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‘Marvels of Everyday Vision’: The Anthropology of Aesthetics and the Cattle-Keeping Nilotes

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‘The current idea that we look lazily into the world only as far as our practical needs demand it while the artist removes this veil of habits scarcely does justice to the marvels of everyday vision.’

(E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*)

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Introduction

This essay is written out of a conviction that progress in the anthropological study of visual aesthetics has been hampered by an undue concentration on art and art objects. The cattle keeping Nilotes of the Southern Sudan make no art objects and have no traditions of visual art, yet it would be absurd to claim that they have no visual aesthetic. In such a case as this, the analyst is forced to attend to areas of life to which everyday concepts of art do not apply, to attend, indeed, to ‘the marvels of everyday vision’ (Gombrich, 1977: 275) which we all, not just the artists and art critics amongst us, experience and delight in. It is my contention that such wide-ranging analyses will produce more satisfactory accounts of the aesthetics of different societies—even of those with art traditions and art objects. With this in mind, then, I present the cattle-keeping Nilotes of the Southern Sudan as a sort of test-case for the anthropology of aesthetics.

The Anthropology of Aesthetics

While it is generally recognized that aesthetics concerns more than art and that art is about more than aesthetics, anthropologists, along with philosophers and aestheticians in general, have tended to work on the assumption, made nicely explicit in the ‘Aesthetics’ entry in the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Pepper, 1974: 150), that ‘it is the explanation that can be given for deeply prized works of art that stabilizes an aesthetic theory’. In their accounts of the aesthetics of other cultures, anthropologists have concentrated on materials that fit Western [245/246] notions of ‘works of art’, at times compounding the problem by making the focus of their studies those objects which are ‘deeply prized’ by

the Western anthropologist, rather than those most valued by the people themselves. Moreover, what has passed for the anthropology of aesthetics has often been little more than talk about such 'art'; for many years, anthropologists' or art critics' talk, more recently, indigenous talk as systematized by the anthropologist.

While one doubts that works of art are ever deeply prized for their aesthetic qualities alone, it is probably true that in Western societies, and in others with highly developed art traditions, aesthetic notions are most perfectly manifested in works of art, and are given their most refined expression in that type of discourse known as the philosophy of art. But the aesthetic notions so manifested and refined are those of members of the art world, not necessarily those of the general population. For most of us—or, perhaps more accurately, all of us most of the time—our aesthetic notions have more to do with home decorating, gardening, sport, advertising, and other areas of so-called 'popular' culture. The presence of art having become almost a defining feature of Western notions of the civilized, anthropologists have been loath to say of any other society that it has no art. There is, it is true, probably no society that has no art-form at all, but there are certainly societies with no visual art traditions. A Western preoccupation with the visual has led to both the undervaluation of the poetic, choreological, and other arts, and to the widening of the definition of visual art so as to embrace all those objects or activities which have 'artistic' or 'aesthetic' qualities. So, for example, body decoration has been reclassified as art in recent years. While I have no fundamental objection to 'art' being defined in such broad terms, I find it more satisfactory to talk rather of the aesthetic aspect of a society's activities and products.

All human activity has an aesthetic aspect. We are always, though at varying levels of awareness, concerned with the aesthetic qualities of our aural, haptic, kinetic, and visual sensations. If art were to be defined so broadly as to encompass any human activity or product with an aesthetic aspect, then none could be denied the status of art. This seems to me unwarranted; the possible insight seemingly captured by such an argument is adequately caught by saying that all human activity has an aesthetic aspect.

I am encouraged in arguing for such a view by a trend that seems to characterize some recent anthropological and philosophical literature, a trend towards recognizing that aesthetics may be usefully defined independently of art. The anthropologist Jacques Maquet, for example, has argued repeatedly (e.g. 1979: 45; 1986: 33) that art and aesthetics are best treated as independent. Among philosophers, Nick Zangwill (1986: 261) has argued that 'one could do aesthetics without mentioning works of art! Sometimes I think it would be safer to do so.' And T. J. Diffey (1986: 6) has remarked how it is [246/247] not just philosophers of art who require a notion of aesthetics; philosophers of religion require one too, and 'a notion of it as that which has no especial connection with art, but which, rather, is closer to perception'. Diffey regards 'aesthetic experience' as an as yet 'inadequately understood expression', as a term 'that extends thought, stretches the mind and leads us into new and uncharted territory' (ibid. 11). The task of philosophy, as he sees it, is to clarify and explicate what ordinary language has already 'inchoately discovered'. It is my view that rather than waiting for the clarifications and explications of philosophy, the anthropology of aesthetics should follow such ordinary language usage, disconnect itself from art, and get closer to perception.

I hope that what is meant by this admittedly vague contention will become clearer through the course of this essay. It might be thought too easy to have recourse to 'everyday usage', for probably any definition at all can be supported by judicious selection from the flux of everyday language. I am able, however, to adduce here non-specialist usages of 'aesthetic' and its cognates by three of the authors whose writings on the peoples of the Southern Sudan are drawn on in this essay. These authors do not discuss aesthetics as such, but make passing references which I find significant. Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 22) refers to 'those aesthetic qualities which please him [a Nuer] in an ox'. Elsewhere, Jean Buxton (1973: 7) tells us that 'marking and patterning are very highly estimated in the Mandari visual aesthetic', and John Burton (1981: 76) refers to a particular cattle-colour configuration as being 'the most aesthetically pleasing for the Atuot'. In none of these cases does the author explain what he or she means by the term. They can all be taken to be using the term in an everyday sense which they expect their readers to understand. I take them to mean by an 'aesthetic' something like 'the set of valued formal qualities of objects' or 'valued formal qualities of perception'.

The anthropology of aesthetics as I see it, then, consists in the comparative study of valued perceptual experience in different societies. While our common human physiology no doubt results in our having universal, generalized responses to certain stimuli, perception is an active and cognitive process in which cultural factors play a dominant role. Perceptions are cultural phenomena. Forge touched on this some twenty years ago when he wrote (1970: 282) concerning the visual art of the Abelam of New Guinea:

What do the Abelam see? Quite obviously there can be no absolute answer to this question: it is impossible literally to see through the eyes of another man, let alone perceive with his brain. Yet if we are to consider the place of art in any society...we must beware of assuming that they see what we see and vice versa.

I should argue that, more than just being wary of making assumptions, we must in fact make the attempt to understand how they see. The study of a [247/248] society's visual aesthetic, for example, should be devoted to the identification of the particular qualities of form—shape, colour, sheen, pattern, proportion, and so on—recognized within that society, as evidenced in language, poetry, dance, body decoration, material culture, sculpture, painting, etc. A society's visual aesthetic is, in its widest sense, the way in which people in that society see. Adapting from Michael Baxandall's studies of Western art traditions (1972: 29 ff.; 1980: 143 ff.) the phrase 'the period eye', anthropologists might usefully employ the notion of 'the cultural eye'. It is a society's way of seeing, its repertoire of visual skills, which I take to be its visual aesthetic, and it is with this that I believe the anthropological study of visual aesthetics should be concerned. Such an anthropology of aesthetics will be a necessary complement to any anthropology of art, for it surely must be essential to any anthropological consideration of art, however conceived, that an attempt is made to see the art as its original makers and viewers see it.

