

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BEAUTY AND CHANGE

Aesthetic Experience and the Drive for Knowledge

GIORGIO AMENDOLA FOUNDATION, TURIN, ITALY

16-18 OCTOBER 2025



Book of Abstracts

Fourth International Conference on Beauty and Change

Turin, Italy, 16-18 October 2025

Book of Abstracts

Scientific Committee:

Carola Barbero (University of Turin)
Alessandro Bertinetto (University of Turin)
Elvira Brattico (Aarhus University & University of Bari Aldo Moro)
Fabrizio Calzavarini (University of Turin)
Maura Crepaldi (University of Bergamo)
Alice Cancer (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)
Filippo Contesi (University of Cagliari)
Jacopo Frascaroli (University of Turin)
Irene Ronga (University of Turin)
Maria Luisa Rusconi (University of Bergamo)
Pietro Sarasso (University of Turin)
Sander Van de Cruys (University of Antwerp)

Conference website:



The conference is organised by:



BIP Research Group
University of Turin



Fondazione
Giorgio Amendola

The conference is supported by:



Contents

Keynote Talks

Edward A. Vessel, <i>Pleasure from Understanding</i>	7
Diana Omigie, <i>From Epistemic Emotions to Self-Transcendence in the Experience of Music</i>	8
Martin Skov, <i>Towards a Sensory Valuation Account of Visual Liking</i>	9
Francesco Poli, <i>Curiosity and the Dynamics of Human Exploration</i>	10
Elisabeth Schellekens, <i>Aesthetic Discovery and Seeking to Understand</i>	11
Eva Specker, <i>Aesthetic Experience: Cherry on Top or Key Player? An Empirical Approach</i>	12

Parallel Sessions

Day 1

Christopher Earley, <i>Autonomous Wonder: The Case for Process Aesthetic Cognitivism</i>	13
Iris Vidmar Jovanović, <i>Aesthetic Experience and Literary Cognitivism: A Compatibilist Approach</i>	14
Irene Romero Suarez, <i>Is Factual Knowledge Artistically Relevant in Fiction?</i>	15
Rebecca Zuccotti, <i>Aesthetic Understanding: Art as a Laboratory of Essential Examples</i>	16
Carola Barbero & Fabrizio Calzavarini, <i>Reading with Eyes, Ears, and Fingers</i>	17
Veronika Knedlikova Wankova, <i>The Epistemic Power of the Miraculous: Visual Strategies in Early Modern Religious Art</i>	18
Anita Merlini, <i>Optical Encounters: A Philosophical Account of the Epistemic Role of the Seeing Eye</i>	19
Sam Bennett, <i>Exploring Care Aesthetics Through Visible Mending and Aging</i>	20
Alberto Voltolini & Pietro Kobau, <i>On the Intrinsic Value of Artworks</i>	21
Ancuta Mortu, <i>Learning from Remote Art: A Schema-Based Account</i>	22
Elsa Saliba, <i>Prototypes, Heresy and the Ontology of Pioneering Artworks</i>	23
Jerzy Luty, <i>Epistemic Framing of Aesthetic Experience: How Knowledge about the Artist and the Context of Creation Shape the Perception of Artworks</i>	24
Patrick Hayes, <i>Blow to the Art: Epistemic Access to the Self through Aesthetic Engagement</i>	25

Beatrice Sofia Vitale, <i>Reading and Interpretation of the Self: Theoretical-Practical Implications of the Interconnection of the Poetic World and the World of Action Following the Poetic Reflections of Paul Ricoeur</i>	26
Ori Grossman, <i>Shaping the Classical Concert Experience: How Musical Style and Sequence Correlate with Audience Satisfaction</i>	27
Victor Popa, <i>Can Aesthetic Talk Be of Any Use in Science?</i>	28

