Remote Access

The Philosophy, Anthropology, and Archaeology of Remote Visual Conspicuousness

Thursday, 27 September 2018

- **10:00 Introduction**

- **10:15 Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge)**
  Making Invisible: The Limitations of Enquiry

  11:15 coffee break

- **11:45 Lambros Malafouris (Oxford)**
  Material Engagement and the Prehistory of Pictorial Skill: A Cognitive Ecology of Forms and Material Signs

  12:45 lunch break

- **14:30 Marion Lauschke (HU Berlin)**
  What Images Afford

  15:30 coffee break

- **16:00 Whitney Davis (UC Berkeley)**
  Pictorial Authority: How It Looks and What It's Like

Friday, 28 September 2018

- **10:15 Jonas Grethlein (Heidelberg)**
  Aesthetics in Greco-Roman Antiquity? Ancient Visual Culture and the Phenomenology of Pictorial Seeing

  11:15 coffee break

- **11:45 Gregory Currie (York)**
  The Development of Aesthetic Culture in the Old Stone Age

  12:45 lunch break

- **14:15 Marilynn Johnson (FIU Miami)**
  Philosophical Perspectives on Communication by Prehistoric Bodily Adornment

  15:15 coffee break

- **15:30 Sam Rose (St. Andrews)**
  The Expansion of the Author

  16:30 coffee break

- **17:00 Jakub Stejskal (FU Berlin)**
  Alien Aesthetics: The Heuristic Implications of Radical Remoteness

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ABSTRACTS (alphabetically)

- ### Gregory Currie (York)

  #### The Development of Aesthetic Culture in the Old Stone Age

  According to me, some of the stone tools from around 0.5mya are aesthetic objects. I aim to do two things in this paper. First, I try to be very clear about what this claim does (and does not) commit me to. Secondly, I tackle what we might call the explosion problem: if these are aesthetic objects does that put them in the same category as, say, parietal depictions from 30kya and later? And how do we distinguish hand axes from, say, the bowers of bower birds? I argue that we can provide a set of distinctions capable (probably) of distinguishing fairly robustly between these three kinds of artefacts. I conclude by saying something about how conceptual and empirical issues interact in this discussion.

- ### Whitney Davis (UC Berkeley)

  #### Pictorial Authority: How It Looks and What It's Like

  The paper departs from Arthur Danto's suggestion that our analytic histories of the ontological and epistemological claims made upon on us by putatively 'visual' artworks and pictures must always take account of 'the history of central systems vesting what we see with meanings that have not entirely to do with what we see, since they are often relational terms conferred by things often not present in pictures'. This suggestion sits uneasily with the very idea that 'striking visibility' could lie at the core of not only the message of pictorial artworks but also their aesthetics. As I have argued, analogical likenesses are as, or more, determinative in the message and aesthetics of pictorial artworks as visual looks. But if we have historical, archaeological, and/or anthropological access only to the forms of the looks – the looks to us, as they strike us – how do we take account of the forms of likeness? Is it possible that we actually know more about what things were like to people who are (or were) remote from us in space and time than about the looks of those things? The paper argues that the primary analytic problem is not so much the 'remoteness' of some pictures but their 'resolution' in terms of 'look' and 'like'.

- ### Jonas Grethlein (Heidelberg)

  #### Aesthetics in Greco-Roman Antiquity? Ancient Visual Culture and the Phenomenology of Pictorial Seeing

  Since Kristeller's papers on 'The Modern System of the Arts', it has been controversial whether or not it makes sense to speak of aesthetics in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Visual artefacts such as statues are particularly challenging: they are still visible as they were in antiquity, but while they now populate museums and exhibitions, in Antiquity they served religious, civic and other functions that conflict with the aesthetic distance that is constitutive of 'Art'.

In particular the living-presence responses that are attested in ancient ecphrastic texts do not square with a Kantian framework of aesthetics and have therefore been eagerly discussed by Art Historians who argue for the agency of images. Ancient artefacts thus form an intriguing subject for reflections on 'remote access' to visual artefacts. In this paper, I suggest an approach that does justice to antiquity's distinct visual culture while also accounting for the phenomenology of pictorial seeing, which, I try to show, is reflected in ancient artefacts themselves as well as in ecphrasis.

Marilynn Johnson (FIU Miami)

Philosophical Perspectives on Communication by Prehistoric Bodily Adornment

Discussions of prehistoric bodily adornment as a system of communication explicitly or implicitly rely on philosophical machinery about how artifacts can be bearers of meaning. Semiotic theory in the Saussurean or Peircean traditions are often explicitly appealed to by archaeologists (Weissner 1983; Conkey 2001; Hovers et. al. 2003; Trigger 2006; Preucel 2010; Bauer 2013; Crossland 2014). In some discussions of bodily adornment a theory of communication is not explicitly detailed but is implied by 1) the sort of evidence that is taken to demonstrate symbolic behavior, and 2) the sorts of messages that are proposed as the communicated content (Knight, Power, & Watts 1995; Kuhn et. al. 2001; D'Errico et. al. 2009; Stiner 2014; Hiscock 2014). In this presentation, I will begin by explaining why bodily adornment, understood as evidence of meaning-making practices in the archaeological record, is especially important. I will do this by comparing bodily adornment, such as ochre and shell beads, to other early candidates for bearers of intentional meaning, including handaxes and cave art. Then, I will detail the philosophical commitments made by relatively recent discussions of prehistoric bodily adornment as a system of symbolic communication. I will attempt to tease out for analysis the theoretical commitments and assumptions made by these theorists in the discussion of their empirical findings. I will then return to the philosophical frameworks. First, I will discuss the important distinction between signs that are arbitrary and signs that bear a necessary connection to what they symbolize. I will argue that archaeological discussions of symbolic bodily adornment have not always been mindful of this important distinction. I will conclude by highlighting the upshot of various ways of understanding communication by prehistoric bodily adornment.