The study of aesthetics as it is taken here is to be distinguished from both art criticism and the philosophy of art. These disciplines are concerned with aesthetics, but not exclusively so. The evaluations of art criticism involve considerations of form, but

also of content and meaning. The philosophy of art tends towards analysing the relations between art and such matters as the True and the Good, matters which are beyond the formal qualities of works of art. It is perhaps worth emphasizing that practices similar to those of Western art criticism and philosophy are to be found in other cultures. These practices are worthy of study in their own right. According to the terminology adopted in this essay, however, they are not the aesthetics of a society, but its art criticism or its philosophy.

The Cattle-Keeping Nilotes

The cattle-keeping Nilotes need little introduction here. This essay focuses on the Nuer, Dinka, Atuot, and Mandari of the Southern Sudan, concerning each of whom there is a substantial and easily accessible literature, while making passing reference to the closely related Anuak of the Southern Sudan and the more distantly related Pokot and Maasai of East Africa. The Nuer and Dinka in particular are well known to all students of anthropology. [Note 1] What does perhaps require some explanation is their being taken together as 'the cattle-keeping Nilotes'. The million or so people who are referred to by the names 'Nuer', 'Dinka', 'Atuot', and 'Mandari' do not compose a homogeneous society—but then, neither do any of the four 'peoples' themselves. There are, for example, variations in the ecological situation, economic life, degree of political centralization, and particularities of religious belief and practice both within and between these peoples.

However, they also share many social and cultural features, not least of [248/249] which is the importance of cattle in their lives. [Note 2] Cattle are not just a food source, but a central factor in all aspects of their social and cultural activities, being used to mediate social relationships through the institutions of bridewealth and bloodwealth, as well as to mediate man's relationship with God through their role as sacrificial victims. Moreover, the Nuer, Dinka, Atuot, and Mandari share a common history, [Note 3] live in geographical proximity, and have extensive interrelations across the 'borders' that might be supposed to exist between them.

The picture of Nilotic visual aesthetics painted here is an analyst's abstraction. It is founded on the current state of anthropological knowledge concerning the group of peoples which provide the ethnographic focus, peoples who are related linguistically, historically, geographically, and culturally. Further research may reveal significant differences between and amongst the aesthetics of these four peoples. It might, however, also reveal significant similarities between these four peoples and other Nilotic-speaking peoples. The analysis presented here is ahistorical. This is for the sake of convenience only. A full understanding of an aesthetic system must include the historical dimension. I hope to be able to deal with aesthetic change among the Nilotes elsewhere.

Nilotic Aesthetics

Little attention has been paid by scholars to aesthetics amongst the Nilotic-speaking peoples of Southern Sudan and East Africa. [Note 4] In his thesis on Western Nilotic

material culture, Alan Blackman (1956: 262-73) devotes a chapter to 'Aesthetics', but only to discuss representational art—or, more accurately, the lack of it. Ocholla-Ayayo's discussion (1980: 10–12) of 'Aesthetics of Material Culture Elements', in his account of Western Nilotic Luo culture, is a purely theoretical account of the abstract notion of beauty and its relation to value, appearance, use, and society, drawing on thinkers such as Santayana, without entering into a discussion of the particularities of Luo aesthetics as such. Harold Schneider's short but often quoted article on 'The Interpretation of Pokot Visual Art' (1956) is the best-known contribution to the study of Nilotic aesthetics, and is worth commenting on at some length.

Schneider defines his terms rather differently from how they are defined here. He defines 'art' as 'man-made beauty', but recognizes that what the Pokot themselves find beautiful should not be assumed by the analyst but has to be discovered. To do this, he analyses the meaning and use of the Pokot term *pachigh*, which his interpreter variously translated as 'beautiful', 'pretty', 'pleasant to look at', and 'unusual'. *Pachigh* is distinguished from *karam*, which means 'good', and which Schneider glosses as 'utilitarian'. The Pokot apply the term *pachigh* to non-utilitarian, aesthetically pleasing objects [249/250] of the natural world or of non-Pokot manufacture, as well as to the non-utilitarian embellishments of Pokot utilitarian objects. Cattle, for example, are utilitarian (*karam*), but the colours of the hides are *pachigh* (ibid. 104). People are also *karam*, though a woman 'may have aspects of beauty such as firm round breasts, a light, chocolate-coloured skin, and white even teeth' (ibid. 104); and a fully decorated man may be referred to as beautiful but 'it is clear that they mean only the aesthetic embellishments' (ibid. 105).

Through his analysis of the term *pachigh*, Schneider is able to identify what it is that the Pokot find aesthetically pleasing, but he tells us little about why these particular objects and embellishments are considered *pachigh*. In recognizing that what is of interest is not a category of objects—art—but a category of thought—aesthetics—Schneider makes an important contribution—being 'forced' to, perhaps, by the very lack of Pokot art—but he tells us little about what characterizes this category of thought, merely listing those objects to which it is applied. While he refers in passing to contrast, which is discussed below—and to novelty, which I hope to discuss elsewhere—the discussion of aesthetic qualities, the very stuff of aesthetics, is not developed. It is on the aesthetic qualities which Nilotes appreciate, rather than on the category of objects in which these qualities are observed, that this essay concentrates.

For Nilotic-speaking cattle-keepers, cattle are the most highly valued possessions. This analysis of Nilotic aesthetics is, therefore, centred on cattle. The importance of cattle for the Nilotes is well known, and I do not propose to summarize the literature here. I wish to concentrate on the perceptual qualities of cattle as they are apprehended by their owners. These concern the colour configuration and sheen of the hide, the shape of the horns, and the bigness and fatness of the body including particularly the hump (see Fig. 10.1). These are discussed first, and then their ramifications into other areas of Nilotic life are traced.

Of primary importance for this discussion are the cattle-colour terminologies which are so characteristic of the cattle-keeping peoples of East Africa. [Note5] Nilotic languages in general have many terms to describe the colour configurations of cattle. Even people who no longer keep cattle or depend upon them materially may maintain

cattle-colour terminologies. The Anuak, for example, who, according to Evans-Pritchard (1940b: 20), can only have been a pastoral people 'a very long time ago', still based their metaphorical praise-names upon cattle colour configurations when Lienhardt studied them in the 1950s (Lienhardt 1961: 13n.). Cattle colour terms rarely refer to pure colours or shades of colours, but rather to configurations of colours or, in a loose sense of the term, patterns.

For the Western Dinka, Nebel (1948: 51) recorded twenty-seven terms, while for the Ngok Dinka, Evans-Pritchard (1934) recorded thirty. For the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 41–4) showed that there are 'several hundred colour permutations' based on ten principal colour terms multiplied by at least [250/251] twenty-seven combination terms. In his 1934 article on Ngok Dinka terms, he promised that he would publish a full account of Nuer terms, a promise repeated in *The Nuer* (1940a: 44). The fact that the promised lengthy analysis, of what he noted in 1940 was a 'neglected' subject (ibid. 41n.), has never appeared suggests how difficult such an analysis would be. Indeed, the application of the abstract terminology to real animals is not always straightforward for Nilotes themselves. According to Deng (1973: 96), 'the colour-patterns are so intricate among the Dinka that frequent litigation centres on their determination'. And Ryle has described (1982: 92)—in interesting terms, given the subject of this essay—how

When discussing the colour pattern of an animal—as they do for hours—the Dinka sound more like art critics than stockbreeders. For instance, when does *mathiang*—dark brown—become *malual*—reddish brown? If the animal has brown patches, are they large enough to make it *mading* or are they the smaller mottling that identifies *malek*?