Day 2

Joerg Fingerhut, <i>Aesthetic Emotions Are Epistemic Emotions</i>	29
Claudia Cano, <i>Reconciling Curiosity and Aesthetic Disinterestedness</i>	30
Francesca Piovesan, <i>Curiosity in Language Processing: Insights from LLMs</i>	31
Magda Stanová, <i>Thrills Around the Border of Not Knowing and Knowing</i>	32
Gemma Schino, <i>Emotions and Sense-Making in Conversations of Art Experiences</i>	33
Isabel Heckmann, <i>Changing Judgement, Changing Preferences: The Influence of Higher-Order Evidence on Aesthetic Judgement in Cases of Peer Disagreement</i>	34
Jodi Miller, <i>Audience-Led Performances</i>	35
Antonello Caravelli, <i>Shaping Fiction with Participative Imagination</i>	36
Marta Benenti, <i>Aesthetic Experiences Teach Us Emotions Through Affective Affordances</i>	37
Efi K. Kyprianidou, <i>On the Epistemic Role of Moral Disgust in Fiction: What Can We Learn from Affective or Empathetic Engagement with Vicious Perspectives</i>	38
Tanushree Agrawal & Anna Bruns, <i>The Effect of Perceived Emotion on Art Preference is Mediated by Feelings of Being Moved</i>	39
Ryan Joseph Slaby, <i>The Posterior Cerebellum's Role in Feeling Moved by Visual Art: A Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation Approach</i>	40
Luca Marchetti, <i>Other Minds and the Aesthetic Value of Animals</i>	41
Laura Malinin, <i>Architectural Aesthetics and User Creativity: Bridging Embodied and Neuro-Architecture Approaches</i>	43
Samrawit Ayele, <i>Curb Your Curiosity: The Role of Processing Fluency on Curiosity Judgments and Eye Movements for Internet Memes and Mooney Images</i>	44
Mara Stockner, <i>Motor Fluency and Likeability: Some Data from the QWERTY Paradigm</i>	45

Day 3

Martina Stratilková, <i>Musical Profundity: Where Phenomenology and Analytic Philosophy Meet</i>	46
---	----

Dana Swarbrick, <i>Being in Concert: The Effects of Audience Participation on Motion, Emotion, and Connectedness</i>	47
Matthew Heeney, <i>The Form of Aesthetic Understanding</i>	48
Milica Czerny Urban, <i>Responsibility in Art</i>	49
Alexandra Victoria Alvarez, <i>What is in an Aura? Emotion Sharing Between Contemporary Artists and Viewers of the Post Digital Age in Original and Digital Contexts</i>	50
Maximilian Kenzo Molitor, <i>Experiencing Art and Learning about it Using VR-Replicas</i>	51
Marta Mondellini, <i>Designing for Motivation: Development of a VR Application Based on Hedonic Visual Stimuli</i>	52
Anca Simion, <i>The Vanishing Script: Handwriting as an Aesthetic and Epistemic Practice in the Digital Age</i>	53
Natalia Pérez Juncal, <i>The Unknowable Core: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Aesthetic Experience and the Drive for Knowledge</i>	54
Rona Cohen, <i>From Epistemic Doubt to Aesthetic Truth: Revisiting the Case of Anxiety</i>	55
Hilary Serra, <i>Biodiverse Nature Videos with Instrumental Music Promote Recovery from Induced Stress</i>	56
Marta Pizzolante, <i>Neurophenomenology, PNEI, and Epigenetics: A Framework for Understanding the Health and Cognitive Benefits of Art and Aesthetic Experiences</i>	57
Gunter Kreutz, <i>On the Origins and Consequences of Natural Play and Performing Arts Practices</i> ...58	
Avani Sanghvi, <i>From Play to Knowledge: The Aesthetic Childhood</i>	59
Olivier Penacchio, <i>From Nutrients to Art: Hedonic Foraging, a Common Basis for Motivated Behaviour</i>	60
Luis E. Morales, <i>Individual Differences in How Category Learning Shapes Aesthetic Appeal</i>	61

Posters

Aida Anderson, <i>Art as Epistemic Practice: Olga Markova’s Musaget and Post-Soviet Literary Authority</i>	62
Adrian Beil, <i>“I feel you”: Emotion Sharing between Artists and Viewers in Original and Digital Contexts</i>	63
Sandra Kay, <i>Elegant Problems: The Role of a Personal Aesthetic Factor in Creative Thought</i>	64
Irene Lozzi, <i>Turning Off SEEKING: (An-)Aesthetics of Depression</i>	66
Mapi Lucia, <i>Meta-Museum</i>	67