Marion Lauschke (HU Berlin)

What Images Afford

This paper follows the largely forgotten traces of Richard Müller-Freienfels and other psychologists of the first decades of the 20th century in order to support the proposition that the perceptibility of images cannot be reduced to visuality. It will be shown that unconscious bodily interactions prime the interpretations of images. The beholder can become aware of these interactions via kinesthetic perception. Among other things, images afford aesthetic experiences.

Lambros Malafouris (Oxford)

Material Engagement and the Prehistory of Pictorial Skill: A Cognitive Ecology of Forms and Material Signs

In this paper, I will explore the nature of the relation between perception and pictorial skill in the context of early human prehistory. I will use the example of cave art to propose a view of human perception as an 'open' situated process of active exploration and material engagement. Building upon the enactive paradigm and Material Engagement Theory I will be arguing that perception should be seen as the concerted activity of the whole person that collapses the boundaries between the mind and the material world. Moreover, I will extend this embodied view further to argue that perception is a situated bio-cultural construct. An implication of that may be that modes of depiction and modes of perception are continuous; in changing the one you affect the other and thus you cannot understand them in isolation.

- **Sam Rose (St. Andrews)**

  The Expansion of the Author

  Many would agree that particular artefacts have special forms of visual authority, conspicuousness, or salience, but it's less clear whether on this basis we can generalise about the experiences of those who come to view those artefacts. Can we assume a transculturally and transhistorically shared element, perhaps even one that could provide the crucial anchoring for historical reconstructions of the attitudes of original makers and users? Or do knowledge and expectations intervene in ways likely to disrupt any such attempt to use personal experience as a historical tool?

  This paper charts how art criticism and art history have dealt with this issue since the 1960s loss of faith in modernist ideals about an ahistorical core of visual experience. As it became increasingly accepted that knowledge about a work of art might entirely reconfigure how it was seen, the task of historical reconstruction itself expanded to capture the forms of thought and attention bound up in the 'process' of creation. Rather than the much vaunted 'death of the author', attending to the issue this way shows, the moment saw a dramatic reinforcement and 'expansion' of the author: not only of what might be 'seen' in (rather than merely associated with) the work, but of the conceptions of the original makers on which historical reconstruction would in practice continue to be based.

- **Jakub Stejskal (FU Berlin)**

  Alien Aesthetics: The Heuristic Implications of Radical Remoteness

  In a highly controversial and contested body of work, Pat Getz-Gentle (formerly Getz-Preziosi) has claimed that many prehistoric Early Cycladic marble sculptures betray the work of individual sculptors, and that within their respective 'oeuvre' more and less aesthetically accomplished pieces can be identified. Getz-Gentle assumes that her connoisseurship gives her access to the particular values as appreciated by the Early Bronze culture of the Cycladic Islands. I contrast her 'intuitive' method (what in fact amounts to a formalism) with a post-formalist approach devised by David Summers. A Summersian interpretation of individual Cycladic sculptures would identify their 'evident disposition to an end' (in the Cycladic case: a depictive disposition) and focus on the 'artefactual surplus' above and beyond the disposition that would help identify a potential range of values associated with their design.

  Conspicuously missing from the values entertained by Summers are those associated with rewarding attention to modes of presentation, i.e., aesthetic values. I argue that there is in principle nothing in the nature of post-formalism that would substantiate the omission. In fact, making room for such aesthetic ends within post-formalist theory would make it possible to devise a properly 'alien aesthetics', that is, a heuristic for reconstructing the mandate of remote artefacts to invite appreciation, which would stay immune to the criticism levelled at Getz-Gentle.

- **Marilyn Strathern (Cambridge)**

  Making Invisible: The Limitations of Enquiry

  Anthropologists have access to first hand accounts of what it is that people may see in certain artefacts meant for display. The notable example of ceremonial occasions in Papua New Guinea, when through their decorations people momentarily turn themselves into artefacts, is the starting point for this enquiry from Mt Hagen in PNG's Western Highlands. However the anthropologist's accommodation of such accounts in terms of their own visual sensibilities is another matter. A recent attempt to 'repatriate' old ethnographic photographs, mainly pictures of persons both alive and deceased, raised several questions as to what was being made visible. Contrary to what I thought I knew about present day uses of photography, these questions pointed to a failure more of cultural rather than temporal distance. At the time I was advised to act in certain ways; retrospectively it is my surmise that for all I knew about Hagen practices of revelation and concealment I was not sensible enough (indeed could not have been) to the power of the invisible.