Such discussions are a matter of both appreciation and classification, perhaps more akin to the discussions of antique-dealers or wine connoisseurs than to those of art critics.

It is not necessary to analyse these terminologies at length here. It is sufficient to identify briefly the principles underlying the perceived [251/252] configurations. For Mandari, the colours red, white, and black have much symbolic importance (Buxton, 1973). With cattle, however, they are not so interested in pure colours; what is important is that an ox should be piebald or variegated. When a piebald is born, its owner is delighted and the beast is set aside as a display ox (ibid. 6). Similarly, Ryle has described (1982: 93–6) the 'hopeful expectation' that attends the birth of a new calf amongst the Agar Dinka. He relates how in one instance Mayen, the cow's owner, 'was ecstatic, beaming with pleasure and singing snatches of song, because the calf was a much desired *marial*'. It is the destiny of such well-marked male calves to become 'song', or 'display' oxen, being castrated when they are eight or nine months old. Animals with the most highly valued configurations are thus excluded from breeding. Ryle was told that one cannot anyway predict the occurrence of such colour patterns, 'and therefore there is no point in trying to breed from them' (ibid. 93; cf. Howell *et al.*, 1988: 282). For the Western Dinka Lienhardt (1961: 15) records how, when a male calf of a highly valued configuration is born, 'it is said that...the friends of its owner may tear off his beads and scatter them, for his happiness is such that he must show indifference to these more trivial forms of display'. If the dam that has produced the well-marked calf is a good milch cow, Dinka may find it hard to choose whether to keep the calf for stud purposes, knowing that

is likely to produce further good milch cows, or castrate it for display. They may hope that the dam will produce another, not so well-marked, male calf later, and castrate the one it has already produced. Mandari also choose their stud bulls from the progeny of good milch cows. All other things being equal, they will choose well-coloured ones; but, significantly, not the piebald or variegated but the plain black or red calves, trusting that these will produce offspring which are well-marked (Buxton, 1973: 6).

In fact, most cattle are not well-marked. Buxton noted that the majority of Mandari cattle are a nondescript white (*ibid.*), and my own experience would support this. Amongst the Agar Dinka to the west, the situation is much the same; greyish, off-white cattle are preponderant, as aerial photographs have demonstrated. [Note6] That they are relatively rare helps to explain why well-marked beasts are valued to such an extent that the Agar Dinka, for example, 'will trade two or three oxen of unexceptional colourings for one particularly desirable beast, if the owner is willing to part with it' (Ryle, 1982: 92). It follows that it is the cattle of less aesthetic interest, as well as those beyond breeding, which are marketed by those Nilotes, such as some Atuot, who have entered the incipient Southern Sudanese cattle trade (Burton, 1978: 401).

The sheen of the hides is also appreciated and valued. Though sheen is not a factor in cattle-colour terminologies, its appreciation can be amply illustrated by the amount of time and effort expended in the grooming of cattle, and by frequent reference to it in poetry and song. An Atuot song, for example, includes the words: 'the back of my ox is as white as the grazing [252/253] in the new grass'—the image, as Burton explains (1982: 274), being 'of morning dew glittering in the sunlight'. A song by Stephen Ciec Lam, a Nuer, refers to 'my sister's big ox / whose glossy hide shines against the compound' (Svoboda, 1985: 32). Another by Daniel Cuor Lul Wur, also a Nuer, refers to an ox whose hide 'is like the sun itself: he is the ox of moonlight' (*ibid.* 19). And yet another by Rec Puk relates how 'Jiok's hide is as bright as moonlight, / bright as the sun's tongue. / My Jiok shines like gold, / like a man's ivory bracelet' (*ibid.* 11). In this last example, specific comparison is made between the white-on-black cattle hide and the whiteness of the ivory bracelet shining against the black Nuer skin.

The training of ox-horns is practised by cattle-keeping peoples all over the world. Nilotes cut the horns of young display oxen so that they grow into shapes which their owners find particularly pleasing. They are cut with a spear at an oblique angle, and the horns grow back against the cut. [Note7] To describe such horn shapes the Nuer have six common terms, as well as 'several fancy names' (Evans-Pritchard, 1940a: 45). In combination with the cattle colour configuration terms, these considerably increase the number of possible permutations to specify individual beasts—logically, to well over a thousand. As can be seen in Fig. 10.2, the horns may also be adorned with buffalo-tail hair tassels to accentuate the effect. When Burton (1982: 279) was carrying [253/254] out his field-work among the Atuot, such tassels were exchanged at the rate of one tassel for six cow-calves. Cutting also thickens the horns, and large and heavy horns are especially characteristic of display oxen among the Mandari (Buxton, 1973: 7).

Appreciation of horns is expressed in song. A Dinka song, for example, tells of an 'ox with diverging horns, / The horns are reaching the ground; / The horns are overflowing like a boiling pot' (Deng, 1972: 84). The range of imagery is vast: Cummins (1904: 162) quotes a Dinka song in which an ox's horns are said to be 'like the masts of ships'—presumably referring to the masts of sailing ships which once plied the Nile and its

tributaries. Horns are also sometimes decorated with ash, when oxen are exchanged in bridewealth, for example, the effect being to make them stand out more against the dull background of sky and landscape.[Note8]

In his discussion of the Nuer attitude to their cattle, Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 22) referred to 'those aesthetic qualities which please him [a Nuer] in an ox, especially fatness, colour and shape of horns'. And, according to him (ibid. 27), it is fatness which is most important, for 'colour and shape of horns are significant, but the essential qualities are bigness and fatness, it being considered especially important that the haunch bones should not be apparent'. He goes on (ibid.): 'Nuer admire a large hump which wobbles when the animal walks, and to exaggerate this character they often manipulate the hump shortly after birth.' This admiration of humps is shared by the Dinka and Atuot. A Dinka song (Deng, 1972: 81) has the lines: 'My ox is showing his narrow-waisted hump./ The hump is twisting like a goitered neck,/ Staggering like a man who has gorged himself with liquor;/ When he walks, the hump goes on twisting/ Like a man traveling on a camel.' Another Dinka song, quoted by Cummins (1904: 162), refers to an ox whose hump is 'so high that it towers above the high grass'.

The qualities of bigness and fatness are also referred to in songs. An Atuot song recorded by Burton (1982: 272) refers to an ox which is the subject of the song as 'the mahogany tree', thereby likening the size of the ox to the tree. Another Atuot song (Burton, 1981: 107) tells of an ox which is said to be 'so large like an elephant'. A Dinka song recorded by Cummins (1904: 162) tells of an ox which is 'so big that men can sit and rest in his shadow'. It should be stressed that bigness and fatness are not appreciated because they will lead to a better price at market, or to a larger meal on the death or sacrifice of the animal: cattle are primarily a feast for the eyes, and only secondarily a feast for the stomach.