Letizia Masia, <i>Game as a Ceremonial Form of Aesthetic Experience: A Dialogue Between Simone Weil and Maria Lai</i>	68
Francesca Camilla Mattioli, <i>Emotion and Attention in the Aesthetic Response</i>	69
Federica Piccoli, <i>Neurophysiological Responses to Digitalized and Digital Art: A Pilot Study on Generations Z and Y in Virtual Museums</i>	70
Enrico Selini, <i>Aesthetics and Creativity in Neurological Patients: Validation of a New E-Health Rehabilitation Protocol (CLICk)</i>	71
Mehjabin Shirin, <i>Skin Tone Colour Perception and Facial Attractiveness Among the Indian Population: Quantifying the Effects of Different Colours and Facial Features</i>	72
Eero Suorsa, <i>Plastic Dolls: Immanuel Kant, Aesthetic Practices and the Modern Body</i>	73
Erdem Taskiran, <i>An Unsupervised Machine Learning Approach to Investigating Structural Brain Differences in Professional Dancers: Gray-White Matter Fusion Analysis with tIVA</i>	74
Niels van Velzen, <i>Studying Wonderment by Designing for Awe</i>	75

Keynote Talks

Pleasure from Understanding

Edward A. Vessel

City College, The City University of New York

evessel@ccny.cuny.edu

Is there a common element to the experiences of finding beauty in a painting, of "aha" moments of sudden insight, and of satisfying our curiosity about an unknown fact? All three are examples of when humans experience "pleasure from understanding." While there is a large literature exploring the role of reward and pleasure in learning, very little is understood about how and why comprehension itself is experienced as pleasurable. The learning theory of aesthetics suggests that aesthetic value is an affective learning signal that is fundamentally personal: how an object impacts a viewer depends on how that object relates to what a person knows about the visual world: is it familiar? Is it unique? We hypothesize that aesthetic value is highest for stimuli that are on the edge of what a person knows in a "zone of learning": relatable to what we know but offering the promise of learning something new. In this talk, I summarize studies from my lab that have sought to better understand this phenomenon. I suggest that there are no inherently positively hedonically marked features: rather, it is the informational content of any feature dimension, and the uncertainty reduction afforded by a stimulus, that predicts aesthetic appeal. These evaluations are sculpted by experience and are thus highly subjective and individual. Using computational models, we find that affective signals predictive of aesthetic appeal can be extracted from the activation profiles of models trained only on object recognition, linking representation and appeal. Using fMRI, EEG and physiological measures, we find evidence that aesthetic value is indeed separable from reward derived from (monetary) reinforcement, and that it is possible to decode signals related to curiosity, liking and understanding during experiences of "aha" perceptual insight with visual art.

From Epistemic Emotions to Self-Transcendence in the Experience of Music

Diana Omigie

Goldsmiths, University of London

diana.omigie@gold.ac.uk

How do artworks elicit the profound effects they have on us? Over recent decades, several influential theories and frameworks have been developed to account for the aesthetic experience, often emphasizing cognitive, affective, and decision-making processes. While these models offer valuable insights, few provide a comprehensive account of how such processes might give rise to rarer—but highly significant—outcomes of art engagement, such as self-transcendence, transportation, or transformative experiences.

In this talk, I explore the possibility that empirically traceable links exist between the cognitive processing of musical structure and self-transcendent states. I will present research that identifies potential pathways from auditory cognition and epistemic emotions (such as surprise and curiosity) to altered states of consciousness, expanded awareness, and open-minded thinking. This work draws from diverse methodological approaches, including computational analysis of music, EEG, and immersive virtual reality (VR), and integrates perspectives across cognitive psychology, affective neuroscience, and music perception.

By examining how structural features of music may interact with listener expectations and emotional responses, I propose a framework for understanding how encounters with art can lead to meaningful psychological shifts. I conclude by discussing the broader implications of developing a mechanistic understanding of arts-induced self-transcendence—for both psychological science and the design of transformative cultural experiences.

