

Lecture

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

23rd May, 2024, 10:00 am

Lecturer's short bio:

Vitor Guerreiro is a Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto, Portugal. He wrote his PhD in the philosophy of music, and works primarily in both the philosophy of music and general aesthetics (or philosophy of art). His teaching activity and writing focus especially on issues of ontology, definition, musical expression, aesthetic cognitivism. He is interested in the intersection of aesthetics with both ethics and epistemology, and related debates concerning the nature of value.

Title of presentation:

Framed resemblances: on representation, expression and understanding in the arts

Abstract:

There have been two major views of aesthetics as a philosophical field, since its inception. One of them I call insular, the other continentalist. These are two responses to the 'basic problem' of aesthetics: what makes 'aesthetic value' both a value and aesthetic? A paradigm case of insularist would be Clive Bell: aesthetic value is separate from any other value, especially instrumental value. A paradigm case of continentalist would be Nelson Goodman: aesthetics is a part of epistemology. For Goodman, 'the aesthetic' simply names a mode of the cognitive. This brings a host of interesting issues connected to the distinction between knowledge and understanding, the expression of intellectual virtues, the nature of representation and where 'expression' and 'aesthetic properties' fit in that picture.

I approach this issue from a specific problem in the philosophy of art: that of expression. I focus on recent writings, in which I defend Goodman's theory of expressiveness as a variety of metaphorical exemplification (metaphorical exemplification + something else) from a number of criticisms. One challenge comes from a philosopher that is very close to Goodman in some aspects: James Young. The challenge has the form of a dilemma: either metaphorical exemplification is a bogus phenomenon or the theory of expression

as metaphorical exemplification is but a wordy version of the resemblance theory. In either case, we should prefer another theory. I respond by breaking the dilemma, and showing that Goodman's theory can be seen as a theory of framed resemblance, and, in that case, it is the resemblance theory which is a version of Goodman's theory but lacking something (not wordy – pun intended – enough). I show how Frank Zappa packed more insight than he could ever imagine, when he claimed that 'The most important thing in Art is The Frame'. The second challenge comes from Malcolm Budd's 'heresy of the separate experience', about which my colleague Tiago Sousa has recently written, and about which we had an exchange of 'reply to' papers. Basically, the challenge comes from two sources – one of which I criticise as an aesthetic dogma – that while exemplification concerns the generic, expression is intimate and singular. The other source is a combination of the propositional knowledge model of cognitive value and denotation as the implicit model for all symbolization in art. Breaking the dogma also vindicates a point made by Young: 'expression of x' (in art) is just another phrase for 'representation of x'.

If time there be, I'll finish this periplus by returning to the starting point, with some observations on what I call 'the return of mimesis', i.e., a return to representation and a cognitive function of art, as a way out of the spiralling attempts to either explain the aesthetic through the concept of art; or vice-versa. It is all about the kind of beings that we are, making and understanding representations of our own experience.