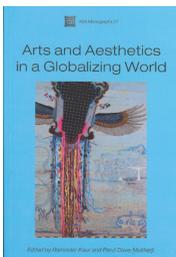


General



Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave-Mukherji, eds., *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalizing World*

London: Bloomsbury, 2015. 304 pages. Cloth, \$112.00; paperback, \$37.95; ebook, \$24.99. ISBN 9781472519306 (cloth); 9781472519313 (paperback); 9780857855473 (ebook).

THE CHOICE of the title *Arts and Aesthetics in a Globalizing World* by the editors Raminder Kaur and Parul Dave-Mukherji seems to be very unspecific. However, it indicates a complementarity that places arts and aesthetics side by side instead of imposing a hierarchy that separates them as different fields of inquiry. At first glance, the title fits the content and the idea that the world is indeed globalizing. The publication is mainly about open processes, interconnectivity, and dissolving static views of changing value systems in human society. It is the result of a conference based on research collaboration between the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) with the School of Arts and Aesthetics and the Centre for the Study of Social Sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi. The arrangement of the chapters is suitable for a wide array of readers in academia, and it may also interest the general public interested in anthropology, who will benefit from some very new and some vintage yet still valuable ideas presented in this volume, which is comprised of sixteen chapters.

The introduction by the editors starts with a citation from Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi: “The art of knowing is knowing what to ignore” (1). Out of a large number of panels and plenary sessions, the most convincing chapters present a mosaic of approaches, ideas, and emerging theories. A few aspects, however, appear more frequently and stand for a paradigm shift in research about the role, impact, and function of arts and aesthetics in society; namely, the focus on sensory and material features

within the scope of arts and aesthetics connected to local communities and their capability to interconnect with globalizing movements. Connecting the local to the global is a highly interesting point of departure. Some chapters, such as Atreyee Sen's "Slaps, Beatings, Laughter, Adda, Puppet Shows: Naxal Women Prisoners in Calcutta and the Art of Happiness in Captivity" (119–34), or Christopher Pinney's "Hot Bricolage: Magical Mimesis in Modern India" (85–98) are clearly dedicated to this approach, and their contributions to this volume will surely be discussed among scholars in the future.

Despite the innovation of some contributions, there are also less fresh arguments concerning the underlying criticism of Eurocentric assumptions and so-called indigenous artwork. Though both topics are high priority topics for researchers, and no less important than others in the broader context of the anthropology of art, some of the contributions are lacking in updated information on theoretical protagonists and their views. In a globalizing world, the fact of being born in a colonized country or in a colonizing country can no longer be used as an epistemic attribute, for too many social layers of human experiences create ongoing changes that configure with ethnic, national, gendered, and generational belongings. The chapter titled "Of Mockery and Mimicking: Gagnendranath Tagore's Critique of Henri Bergson's *Laughter* (1911)" by Emilia Terraciano (21–37) reflects upon an assemblage of very detailed historical facts and sources. However, the position of the observer remains slightly static and dualistic. In another chapter, Shiv Visvanathan's "Rethinking Waste: Time, Obsolescence, Diversity and Democracy" (99–118), the author deals with the positions of key figures within their societies regarding the perception of waste as opposed to dirt. Visvanathan similarly moves through his chapter with rich philosophical discussion. In the end, however, a clear direction or position is missing, despite his oscillation back and forth between sharp observation and pluralistic generalization.

Another important topic of the volume is the therapeutic effect of the arts and aesthetics on people's capability in coping with the globalizing world. Though the healing dimension is often an integral part of art analytics, chapters 9 and 13 take very specific views on the subject. Chapter 9 is Andrea Griede's "Rwanda: Healing and the Aesthetics of Poetry." She sets out to explain the value of poetry as a grounded search for metaphors in a traumatized community. Describing the power of words as an extension of self, she argues that they help in overcoming jealousy and loss. In so doing, she offers interesting insights into the aesthetics of local history. Chapter 13 is Susanne Schmitt's "Intimacy Out of Place: On the Workings of Smell in an Exhibition on Human Sexuality" (205–20), which deals with bodily experiences at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in Dresden. The creation of cultural and physical contact points is investigated as an aspect of ethnographic relevance in the transmission of sensory experience to museum goers. Interesting insights are offered on smell as an ethnographic category connected to the human body.

The impact of mobility and tourism is the last topic under the umbrella of arts and aesthetics mentioned here. In chapters dedicated to this topic, the rather undifferentiated view of Eurocentric assumptions and categorizations partly continues. In "The Aesthetics of Diaspora: Sensual Milieus and Literary Worlds" (153–68), Pnina Werbner and Mattia Fumanti discuss what they term "vernacular" and "encapsulated" aesthetics. After reviewing a huge amount of previous research, they conclude that these two forms of aesthetics are especially represented by the exile literature dedicated to

departure cultures. Soumendra Mohan Patnaik in his “Consuming Culture: The Re-figuration of Aesthetics in Nagaland Cultural Tourism in India’s Northeast” (221–40) remains rather modest and secure by limiting his discussion to conventional analyses.

The most innovative contributions, however, seem to be those dedicated to the overarching idea of the publication, which is a rather philosophical and empirical approach to discussing “mediated audiovisuality” in arts and aesthetics. Among this core group is Denis Vidal’s very interesting analysis titled “The Return of the Aura: Anish Kapoor: The Studio and the World” (39–60). This is also one of the few chapters diverting from the headline model “x:y,” where X stands for an extremely minimized abstract and Y for the primary object of research. It does so by inserting Anish Kapoor, an important and fashionable name that is often cited alongside that of the legendary Homi Bhabha, who is widely cited throughout all chapters. Patricia Spyer’s chapter, “Art under Siege: Perils and Possibilities of Aesthetic Forms in a Globalizing World” (73–84), also falls into the cluster of core chapters. Her argument appears compelling, straightforwardly using technical terms within a reflection concerning the narration of experiences. Spyer’s chapter leaves the reader with many productive questions.

All of the chapters, including those not mentioned here, deal generously with the relevant scholarly literature. The editors have paid special attention by creating clear structures by thematically grouping the essays. As a whole, the entire publication enriches anthropological research on art and aesthetics, especially within the context of South Asia, which is indeed appropriate given that the conference upon which the volume is based was held in India. The chapters demonstrate a broad diversity of topics regarding art forms, theoretical perspectives, and the role of the human senses. They collectively offer a considerable number of novel insights, while only occasionally adhering to conventional and predictable analyses. In some cases, however, improvements could have been suggested on how to apply more differentiated views on the role of individuals in the production and reception of art. Coming back to Rumi, the editors knew well what to ignore.

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