Before going on to trace some of the ramifications of these elements of Nilotic 'bovine' aesthetics into the Nilotes' appreciation of, and action in, the world, it is worth making the attempt to understand why the particular perceptual qualities identified are so appreciated.

The appreciation of a large hump and of bigness and fatness are [254/255] presumably at least partly explicable as indicators of healthy and well-fed beasts. And the same can presumably be said for the appreciation of sheen—it indicates a sleek and healthy hide; though it should be noted that sheen is perceptually exciting in and of itself, so its appreciation can be understood as a particular manifestation of the universal appreciation of brightness.

The appeal of horn shapes is not difficult to understand in the field. One quickly learns to appreciate the variety of trained and untrained shapes in a forest of horns in the cattle camp. Both the symmetrical and the asymmetrical curving shapes of Nilotic cattle horns have great visual appeal, especially when they are seen moving through space as the cattle move their heads, and when the arcs the horns make in the air are exaggerated by the swinging movements of the tassels. Fagg (e.g. 1973) has drawn attention to the frequent use of exponential curves in African art: the Nilotic appreciation of the curving shapes of cattle horns can be seen as yet another instance of this theme in African aesthetics.

As with horns, the appeal of particular cattle-colour configurations cannot be explained by reference to the healthiness or well-being of well-marked beasts. The

majority of such beasts, though, are likely to have larger body proportions than other beasts, as the majority of well marked beasts are castrated, and neutering encourages body growth. They also spend no energy in sexual activity and much less than uncastrated cattle in fighting; so their body growth is further encouraged and they remain physically unblemished. In general, more care is lavished on them by their owners, and one can expect this to have a beneficial effect on their health and well-being. Well-marked beasts are thus also likely to be big and fat, and vice versa. It would, however, be a strange argument which explained the appeal of well-marked beasts by the fact that they are healthier, when their being healthier depends upon their being well-marked.

As aestheticians stabilize their theories by explaining why highly prized works of art are so valued, the explanation for the Nilotes' appreciation of well-marked cattle might be sought in what they value most highly. For the peoples who are the focus of this essay, it is bold pied markings. For the Western Dinka at least, it is in particular the black-and-white configurations *majok* and *marial* (Lienhardt, 1961: 15). The former is most simply described as a black animal with a white chest, the latter as a black animal with a white flash on its flank. Black-and-white configurations provide strong contrasts. Buxton offered an explanation of the appeal of such contrasts, noting (1973: 7) that 'marking and patterning are very highly estimated in the Mandari visual aesthetic; and the strong contrast markings of black on white, red on white, or a combination of all three, stand out so strikingly in a landscape devoid of strong colour that the importance given to it can be readily understood'. Such an explanation can only be partial at best, but when one remembers that the vast majority of cattle are a nondescript white, the appeal [255/256] of strongly contrasting black-and-white or red-and-white markings can be appreciated more readily.

The visual stimulation offered by both black and red markings amongst a herd of greyish cattle is not to be doubted. It might be expected, then, that it should be the pure black or red beasts which are most highly valued. This is not the case, for while the appreciation of well marked beasts should be understood in the context of a dull and pale landscape and herds preponderantly off-white in colour, it is the contrast of black and white or red and white in the single beast which provides the greatest aesthetic satisfaction. The individual beast, then, provides the locus for stimulating visual experience.

Aesthetics in the Wider World

Having introduced some elements of Nilotic aesthetics, it is possible to trace their ramifications in the Nilotes' appreciation of, and action in, the world in which they live.

The cattle-colour terms are associated with a wide range of phenomena apart from cattle. At its most simple, this involves the recognition of connections between, for example, the ox *makuac*—that is, an ox of the *kuac* configuration—and the leopard, *kuac*. In their poetic imagery, however, the Nilotes go beyond these relatively straightforward linguistic connections to more complex associations. Evans-Pritchard recorded (1940a: 45) some 'fanciful elaborations of nomenclature' among the Nuer where, for example, 'a black ox may be called *rual mim*, charcoal-burning or *won car*, dark clouds'. And amongst the Western Dinka, according to Lienhardt (1961: 13), a man with a black

display ox may be known only as *macar* ‘black ox’, but also as, for example, ‘*tim atiep*, “the shade of a tree”; or *kor acom*, “seeks for snails”, after the black ibis which seeks for snails’.

It is not just that Nilotes make metaphorical connections between cattle-colour configurations and other phenomena; it is not just poetic play. In a real sense they see the world through a sort of grid or matrix of cattle-colours:

The Dinkas’ very perception of colour, light, and shade in the world around them is...inextricably connected with their recognition of colour-configurations in their cattle. If their cattle-colour vocabulary were taken away, they would have scarcely any way of describing visual experience in terms of colour, light, and darkness. (Lienhardt, 1961: 12–13)

This is not, of course, to say that they could not perceive the black ibis or the shade of a tree if it were not for the existence of black oxen, but it is to say that their visual experience and appreciation of the ibis and the shade is inseparable from their appreciation of the *macar* colour configuration in cattle. [256/257]

Those cattle-colour terms, such as *makuac*, which are clearly related linguistically to natural phenomena, are no doubt derived from the term for the phenomenon and not vice versa. Presumably the Dinka called the leopard *kuac* before they called the spotted ox *makuac*. However, the *kuac* configuration in cattle is not called after the leopard because of some significance of the leopard as such, but because it is like the pattern to be found on *kuac*. Children will learn the names of cattle-markings, and then apply them to natural and cultural phenomena, before they ever see the source of the name in markings. A Dinka child will know what *kuac* means as a marking pattern, and will be applying it to cattle and to spotted cloth, for example, well before he or she ever—if ever—sees a leopard. The visual experience of young Dinka is focused on cattle and their markings, and the cattle-colour terminology is learned through listening to daily discussions about cattle. As Lienhardt (ibid. 12) writes, ‘a Dinka may thus recognize the configuration in nature by reference to what he first knows of it in the cattle on which his attention, from childhood, is concentrated’. This fact is of greater significance than the possible historical origins of the terms.[Note 9] That the Nilotes’ visual perception of their natural and cultural world is thus shaped by their interest in, and experience of, the colour configurations of their cattle is amply attested, both by their complex cattle-colour terminologies and by the rich poetic and metaphorical elaborations of these terminologies by which associations are made between the most diverse visual experiences and cattle-colours. These associations are not by any means always obvious; part of the pleasure of composing and singing songs is in making creative connections which one’s audience has to work at to comprehend.

That these associations are not made only in poetic contexts, however, is shown by Lienhardt’s remark (1961: 19) that Dinka ‘frequently pointed out to me those things in nature which had the *marial* colour-configuration upon which my own metaphorical ox-name was based’. One might expect a man to become particularly attuned to the colour-configuration of his own name or song ox, but as Lienhardt’s anecdote makes clear, this attuning is not exclusive; Dinka recognize and appreciate a wide range of colour-configurations. Agar Dinka friends called me Makur, explicitly referring to the dark rings

around my eyes like the black patches round the eyes of the ox *makur*. Other Agar to whom I was introduced immediately grasped why I had been so called.