Towards a Sensory Valuation Account of Visual Liking

Martin Skov

Copenhagen University Hospital Hvidovre

mskov01@gmail.com

The sensory valuation account (Nadal & Skov, 2025) is a theoretical framework for understanding how liking and disliking emerges from engagement with sensory objects. In contrast to the standard paradigm of aesthetic appreciation, it posits that liking and disliking of any kind of sensory object—including works of art—is the product of hedonic evaluation, a domain-general mechanism for the assessment of the survival value of the sensory environment. Hedonic evaluation seeks to establish how rewarding or punishing a stimulus is by taking into account the evaluating agent's current needs and behavioral plans, its previous experience with the stimulus, including whether it was previously experienced as pleasurable or displeasurable, its behavioral options, cost of approaching or avoiding the stimulus, etc. Evidence from neuroscientific research suggests that hedonic evaluation recruits a complex pattern of neural processes associated with perception, memory, executive control, interoception, and reward in order to represent these factors. However, how these processes work together remains largely unknown. In this talk, I will present results from recent work that cast light on the way neural processes related to visual encoding, object recognition, and explicit judgment, in conjunction with mechanisms in the reward circuitry, contribute to the computation of visual liking.

Curiosity and the Dynamics of Human Exploration

Francesco Poli

University of Cambridge

francesco.poli@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk

What drives our curiosity remains an elusive and hotly debated issue. Although uncertainty, prediction error, learning progress and other candidates have all been proposed as factors which might be fuelling curiosity, an integrative account is still lacking. I advance a model-based framework that traces the moment-by-moment dynamics of these putative drivers and links them quantitatively to behaviour. A series of learning and exploration tasks will pit these drivers against one another, revealing how the importance of different drivers shifts across development and among individuals—and why embracing such variability is critical for a more complete understanding of curiosity. Finally, I apply the same model-based approach to aesthetics, operationalising beauty in computational terms. This parallel analysis might illuminate the interplay between curiosity and beauty, and opens fresh terrain for new empirical research.

Aesthetic Discovery and Seeking to Understand

Elisabeth Schellekens

Uppsala University

elisabeth.schellekens@filosofi.uu.se

A cornerstone of the noetic conception of aesthetic experience is the claim that such experience is first and foremost a kind of explorative thought-process guided by the object of attention's aesthetic character (Schellekens, 2024). On this approach, aesthetic value gives us reason to engage in a series of contemplative and reflective processes during which we rely not only on our perceptual, emotional and imaginative abilities, but also on our capacities for sense-making, problem-solving, deciphering, hypothesizing and theory-building. Aesthetic experience is conceived in terms of a seeking to understand whereby, through a process characterised here as a form of discovery, we come to grasp how various aspects of the world are connected to one another, see some phenomenon or character in a new light, or find a novel way of encountering our environment.

A distinction key to what I shall refer to as the 'learning from art' model will be drawn, namely between understanding the object of aesthetic appreciation itself (or learning about), and understanding that which the object in question addresses, represents or sets out to convey (or learning through). Although important, this distinction will be held to be too narrow to fully explain the role and scope of understanding in connection with aesthetic experience in general. An alternative way of accounting for aesthetic understanding is offered, building on the idea that the epistemic benefits in question are not so much the consequences of specific aesthetic encounters with art gained in the aftermath of our aesthetic experience of them, as inherently built into what aesthetic experience is. To support this claim, we will lean on some German Enlightenment philosophers' attempts to establish the underlying principles of the *ars inveniendi*, and how they defined the role of wit or 'thought skills' in aesthetic experience. The idea that aesthetic experience is both epistemically motivating and epistemically creative (Schellekens, 2022) will be unpacked.

References

- Schellekens, E. (2022). Aesthetic experience and intellectual pursuits. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 96, 1, 123-146.
- Schellekens, E. (2024). Thinking the aesthetic: Towards a noetic conception of aesthetic experience and value. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 58, 2.

Aesthetic Experience: Cherry on Top or Key Player? An Empirical Approach

Eva Specker

Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen

e.specker@iwm-tuebingen.de

In this talk, I will investigate two main questions: 1) How can we learn from aesthetic experiences? and 2) What can we learn from aesthetic experiences? To do so, I will first briefly discuss — what IS an aesthetic experience and present my view on this age-old question.

