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# ART AS COMPLEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY\*

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## *abstract*

*Art and aesthetic experience, as well as the nature of depiction, representations and images, are crucial topics in the ongoing multifaceted debate at the interface between philosophy of perception, aesthetics, philosophy of mind and neuroscience.*

*This issue collects the papers presented at San Raffaele Spring School of Philosophy and International Conference 2017 and investigates the mentioned topics, together with other related ones, by locating them in the more general framework concerning the relation between perception and cognition.*

*In this introductory chapter, we provide some sketches of this multidisciplinary field of inquiry together with an overview of the materials collected in the issue.*

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## *keywords*

*aesthetic experience, art, pictures, perception*

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- 1. Introduction** This special issue of *Phenomenology and Mind* collects the proceedings of the San Raffaele Spring School of Philosophy and International Conference 2017 (SRSSP 2017) “Perception and Aesthetic Experience. Starting from Noë’s *Strange Tools. Art and Human Nature*”, which was held at Vita-Salute San Raffaele University – Milan, from May 22<sup>nd</sup> to May 24<sup>th</sup> 2017. The School was jointly organized by the research centers PERSONA and CRESA, in collaboration with the Doctoral School of the Faculty of Philosophy of San Raffaele University. SRSSP 2017 hosted papers presented both by invited speakers and by contributors selected by a double-blind peer review process. In addition, this issue collects two papers by the guest editors.
- SRSSP 2017 aimed at fostering the debate on perception and aesthetic experience, which is at the intersection between philosophy of perception, aesthetics, philosophy of mind and neuroscience.
- Aesthetic experience turns out to be a crucial topic worth dealing with for all these disciplines. Indeed, it can be fruitfully analyzed on the background of various theories of perception, in order to specify differences and similarities (if any) between perception in general and aesthetic experience (or, arguably, aesthetic perception) in particular. An analysis of the latter helps also fostering a deeper investigation on the nature of depiction and representation, which are crucial topics in contemporary debates on aesthetics and philosophy of perception. Moreover, aesthetic experience constitutes one of the most complex and multifaceted human experiences, arguably based on perceptual, affective and cognitive abilities. It encompasses a wide range of phenomena, from the experience of the aesthetic aspects of the everyday world to the appreciation of art and its works. Investigating the main traits of this peculiar attitude towards the world is therefore of the utmost importance for all the disciplines that are specifically engaged with the study of the mind and its abilities, such as neuroscience and philosophy of mind.
- Against this background, SRSSP 2017 brought different approaches together, aiming at shedding light on perception, the role of pictures in shaping our access to the world, the nature of representation and its difference (if any) from depiction, the plausibility of the neuroscientific approaches to art and aesthetic experience, the nature of works of art themselves. Ranging on such various topics, the papers here collected have been organized into three sections, based on the main issues dealt with and on the methodological approaches used.