It is not just in their perception of their world, and their poetic expressions concerning it, that we can trace these elements of the Nilotic aesthetic. They can also be traced in the ways in which Nilotes act in the world. For example, they decorate their bodies with ash, the decoration being always (as far as I know) non-representational, but very commonly geometric.[Note 10] Buxton tells us (1973: 401) that among the Mandari 'young people decorate their faces with white ash to imitate the facial markings of oxen and cows'. This is what one [257/258] might expect to be the case for the Nilotes in general, though I know of no other report of such decoration as conscious imitation. The appearance of ash-covered bodies is, in any case, not unlike the colour of the majority of poorly marked, greyish cattle. Even if it is the case that when they decorate themselves with ash they are not consciously imitating the markings of cattle, it is surely not too much to assume that the appreciation of the markings of cattle and of the ash covered bodies are similar, and that the former affects the latter.

More clearly, perhaps, the black-and-white animal skins, like that of the colobus monkey, which are part of 'traditional' Nilotic dress, can be seen as reflecting the contrasts appreciated in cattle-hides.[Note 11] In recent years it has been possible for Nilotes to buy plastic accoutrements with which to adorn themselves; the man pictured with his ox in Fig. 10.2 is wearing a striking black-and-white plastic leopard-skin belt.

The contrasts that Nilotes appreciate in their cattle, and in the world around them, they also achieve in their decorative work. Mandari incise patterns on pots and gourds and blacken them with the heated point of a knife or spear, and contrasts are also made by rubbing white clay or ash into black or red surfaces. Black-and-white contrasts can also be seen in the frequent use of ivory bracelets in body decoration: as noted above, the whiteness of the ivory gleams against the wearer's black skin. Necklaces and bracelets made of indigenous materials such as wood and shell are also characterized by black-and-white contrasts.[Note 12] It seems that contrast continues to be an important aspect of the aesthetics of beadwork, even with the immense range of hues now available in imported plastic beads.[Note 13]

The forked branches erected in cattle camps, like the Agar Dinka example in Fig. 10.3, are decorated by the removal of alternate sections of bark to produce a banded, hooped, or straked effect.[Note 14] In the 1980s, Mandari had access to acrylic paints, and took to painting the tall poles they erected in cattle camps. Instead of stripping alternate sections of bark to produce the desired effect, the whole bark was stripped off and alternate sections painted black and white, or, as in one example I saw, bright red and brilliant yellow.

The asymmetrical branching shape effected by horn-training can be seen in the tree branches erected as shrines amongst the Dinka, Mandari, and Atuot.[Note 15] Although, as can be seen in Fig. 10.4, they also have a practical purpose, in that their shape makes them suitable to lean spears against and hang things from (Lienhardt, 1961: 257–60), it seems unlikely that shapes so reminiscent of the trained horns of oxen are accidentally so. One is encouraged to think that the resemblance is deliberate by the fact that the place marked by such forked-branch shrines is known amongst the Dinka as 'the head of the cattle-hearth' (ibid. 258); and Cummins (1904: 158) recounts a Dinka myth of origin in which it is said that where God lives there is a tree 'that is leafless with only two

branches, one to the right and the other to [258/259] the left like the horns of a bull'. For the Atuot, at least, 'the imagery of the spreading branches is consciously associated with the horns of a cow sacrificed on the occasion when the power was brought into the homestead' (Burton, 1979: 105 n.).

Whatever the case with the forked-branch shrines, there can be no doubt that in other areas of life the representation of horns is conscious. Both symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes are imitated and represented. Some Nilotic scarification patterns can be seen as being based on cattle-horns; perhaps even the forehead marks of some Dinka and Mandari might be seen in this way.[Note 16] Amongst Agar Dinka, at least, it is not unusual to see cattle-horn shaped scarification on various parts of the body.[Note 17]

After initiation, Nuer youths endure much pain and discomfort to imitate the horns of their oxen. They render useless their left arms by fixing a set of bracelets to them. This temporary deformation holds down their left arms as the left horns of oxen are trained downwards (Evans-Pritchard, 1956: 256–7).[Note 18]

Lienhardt describes various ways in which Dinka imitate cattle in stylized action, remarking (1961: 16) that 'a characteristic sight in Western Dinkaland is that of a young man with his arms curved above his head, posturing either at a dance or for his own enjoyment when he is alone with his little herd'. Such posturing has been illustrated frequently and can be seen here in Fig. 10.5 where, as they dance at a sacrifice, Agar Dinka women raise their arms above their heads in imitation of the horns of a cow.[Note 19] This curving of the arms in imitation of cattle is, for the Dinka, 'one of the forms of "handsomeness" (*dheng* [or *dheeng*]), a bodily attitude which the Dinka consider graceful' (ibid. 16); it is 'a gesture of pride and triumph' (ibid. 269).

Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 38; cf. 1956: 251) colourfully describes how

when a Nuer mentions an ox his habitual moroseness leaves him and he speaks with enthusiasm, throwing up his arms to show you how its horns are trained. 'I have a fine ox,' he says, 'a brindled ox with a large white splash on its back and with one horn trained over its muzzle'—and up go his hands, one above his head and the other bent at the elbow across his face.

In one type of Atuot dance, 'men leap high into the air with their arms outstretched, imitating the girth and pattern of the horns of their personality oxen' (Burton, 1982: 268). Even when ox songs are sung in a sitting position a Dinka 'holds his hands up as the horns and moves his head and body in imitation of the ox' (Deng, 1972: 83).

Horn shapes are also found in Nilotic ornament. MacDermot (1972: pl. opp. p. 49) illustrates Thiwat, a Nuer man, wearing two leopard teeth fastened to a piece of leather around his neck, the resultant shape being very reminiscent of horns. Fisher (1984: 42) illustrates a Nuer wooden necklace with a central forked pendant 'shaped to resemble cows' horns'. She also [259/261] illustrates (ibid. 54, 57) ivory pendants 'shaped like cows' horns' suspended from bead necklaces. And Ray Huffman (1931: fig. 3.6, opp. p. 17) illustrates a 'two-pronged wristlet'—in fact a ring—in which the shape formed by the prongs is again reminiscent of the horns of an ox.

It is not just horns which are imitated. In dance, it can be the whole animal, or groups of animals. In the same Atuot dance as that referred to above, young women imitate cows. Burton (1982: 268) describes it as follows:

a line of six or eight young women forms directly in front of the drummers. Here they perform a movement which attempts to imitate the slow gallop cows make as they saunter across a pasture. A girdle of colored beads reaching well above their heads sways back and forth, suggesting the manner in which the hump of a cow shifts back and forth when running.[Note 20]

Deng (1972: 78–80) discusses a number of dances in which men and women act out the roles of bull, ox, and cow. And Lienhardt (1961: 17) describes a Dinka dance which is based upon ‘the running of oxen with cows in the herd’. In considering fully the aesthetics of such dances, we should have to take into account more than just the purely visual; the major element is presumably the kinetic experience of the dancers themselves, though there are oral, and aural, elements too (*ibid.*). The visual appearance of cattle—the [261/262] horns, the hump, and the general posture—are imitated as part of a more complete imitation the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this essay.

