

Aesthetics and ethics: An enquiry into their relationship

Date : March 3, 2015

A one-day workshop

?Wednesday 6 May 2015 9:30 am – 4 pm

Venue: Daryll Forde Seminar Room

Department of Anthropology

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14 Taviton, London WC1H 0BW

Keynote speakers:

Christopher Pinney (University College London)

Roger Sansi-Roca (Goldsmiths)

Organizers:

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The relationship between aesthetics and ethics has long been the topic of scholarly debates, from Kant's (1928[1790]) insistence that the experience of beauty involved disinterested contemplation and, subsequently, the separation of aesthetics from ethics, or Wittgenstein's (1961[1889]) enigmatic proposition that 'ethics and aesthetics are one', to the numerous enquiries into the ethical aspects of art and art criticism or the aesthetic aspects of moral life and moral evaluation (e.g. Bourdieu 1984, Foucault 1985, 1986, Eco 1986, Eagleton 1990, Guattari 1995, Korsmeyer

1998, Levinson 2001, Rancière 2006, Osborne and Tanner 2007).

How has anthropology related to these debates? Thompson (2006[1973]), Bateson (2006[1973]), or Boone (1986), for example, in the tradition of a holistic anthropology, have analysed local concepts of beauty and illustrated the ways in which these concepts articulated with religious and moral values. Gell (1998), to give another example, through his notion of the artwork as an index, which enables the observer to make causal inferences about the artist's intentions, has theoretically paved the way for inquiries into the morality of intentions. Furthermore, how can anthropology contribute to these debates, especially in light of its increasing interest in ethics (e.g. Lambek 2010, Faubion 2011, Robbins 2013, Keane 2013, 2014, Fassin and Lézé 2014, Laidlaw 2014)?

Participants have been invited to address the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in anthropology and to consider the following questions:

i) do the definitions of aesthetics and ethics currently in use in anthropology help or hinder us in our reflections on their relationship?

ii) when are the questions of aesthetics and ethics similar?

iii) what kind of theoretical framework is appropriate for reflecting on this relationship? (e.g. value theory; then the questions might be: how does aesthetic value relate to the notion of value generally? how does ethical value relate to the notion of value generally? are these types of value incompatible?)

iv) what kind of ethnographic topic is appropriate for reflecting on this relationship? (only those where there is an explicit expectation that aesthetic principles are guided by ethical considerations, such as Qur'anic art and Islamic fashion?)

v) should a third term, that is, politics, be also taken into consideration in order to better understand the relationship between aesthetics and ethics?

All Welcome