

SYMPOSIUM

THE ETHICAL LIFE OF IMAGINATION

TECHNIQUES OF ANTICIPATION IN INTERACTIONAL CONTEXTS

CONVENERS: GIOVANNI DA COL (SOAS) AND CARLO SEVERI (EHSS)

MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY, MARDI 4 OCTOBRE 14H30-19.00H - CINÉMA

WEBB KEANE

JAMES LAIDLAW

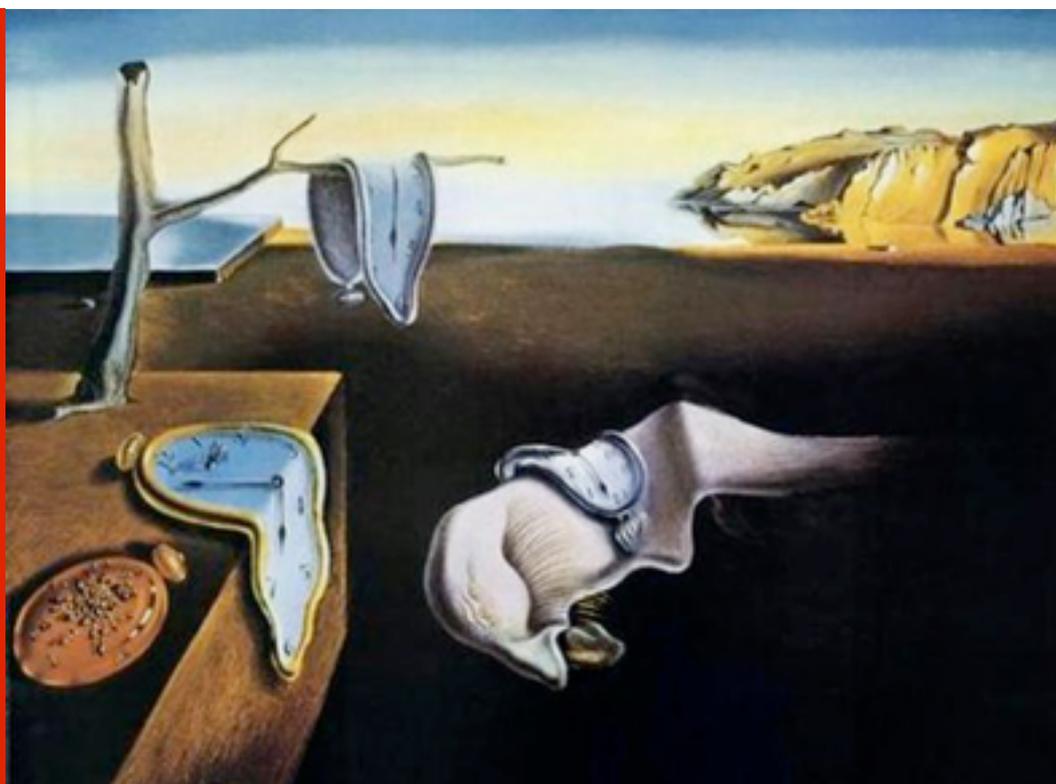
JOEL ROBBINS

ANNE-CHRISTINE
TAYLOR

CLAUDE IMBERT

CARLO SEVERI

GIOVANNI DA COL



For long time ethics was studied as a doctrine of conducts, yet recent studies of the interactional context of ethical acts have provided a fertile field for anthropological insights. Part of Carlo Severi and Giovanni da Col's seminar series *Anthropologie de l'Imagination*, running at Musée the Quai Branly since 2014, which sets itself against some of the de-humanizing trends affecting the discipline, this symposium aims to explore some lines of inquiry advocating a return to a humanist study of the relationship between value and imagination and their interactional pragmatic logics. Inspired by Marx's famous passage in *Das Kapital* on the human architect who, unlike the best of the bees, must raise a building in his own imagination before it is raised in reality - in this symposium we approach "imagination" as an active force, embedded in creative projects of action—i.e., as immanent in a reality that is constantly being shaped by it rather than being transcendent from it. This in turn means seeing what we are used to calling "imaginaries" as, above all, the effects of pursuing forms of value; as such, they tend to take on a certain hypothetical, "subjunctive," "uncertain" or "as-if" quality. We also follow Joel Robbins' invitation to revisit imagination in its relation to anthropological idioms of moral value and notions of "good" as something that may lie beyond the given and the taken-for-granted, "something that must be imaginatively conceived, not simply perceived" (2013: 457). Taking as immediate inspiration James Laidlaw's (2013) and Webb Keane's (2015) interventions on the subject, this symposium aims to ask: How are imaginative techniques cultivated and practiced as a ground for ethical action in different traditions (i.e. Buddhism)? How are ethical values negotiated during interactional and ritual moments? How do people anticipate the uncertainty of the interactional context through different imaginative ethical strategies? What are the limits of the ethical imagination, especially in relation to the recent interest in comparative theories of mind and the opacity of different people's intentions (cf. Stasch 2008; Duranti 2014)? How does one imaginatively trust or mistrust other people's "sincere" intentions or agency, and orientate and act through them? What are the properties of ethical imagination in terms of content, agency and personal commitment?



MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY

là où dialoguent les cultures

PROGRAM

14.30-16.30

Introduction: Giovanni da Col (SOAS) and Carlo Severi (EHESS)

Webb Keane (University of Michigan), From First to Third Person and Back Again

Discussion and interventions by James Laidlaw (Cambridge), Anne-Christine Taylor (CNRS), Claude Imbert (École normale supérieure), Carlo Severi (EHESS), Giovanni da Col (SOAS)=

Questions and Answers

16.30-17.00 Break

17.00-19.00

Joel Robbins (University of Cambridge), Opacity of Mind, Imagining Others, and the Coordination of Action: Melanesianist Reflections on the Ethics of Trust

Discussion and interventions by James Laidlaw (Cambridge), Anne-Christine Taylor (CNRS), Claude Imbert (École normale supérieure), Carlo Severi (EHESS), Giovanni da Col (SOAS)=

Questions and Answers

Final discussion

ABSTRACTS

From First to Third Person and Back Again

Webb Keane
(University of Michigan)

Marx's invocation of the contrast between the bee and the architect anticipates a key feature of the anthropological concept of culture, that humans are defined by their relative freedom from determinism, and that this principle of freedom derives from their conscious awareness. The ability to imagine a structure before raising it, as Marx puts it, depends on a capacity for taking some distance on immediate experience, what I call the third person stance. Yet the concept of practice, which is equally crucial to anthropological thought, emphasizes the ways humans are embedded in the first person perspective. Certain difficulties emerge from each of these approaches. The culture concept can be carried to a point of debilitating particularism. The concept of practice can undermine the very notion of human self-awareness. Both problems play a critical role in the recent ethical turn in anthropology. This talk will draw on my book, *Ethical Life*, to sketch out the relations between first and third person stances, with particular attention to the argument that we can gain more ethnographic insight by taking the claims of "theory of mind" as a significant limit to the so-called "opacity doctrine" of certain societies, than we would from a strong social-constructivist approach.

Opacity of Mind, Imagining Others, and the Coordination of Action: Melanesianist Reflections on the Ethics of Trust

Joel Robbins
(University of Cambridge)

This paper considers the role of the problem of coordinating action in academic theoretical constructions of the necessity of mind-reading and trust. Looking at one case of a group in which opacity doctrines are strong, it considers local notions and valuations of coordinated action and trust in order to suggest that theories of the universal nature of trust and coordination as problem in the construction of social life require further investigation.