Nilotes have no developed tradition of figure sculpture or painting. There are, however, examples of modelling and drawing in which the aesthetic elements identified above are manifested. Through an examination of such models and drawings, we can deepen our understanding of the ideal forms in terms of which actual cattle are assessed and appreciated.

The making of clay, mud, or baked-earth models of cattle is a common occupation of Nilotic children. Generally speaking, the models are made by children for children’s play, as is illustrated by the Dinka boy featured in a Survival Anglia film (1983) and in Fig.10.6 here.[Note 21] Amongst the Nuer, children play games with their oxen, ‘taking them to pasture and putting them into byres, marrying with them and so on’ (Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 238; cf. 1940a: 38), and Deng (1972: 60) tells of Dinka children making cattle camps using either shells or clay figures as cattle.[Note 22] Such mud oxen may have their horns decorated with tassels in imitation of the real-life song oxen, as has the one at the furthest left in the group illustrated in Fig.10.7. They may also be coloured with ash or charred wood (Huffman, 1931: 65; Blackman, 1956: 273) in imitation of the markings of real animals.

In the examples illustrated in Fig.10.7,[Note 23] it is evident that what are emphasized and exaggerated are the hump, the horns, and the general fatness of the body: the head, legs, and hooves are of much less importance. A most satisfying example of such exaggeration, in which these features have been abstracted to produce a form which at first sight it takes a little imagination to see as a whole beast, are a group of five mud cows collected by Jean Brown among the Pokot in the 1970s and illustrated in Fig.10.8. While not from a people within the particular focus of this essay, they are so striking that they are well worth illustrating here. In these examples, the aesthetically central aspects of the physical form of cattle—the fatness of the body, the hump, and the horns—have been brought together to produce a form which, though it bears little resemblance to the form of the animals themselves, is in itself aesthetically pleasing. That such models are made by children for children’s play, or as in the Pokot case, by mothers for their children, does not lessen their interest for an understanding of Nilotic aesthetics. They can be taken as an indication of what is aesthetically pleasing for the older brothers of these children, that is, for themselves when they grow up.[Note 24]

Two-dimensional representations of cattle as illustrated in Fig.10.9 are found on external hut walls amongst the Agar Dinka. Although there are reports of such mural drawings amongst the Nuer (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 1937: 238; Jackson, 1923: 123–4), there are no published illustrations to provide comparative examples. They may be compared, however, with the figures of cattle incised on gourds by the Anuak as illustrated in Fig.10.10. Here the cattle have triangular humps, and the colour configurations on their [262/263] rectangular bodies are geometrically stylized. [Note 25] They are more reminiscent of flag designs than the configurations actually found on cattle. If clay modelling reflects the Nilotic appreciation of the physical qualities of bigness and fatness, then the geometricized representations of cattle on gourds and walls can be seen to reflect the importance of colour configurations. That the bodies are rectangular and the configurations geometricized suggests that the cattle-colour classification represents a set of ideals which can be abstractly stated—or represented—even though real cattle only ever approximate to them.

Aesthetics and Society

So far I have discussed some of the qualities of perceptual experience recognized and appreciated by Nilotes. Little reference has been made to ‘art’, ‘beauty’, or ‘the good’, which are so often taken to be defining terms of the aesthetic. Nor has reference been made to those traditional concerns of anthropology, such as social organization and social structure, to which analysts have attempted to link aesthetics. The discussion of elements of visual appreciation in a given culture is an end in itself, contributing to an understanding of what it is to be a member of that culture. Nevertheless, I shall try to address, albeit briefly, some of the wider concerns often discussed in what has been taken elsewhere to be the anthropology of aesthetics. My concern is to bring out what I take to be the implications for the anthropology of aesthetics of the material presented above.

As for ‘art’, I have referred to body decoration, mural drawing, and clay modelling, all of which might well have been discussed under a heading of ‘art’. I indicated my response to such an approach in the introduction to this essay. Such activities as body decoration and clay modelling have an aesthetic aspect, as all human activity does, and it is the aesthetic aspect of these activities which has been of concern in this essay. No good purpose would be served for the anthropology of aesthetics, as I understand it, in separating such activities as ‘art’, or in restricting any discussion of aesthetics to them.

As for ‘beauty’, it is hoped that the terminology adopted in this essay avoids the problems that beset attempts to use such vague terms in accounts of other cultures. An understanding of the aesthetic qualities which we have identified is, of course, relevant for any understanding of Nilotic ideas approximating Western notions of beauty. For example, Lienhardt (1963: 87) quotes a Dinka song in which the singer compares his own ‘dazzling array’—glossed by Lienhardt as ‘shining beauty’—with that of the ugliness of ‘a big coward’ to whom a girl in whom the singer is interested has been promised by her father: ‘This dazzling array is a poor man’s truculence, ee/ [That her father] gives her to that big ugly coward to play with, ee/ This dazzling array is just [263/264] truculence’. The words for ‘dazzling array’ and ‘ugly’ are, in fact, the cattle-colour terms *marial* and

malou. As noted above, *marial* is one of the most highly valued black-and-white configurations signifying a black ox with a white splash on its flank. *Malou* is a grey ox, the implication in this context being dullness—*lou* is the Dinka name for a large bustard, probably the visually uninteresting kori bustard (*Ardeotis kori*) (Nebel, 1979: 52, 56). That *rial* combined with *nyin*, ‘eye’, is the Dinka term for ‘to dazzle’ gives some indication of the Dinka conceptualization of the visual stimulation of the *rial* black-and-white configuration (ibid. 76). In some contexts, ‘pied’ and ‘beautiful’ might be virtually interchangeable: Deng (1972: 63) quotes a song in which some young girls are said to wear ‘pied and beautiful beads’.

But what is aesthetically pleasing and what is beautiful are not necessarily the same thing. A better appreciation of Nilotic ideas concerning beauty can be achieved through a discussion of indigenous concepts, such as the Dinka notion *dheeng*, mentioned in passing above. In a discussion of the virtues and dignity of a ‘gentleman’, Deng (1972: 14) glosses the term as follows:

dheeng ...is a word of multiple meanings—all positive. As a noun, it means nobility, beauty, handsomeness, elegance, charm, grace, gentleness, hospitality, generosity, good manners, discretion, and kindness. The adjective form of all these is *adheng*. Except in prayer or on certain religious occasions, singing and dancing are *dheeng*. Personal decoration, initiation ceremonies, celebration of marriages, the display of ‘personality oxen’ indeed any demonstration of an aesthetic value, is considered *dheeng*. The social background of a man, his physical appearance, the way he walks, talks, eats, or dresses, and the way he behaves towards his fellowmen are all factors in determining his *dheeng*.

In the context of this essay it is the perceptual qualities contributing to *dheeng* which are of significance, and some of these, as they relate particularly to cattle, have been identified. But it is clear from Deng’s discussion that for the Dinka there is more to ‘beauty’ than meets the eye.

