviting us to see Rorschach inksblots “as genuine butterflies-images”: “any relationship to the image operates a psychic experience of one’s own body and, by extension, of that of an Other.” Peter Krieger looks at the emergence of a new hybrid object of study located between art history and anthropology: “megacities” and the innumerable images to which they give rise. Michèle Coquet highlights similarities between the anthropologist “conducting fieldwork” and the art historian Wölflin’s attempts to understand Dürer from the inside by producing studies of models whom he asked to strike poses drawn from Dürer’s oeuvre, thus learning to reproduce with his hand that which he wished to grasp with his mind.

Chapter 4, “L’Occident et les autres” looks at the ways in which the two disciplines respectively construct their object of study, consistently using similar conceptual tools, insofar as they tackle the West’s vision of the Rest—the subject of the first four texts—and insofar as they elicit a critical inversion—as with the trickster object—or, on the contrary, emerge as worthy contenders for resuscitation, as in the application of Warburg’s iconology to Inuit art. Photographic atlases set out to map the world and its cultures by means of photography. In her exploration of “ethnic portraits,” Teresa Castro wonders what the consequences were of applying photographic rationality to people as well as images. Monia Abdallah studies the British Museum’s Islamic art collection, showing the ambiguities of characterizing the artistic production of a plurivocal and constantly evolving civilization only by reference to Islamic writings. Thomas Golsenne remarks that, while ornamentation has often been considered a hallmark of primitive art, it is in fact quite simply primordial. Modern denial of the “adornment instinct” has led to a repression of the ornament’s ability to “overflow,” much as in Georges Bataille’s theory of the “accursed share.” Sally Price, meanwhile, invokes the late Mary Douglas in her call for the museum of the twenty-first century to allow more room for “voices closer to objects’ culture of origin,” to tackle history head on, and to better reflect the reality of life in farflung societies. Jean-Philippe Uzel looks at the revival of Coyote, the trickster figure par excellence, among indigenous Canadian artists from the early 1980s onwards. He shows how they cunningly (the equivalent, if you will, of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Détienne’s métis) use art lovers’ and institutions’ projections to get their point of view across. Cécile Pelaudeix draws on Warburg’s “operating concept” of Nachleben in her reading of the tarniq, or irradiating structure, a recurrent motif in Inuit art, as an element of “survival.”

The last chapter, “Carrière d’objets,” analyzes the different means by which artifacts are translated from one “value regime” into another, principally their “aestheticization,” what André Malraux called their “metamorphosis.” With the “return of the object” in 1990s anthropology, historians’ and then anthropologists’ interest in what Appadurai
called the “social life” of works of art allowed us to go beyond questions surrounding the
origin of images or the intentionality conveyed by artifacts, and instead retrace shifts or
conversions in the gaze brought to bear on objects and, of course, conflicts of intention.
Anne-Solène Roland tracks the emergence of a new balance between study collections
and public displays of objects chosen on aesthetic grounds, by looking at German
ethnographic museums, particularly the one in Munich. For Sabine du Crest, cabinets of
curiosities present *naturalia* in such a way that aesthetics comes to trump science as these
montages of natural and exotic objects are transformed into reliquaries, wherein the
bizarre is used as a foundation on which to rebuild beauty. Laura Foulquier shows how
reused stones, those *tropae fidei*—part-detritus, part-souvenir—are ceaselessly swept up
in the “tidal movement of construction-destruction,” as Julien Gracq so elegantly put it. It
is equally surprising to accompany Maureen Murphy’s description of the tribulations of a
Fon sculpture as it shifts from warrior god to one of the Louvre’s most beautiful
sculptures, exhibited in the Pavillon des Sessions, much as Apollinaire might have wished.
John Stanton makes use of 600 drawings produced in 1945 by Aboriginal Australians from
the Northern Territory for the anthropologist Ronald Berndt and his wife, to argue that
long before the abstract pointillist acrylics of Papunya became popular, the authors of
these non-stylized and almost literal works of art had used them as a conduit for
presenting their worldview. Their artistic quality seems to have been integrated almost
by accident into images that served in some sense as official documents.

14 In the words of Ruth Philips, whose contribution brings the book to a close, art historians
and anthropologists no longer want a “mask stripped bare by its curators.” Just as a mask
cannot be understood without as complete as possible a) reengagement with the entirety
of its links and connections to the society that created it (its dances, its rites and myths,
its “environment”—which it is the museum’s task to “translate”), so a painting cannot be
reduced to “a set of colors assembled in a certain order”—the definition is Maurice
Denis’—and is only comprehensible when placed in the context of the militant demands
for autonomy that emanate from some currents in modern art. At the Armory Show in
1913, Theodore Roosevelt mocked Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* by comparing it
to a Navajo blanket, convinced that in so doing he was “de-arting” them both. But despite
what Roosevelt may have thought, a nude is never just a nude, but rather *this* or *that*
nude in *this* or *that* particular society, and in any case it was not even a mimetic
representation of a nude, just as a Navajo blanket or a mask are not just commodities.

15 The following texts are argument enough: art historians and anthropologists have well
and truly cast aside the myth of original nudity.

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