The first session of this issue collects papers that variously deal with Alva Noë's theoretical proposal on perception, aesthetic experience and art. One of the main topics discussed in this section is the enactive theory of perception presented by Noë in several of his works (Noë, 2004, 2009; O'Regan & Noë, 2001). However, the focus is also on the account of art, artistic practice, and aesthetic experience that Noë puts forward in his book *Strange Tools. Art and Human Nature* (Hill & Wang, New York, 2015). One of the main ideas that Noë defends in the book is that artistic practices are *re-organizational* ones, that is, they are practices by means of which we put on display and investigate several *organizational* activities of ours, such as dancing or making pictures. As far as art, according to this interpretation, investigates our practices, it also investigates ourselves. This idea is very well summarized in the following passage by Noë: "Works of art put our making practices [...] on display. Art puts us on display. Art unveils us to ourselves" (Noë, 2015, p. 101). Besides dealing with this issue, the book also addresses some of the main topics of the author's previous production, namely: the nature of perception and the enactive proposal, the nature of pictures and representations, the extended thesis about our minds and cognitive processes, the place of neuroscience in the study of the mind, and so on. This session, therefore, collects papers that mainly deal with this debate, broadly considered. In the opening paper of this section, thought as an introduction and critical discussion of some of the main topics investigated by Noë's *Strange Tools*, Forlè focuses on Noë's account of aesthetic experience. She stresses the need to better clarify the relation between the author's conceptualization of aesthetic experience as *contemplative* and *detached* seeing (Noë, 2015, pp. 51-52) and the enactive theory of perception the author endorses. Moreover, she addresses the topic of the objective correlate of aesthetic experience, introducing the notion of "tertiary qualities" and claiming that these are crucial features of aesthetic objects. In his invited paper, Noë comes back to some of the main topics dealt with in *Strange Tools*. In particular, he provides further support in favor of the conceptual distinction he drew there between first-order and second-order activities, and, accordingly, between picture-making and making of pictorial artworks. Artistic practices in general are proposed as the second-order activities that put many of our first-order activities on display. However, in this paper the author also argues for the idea that, even though conceptually distinguishable, first-order and second-order activities are usually *ineliminably entangled* and, on this ground, he presents the topic of *entanglement*. The paper by Mortu also deals with the account of art and aesthetic experience presented in *Strange Tools*. Arguing that the enactive approach defended in this book has strong affinities with some recent art-historical approaches, the author maintains that the extended mind thesis, which is implied in these approaches, fails to capture important aspects of the cognitive underpinnings of artistic practices. Moreover, Mortu calls into question Noë's conception of the role of perception in aesthetic appreciation. The enactive and the extended mind theses are at the heart of Wu's paper too. Wu discusses the enactivist attempt to entail the hypothesis of extended conscious mind (ECM). She argues that the enactivist description at the personal level is still open to an internalist challenge at the sub-personal level. In response to this challenge, the author suggests combining enactivism with the concept of predictive processing, in order to delineate a sub-personal characterization of conscious experience that is compatible with the enactivist interpretation at the personal level. In the last paper of this session, Pace Giannotta presents an enactive theory of color that implies a form of color relationism. Likening this view to Husserl's phenomenology of perception, he argues that it constitutes a better alternative to both color subjectivism and color objectivism. He also extends the enactive and phenomenological account of color to the more general topic of the epistemological and ontological status of sensory qualities (qualia).

## 2. Contents

### 2.1 Aesthetic Experience and Enactivism

### 2.2 Neuroscience, Aesthetics, and Embodiment

The second session of this issue is devoted to investigating how contemporary neuroscience addresses the topics of aesthetic experience, perception, and cognitive abilities. A specific interest is directed to those neuroscientific theories that underline the way in which the brain areas and circuits that map one's body are crucially involved not just in the preparation and execution of actions, but also in cognitive abilities, such as (aesthetic) perception, language or semantic memory (Barsalou, 2008; Gallese & Di Dio, 2012; Tettamanti *et al.*, 2005).

This research line is of great interest for the purposes of the present issue since the role of the body and its movements in perception and experience is a point that also the enactive approach presented and discussed in the first session stresses. Yet, the background is quite different and enactivists are generally skeptical about the neuroscientific approaches to the human mind and, more specifically, about the way neuroscience addresses the issue of the role of the body in accounting for cognitive abilities.

The main aim of this section is to present some neuroscientific models addressing these topics, in order to let divergences and, possibly, affinities with other accounts emerge.

In his invited paper, Gallese's main aim is to address the question concerning the role that images and image-making play for human beings, focusing in particular on what makes images so special for us. This issue is investigated through contemporary neuroscientific method, underlining why and how neuroscience can investigate our relationship with art and aesthetics. In this framework, a new model of perception and cognition is defended – that is, embodied simulation – which highlights the constitutive relationship between brain-body and the reception of human creative expressions.

Fingerhut tackles the issue of the enactivists's skepticism about neuroscience more directly, focusing in particular on the debate on neuroaesthetics. The author reviews recent enactive approaches to art and aesthetic experience, such as the ones by Hutto, Gallagher, Noë. He argues that the dismissal of empirical aesthetics that all these accounts endorse is misguided in several respects.

Concluding this session, the invited paper by Conca and Tettamanti focuses on the involvement of sensory-motor brain systems in semantic memory tasks. The authors argue that semantic memory for an object encompasses multi-modal knowledge gained through one's personal experience over her lifetime and coded in grounded sensory-motor brain systems. They show how linguistic access to semantic memories in verbal format relies on the functional coupling between perisylvian language regions and the grounded brain systems implied by our experience with the concept's referents.