It is also in the notion of *dheeng* that aesthetics and morality are linked. What is morally good is expected to display valued aesthetic qualities, and what displays valued aesthetic qualities is expected to be morally good. It is recognized, however, that this is far from always being the case. A Dinka man is *adheng* if he has social status, whether ascribed or achieved, if he is virtuous in his relations with others, or if he is physically attractive. Ideally, these three aspects should go together, but Dinka recognize that they do not always do so.

Some of the recent literature in the anthropology of aesthetics attempts to relate aesthetics to social organization or social structure. As presented here, Nilotic aesthetics seems rather to be a contingent product of these cattle-keepers’ experience of the world which they inhabit, and to have little to do with any social facts. In his account of the aesthetics of the Fang of Gabon, Fernandez (1971: 373) claims to identify basic principles of opposition and [266/267] vitality at work in Fang society and culture: ‘in both aesthetics and the social structure the aim of the Fang is not to resolve opposition and create identity but to preserve a balanced opposition’. This is achieved in the social structure, he argues, through complementary filiation, and in their ancestor statues through skilful aesthetic

composition. Should it not be possible to make such a profound summation concerning the material presented in this essay?

To some extent, one's answer to such a question depends upon one's intellectual temper. No doubt many would find it intellectually satisfying to relate the high value of piedness to the segmentation of Nilotic political structure and to the divided world of Nilotic cosmology. The combination of black and white, or red and white, in the pied ox, the argument might run, is valued because it fits with the principles of the social organization and religious thought. It is probably the case that an intellectually diverting picture of the anthropological material concerning Nilotic aesthetics could be constructed along such lines. But what would it mean? That social structure and cosmology are products of social structure, or that they are all products of underlying principles? For anyone wishing, despite these ontological puzzles, to make links of this sort, there are some suggestive facts in the ethnography to which one might point. They do not, however, stand up to closer inspection.

There is, most famously, the Nuer leopard-skin priest, amongst whose duties it is to resolve conflicts between disputing factions, and to act as an intermediary between man and God. It is not, therefore, most suitable that he is the *leopard-skin* priest? The leopard-skin is pied, and combines within itself the opposites of black and white. However, the priest is not usually known by this title by the Nuer themselves. The more usual title can be translated as 'earth (or soil) priest'; as Evans-Pritchard (1956: 291) points out, 'the leopard-skin title is taken only from his badge (of office) whereas the earth title is derived from a symbolic association with the earth of deeper significance'. He is, therefore, not in fact a leopard-skin priest, but a priest of the soil who wears a leopard-skin as a badge of office. There is no hint that the Nuer regard a pied skin as suitable, *qua* its piedness, for a priest who is in an intermediate position and whose duty it is to resolve disputes. There is no reason to suppose any more profound reasons for the wearing of the leopard-skin than the symbolic associations of the leopard itself, which are beside the point here, and that it is a visually attractive and bold material symbol.

While Nilotes do not, in General picture God to themselves, [Note 26] Lienhardt relates (1961: 46) how some Western Dinka conceive of Nhailic, God, or Divinity, as being pied:

Some people claim to have had visions of Divinity. Two youths, at different times, told me that their mothers had once seen Divinity...In one vision Divinity was seen as an [267/268] old man, with a red and blue pied body and a white head. In the other he appeared as a huge old man, with a blue-green body (the colour of the sky) and again a white head. Other Dinka who have heard of such visions seem usually to be agreed that in them the body of Divinity is strikingly pied, but with a white head, a mark of age and venerability.

The blue-green body, it is worth noting at the outset, is not pied blue and green, but a single blue-green colour—the colour of the sky, *nhialic*, in which Divinity is conceived as living. The red-and-blue pied configuration is not found in cattle, but represents one of the strongest perceptual contrasts. It is an extreme form of piedness. Among the Atuat, similarly, one of the powerful spirits of the sky, the power of rain, is 'usually referred to by its ox-name *awumkwei*', and according to Burton (1981: 76), 'this

color pattern is the most aesthetically pleasing for the Atuot; it signifies a boldly marked black and white animal, with a fully white head and red nose’.

That Nhialic and Awumkwei should be thought of as pied is not surprising, given how much the Dinka and Atuot value such configurations. The high aesthetic value of pied configurations, whether in cattle or elsewhere, is sufficient reason for Divinity to be thought of as pied, when Divinity is thought of as displaying any perceptual qualities at all.

Lienhardt (1961: 46) goes on to explain that ‘white oxen or oxen boldly marked with white are especially appropriate for sacrifice to Divinity’. Significantly, it is not the piebald which is especially suitable, but the white ox—or, in the case of the piebald, one that is marked with white. Similarly for the Mandari, Buxton’s careful and sophisticated analysis of their colour symbolism(1973: esp. 385–94) makes it clear that, despite the high aesthetic valuation of variegated beasts, they have no symbolic importance and no especial place in sacrifice over and above their being cattle like any other. The appropriateness of different colour configurations for sacrifice to different divinities—or Divinity—amongst the Dinka, however, is exemplified in a number of cases in Lienhardt’s study. In particular, the black-and-white configurations in cattle are especially suitable for sacrifice to the free-divinity Deng, which is particularly associated with celestial phenomena such as rain, thunder, and lightning. It is, however, not the piedness as such which makes beasts of black-and-white configurations suitable for sacrifice to Deng, but rather the imaginative connections between the quality perceived in the black-and white ox and the quality of the lowering skies: ‘the black-and-white configurations in cattle...impress themselves upon the minds of the Dinka as does the lightning in dark, overcast skies which signifies the activities of Deng’ (Lienhardt, 1961: 162). The symbolic action is thus inexplicable without an understanding of the workings of the Dinka imagination, and our appreciation of the working of the Dinka imagination involves, I should argue, an appreciation of Dinka aesthetics. [268/269]

Conclusion

Cattle provide the primary aesthetic locus of Nilotic society. This is a given of their pastoral life style and the well-documented centrality of cattle in their lives. The particularities of the Nilotic aesthetic relate to their deep appreciation of the physical qualities of their cattle and their ideals of bovine form. Their appreciation of cattle-colour configurations can be understood in the context of the environment in which the cattle are perceived, and as a particular instance of the universal appeal of contrast, manifested here in the appreciation of black-and-white and red-and white beasts in herds of mostly off-white, greyish cattle. Elements which have their origins in this ‘bovine’ aesthetic can be traced through the ways in which Nilotes perceive, appreciate, enjoy, describe, and act in their world.

The underlying assumptions of this essay are that, all other things being equal, people act in the world to maximize their aesthetic satisfaction, and that an awareness of this aspect of human activity may help us to understand cosmology, symbolism, etc. I do not imagine that I have established beyond doubt the worth of these assumptions here, but I hope that I have provided at least an insight into how the Nilotes of the Southern

Sudan take pleasure in the lives they lead, as well as into some of the marvels of their everyday vision.