### 2.3 Art, Depiction, and Perception

The third session of this issue is mainly devoted to two interrelated topics that have already come out in the previous sessions as crucially involved in the discourse on art and aesthetic experience, namely: pictures (and depiction) and perception.

Pictures raise interesting questions for both aesthetics and philosophy of perception specifically for their ability to present objects that are not there in the flesh. How can pictures do that? What is the actual content of a picture? Is it actually presented or rather just represented? These issues turn out to be strictly connected also to the debate about perception, its nature, and the relationship between picture perception and perception in general (Nanay, 2016).

These are the main topics that the papers collected in this session variously address.

In their invited paper, Kulvicki and Nanay argue that the fact that communication has become more and more pictorial not only has produced a deep change in our communicative practices, but it also has changed the world about which we communicate. Increasingly, the authors say, we are making a world that is *worth* depicting using the tools we now possess. In their paper, the authors consider one example of this phenomenon, that is *trompe l'oeil* street art. They

maintain that more and more of this seems to be produced with the intention that it is seen primarily in pictures. It seems that anything someone makes to be seen is made with good photography potential in mind, so that the pictures of the work become more interesting than the pieces seen in the flesh.

The phenomenon of *trompe l'oeil* that Kulvicki and Nanay analyze is crucial in the debate about picture perception, depiction and representations. In his paper, Ferretti considers one of the most debated questions in this field of inquiry, namely: whether, in perceiving an object in a picture, we see only the depicted scene or, rather, simultaneously, both the depicted scene and the picture's surface. After having presented the two main competing views on this topic – the 'simultaneous account of picture perception' (SA) and the 'non-simultaneous account of picture perception' (NA) –, Ferretti provides an argument in support of SA.

The notion of twofoldness, discussed by Ferretti in connection with picture perception, recurs in Arienti's paper too. Arienti considers Walton's definition of pictorial experience as a *visual game of make-believe* and maintains that, for twofoldness to be preserved in this characterization, Walton needs to characterise visual make-believe as involving a propositional imagining. However, Arienti argues that such a strategy does not seem to be successful and shows how in his view Walton's account is ultimately unable to secure the twofold character of pictorial recognition.

Keeping the focus on picture perception, the invited paper by Voltolini has two main aims. The first is to show that picture perception is specifically presentational, hence specifically perceptual. By providing a reinterpretation of Richard Wollheim's conception of seeing-in, Voltolini claims that picture perception is presentational for it only ascribes the presence of the picture's subject in its content, but not in its mode. This amounts to a knowingly illusory perceptual experience of such a presence. The author's second aim is to show how this presentational specificity does not prevent the picture from being properly presentational of the properties that are ascribed, within its perception, to its subject.

The invited paper by Young and Calabi focuses on a specific aspect of some pictures, that is the fact of their being *pictures as of movement*. It is natural, the authors claim, to describe many pictures as of movement. However, how should this "of" be understood? Is movement depicted or merely represented by, or suggested by, pictures? In their paper, the authors argue that movement can be depicted and not merely represented and characterize their view of movement depiction as a version of Hopkins's experienced resemblance theory of perception.

The paper by Di Bona deals with another specific aspect of perception, that is the perception of sound sources and their spatial properties. The author expands the application of a model for the spatial experience of sound sources to musical sounds by analyzing how we experience space in musical listening. In order to do that, Di Bona briefly summarizes how we experience the spatial properties of sound sources in the case of environmental sounds; then, she mentions the different kinds of physical space we can hear in the case of musical listening.

Finally, she analyzes two compositions by Luigi Nono to show how the model of the experience of environmental sound sources applies also to these musical cases.

Concluding this session, the paper by Sacchi deals with the issues of perceptual contact and perceptual awareness. In particular, the focus of the paper concerns how perceiving an object makes it possible to think about it in a very direct way. She puts forward her proposal by critically discussing both Gareth Evans's (1982) account of the role of perception in singular thoughts and Michelle Montague's (2016) recent criticism of that account. By opting for a characterization that makes room for appearances as objective and mind-independent features of objects, the author aims at putting forward an account of acquaintance close to Russell's than Evans's was, while avoiding the pitfalls of the sense-datum theory that led Evans to part company from Russell's characterization of such a notion.

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