Notes

This essay is based primarily on literary research, although, thanks to the British Institute in Eastern Africa and the Social Science Research Council, I was able to visit Agar Dinka and Apak Atuot country in 1981 and Mandariland in 1982. I am grateful to Survival Anglia and the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, for permission to reproduce photographs. For comments on earlier drafts of this essay I am grateful to Gerd Baumann, Nigel Fancourt, Wendy James, Godfrey Lienhardt, John Mack, Andrew Mawson, Howard Morphy, Michael O’Hanlon, John Penney, and Simon Simonse.

1. For the Nuer, see Evans-Pritchard (1940a); for the Dinka, Lienhardt (1961); for the Atuot, Burton (1987); and for the Mandari, Buxton (1973).

2. See, for the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 16–50); for the Dinka, Lienhardt (1961: 10–27); and for the Mandari, Buxton (1973: 5–11)

3. This includes the war currently being waged in the Southern Sudan, in which Nuer, Dinka, Atuot, and Mandari have been involved as combatants, victims, and refugees.

4. In his comprehensive overview of the literature on ‘African Aesthetics’, Van Damme (1987) mentions only one work on a Nilotic people, Schneider (1956) on the Pokot. Klumpp (1987) includes a brief discussion of Maasai aesthetics. There are a number of works which discuss body decoration, material culture, and so on [269/270] amongst Nilotic peoples; this literature contains material relevant to the study of aesthetics, but rarely discusses aesthetics specifically.

5. See e.g. Turton (1980) on the Mursi.

6. For illustrations, see e.g. Ryle (1982: 17, 26–7, 34–5, 139); Howell *et al.* (1988: 287, 288, pls. 21, 22) and Fig. 10.1 here, in which the ‘background’ of off-white cattle is an accidental feature of the photograph. The veterinary officer Grunnet (1962: 7) claimed that 60% of Dinka cattle were ‘greyish white or dirty white’.

7. On Nuer practice, see Evans-Pritchard (1940a: 37–8; 1956: pl. xiii, opp. 256); for the Dinka, see Lienhardt (1961: 17), and the illustrations in Ryle (1982: 65, 94–5), and in Howell *et al.* (1988: 205, pl. 18); for the Atuot, see Burton (1981: fig. A, opp. 36); and for the Mandari, see Buxton (1973: 7, pl. 1, opp. 6).

8. For an illustration, see Ryle (1982: 39).

9. The fact that similar patterns are highly valued by geographically contiguous peoples who do not keep cattle—such as the Uduk (James, 1988: 28–9)—suggests that these elements may have been part of Nilotic aesthetics even before the Nilotes became cattle-keepers. This is, however, irrelevant to an understanding of the appreciation of such patterns by Nilotic cattle-keepers today, which is founded in their daily experience of their cattle.

10. For illustrations, see e.g. Ryle (1982: 62–5).
11. See e.g. the photograph of a Dinka wearing a colobus monkey skin and other finery in Howell *et al.* (1988: 205, pl. 18).
12. For illustrations, see Fisher (1984: 42).
13. Schneider (1956: 105) noted the importance of contrast in Pokot beadwork, and Klumpp (1987) has discussed the importance of both contrast and complementarity in contemporary Maasai beadwork. I hope to discuss Nilotic beadwork at length elsewhere.
14. See also e.g. the post illustrated in Buxton (1973: pl. 2, opp. 78).
15. For the Dinka, see Lienhardt (1961: pl. vi, opp. 176); for the Mandari, see Buxton (1973: 54, fig. 1; pl. 7, opp. 371; and app. ii at 419); for an Anuak example, see Evans-Pritchard (1940b: pl. iv.b, opp. 40).
16. For illustrations, see, for the Dinka, Fisher (1984: 48, 50, 52); for the Mandari, Caputo (1982: 366).
17. For illustrations, see Ryle (1982: 7, 18, 70–1).
18. For an illustration, see Evans-Pritchard (1956: pl. xii, opp. 234).
19. For other illustrations, see, for the Dinka, Deng (1972: 18); Ryle (1982: 15, 58–9); Lienhardt (1961: pl. 1, opp. 16); and the various sequences including dances interspersed throughout the film *Dinka* (Survival Anglia, 1983), especially the sacrifice sequence.
20. For illustrations of such girdles, or corsets, see Fisher (1984: 50, 51); Howell *et al.* 1988: 205, pl. 18).
21. Lienhardt (1961: 264), however, found mud models of bulls hanging in a shrine he visited.
22. Lienhardt (1963: 82) also refers to children playing at cattle-herding with snail-shells. I do not know what form these shells have, but I should not be surprised if they resembled in some ways the schematized cattle forms represented in the abstracted Pokot examples in Fig. 10.8.
23. These examples are in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, and were collected by [270/271] Evans-Pritchard. All but one are inscribed as having been collected among the Anuak, but it is almost certainly the case that they were all collected among the Nuer.

24. In his discussion of Dinka arts, Caravita (1968: 366) suggests that painting and sculpture remain undeveloped and marginalized because they are the work of people, that is, women and children, who are marginalized within Dinka society.

25. Huffman (1931: 69) remarks that the figures drawn by Nuer children and those incised on gourds by Nuer women always have rectangular bodies.

26. Evans-Pritchard (1956: 123) says that 'Nuer do not claim to see God', while, according to Buxton (1973: 19), Mandari say 'Creator has not been known or seen', and among the Atuot, according to Burton (1981: 138), "God the Father" is never said or imagined to exist in any physical form'.

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Fig. 10.1. Dinka ox of the *marial* configuration; Bekjiu, near Pacong, Agar Dinka; photographer: Jeremy Coote, February 1981. [Page 251.]

Fig.10.2. Dinka man with decorated song-ox; photographer: Survival Anglia, 1975. [Page 253.]

Fig.10.3. Forked-branch post in an Agar Dinka cattle-camp; photographer: Jeremy Coote, February 1981. [Page 260.]

Fig.10.4. Forked-branch shrine in an Apak Atuot homestead, near Aluakluak; photographer: Jeremy Coote, February 1981. [Page 260.]

Fig.10.5. Agar Dinka dancing at a sacrifice; near Pacong; photographer: Jeremy Coote, February 1981. [Page 261.]

Fig.10.6. Dinka boy modelling a md cow; photographer: Survival Anglia, 1975. [Page 264.]

Fig. 10.7. Nuer mud toy cattle; collected by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s (all but one, far right, labelled 'Anuak', though they are almost certainly all Nuer); maximum height 5 1/2 in. (14.0 cm.); Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (d.d. Evans-Pritchard 1936). [Page 264.]

Fig. 10.8. Pokot mud toy cattle; collected by Jean Brown in the 1970s; largest 4 1/3 x 3 3/4 in. (11.0 x 9.5 cm.); Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1978: 20.194–8). [Page 264.]

Fig.10.9. Agar Dinka hut-wall drawings of a young man with two tasselled oxen (*majok*, left; *makuac*, right); near Pacong, Agar Dinka; photographer: Jeremy Coote, February 1981. The human figure is approximately 9 in. (23 cm.) high. [Page 265.]

Fig. 10.10. Anuak gourd bowl, incised with figures and decorative designs; collected by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s; 7 7/8 in. (20.0 cm.) high, 14 1/8 in. (36.0 cm.) max. diameter; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford (1936.10.79). [Page 265.]