I will argue that aesthetics can contribute to learning through being a useful cue in our environment for learning potential—which captures our attention and shapes our engagement with the environment allowing us to effectively learn from our experiences. I will argue that what we can learn from aesthetic experiences goes beyond factual knowledge—and that aesthetic experiences allow us to create meaning in the world and develop socio-epistemic skills. As such, I will conclude that aesthetics (may) play a key role in how we understand the world around us—and how we engage with it. Helping us not only to survive, but giving us something to live for.

Parallel Sessions

Day 1

Autonomous Wonder: The Case for Process Aesthetic Cognitivism

Christopher Earley
University of Edinburgh
christopher.earley@liverpool.ac.uk

Within the philosophy of art, aesthetic cognitivists have argued that the aesthetic features of artworks can be regarded as sources of knowledge. In this presentation, I aim to argue for a novel version of this claim. I argue that artworks can also prompt audiences to aesthetically appreciate their own activity of inquiring.

To motivate my approach, I observe that many artworks require some degree of audience participation in order to be properly aesthetically appreciated. When we engage in this kind of participation, we appreciate not just the aesthetic properties of the objects that constitute the artwork, but also the aesthetic properties of our own activity. Following C. Thi Nguyen, we can call this ‘process aesthetics’, which can be contrasted with the more traditional ‘object aesthetics’, in which attention is placed only on an object and not our own actions with the object.

I develop an aesthetic cognitivist variation on this theme. First, I observe that many artworks do not simply present us with knowledge, but rather with open-ended prompts to inquire in certain ways – e.g. questions, hypotheses, or even problems and ambiguities. To bring inquiry to a close, the audience must necessarily take some further steps on their own, developing their own further inferences, tests, questions, connections, and conclusions. I claim that each of these ‘moves’ in the process of inquiry can be experienced aesthetically – we can find an inference graceful, a question wonderful, or a conclusion profound. By prompting us to act in epistemic autonomous ways, artworks can get us to not only participate in the process of inquiry, but also to experience our own cognitive activity in an aesthetic light. I conclude by proposing that this form of ‘process aesthetic cognitivism’ can, in turn, have important epistemic benefits for inquirers.

Aesthetic Experience and Literary Cognitivism: A Compatibilist Approach

Iris Vidmar Jovanović
University of Rijeka
ividmar@ffri.uniri.hr

One common argument directed against aesthetic cognitivism – roughly, the view that art is cognitively valuable and that we can learn various sorts of things from it and expand our cognitive capacities – points to the aesthetic aspects of artworks and their role in generating cognitive benefits. The claim is that our engagements with a work of art demand aesthetic rather than epistemic stance, and that the two are incompatible – in paying attention to the work’s aesthetic features we lose sight of its epistemic ones, whereas in attending to the work’s epistemic dimension, we are no longer treating it as a work of art.

My aim here is to argue against these claims and to explore the relevance of an artwork’s aesthetic qualities and the aesthetic experience that we undergo in the process of engagement with the work, for the work’s capacity to engage us cognitively, inspire learning and contribute to our epistemic aims. Relying on literary examples, I first analyze the phenomenology of aesthetic experience to show how it relates to readers’ attention, belief processing, emotional response and pleasure, arguing ultimately for what I call the compatibilist approach: the view that aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of a work are compatible and mutually reinforcing. I rely on research in cognitive sciences to explain our literary engagements, bringing it in relation to philosophical work on aesthetic experience. In conclusion, I show that the problem of learning from art matters not only within philosophical debates, but, more importantly, within our cultural and educational context. Understanding the interaction between aesthetic and cognitive dimension of our literary experiences is therefore a crucial step in recognizing the important education benefits of literature, as well as those that may be in some way corruptive

Is Factual Knowledge Artistically Relevant in Fiction?

Irene Romero Suarez
Birkbeck, University of London
iromer04@student.bbk.ac.uk

Aesthetic cognitivists claim that we can get knowledge from fiction and that this knowledge is not only cognitively valuable but also artistically relevant. Cognitivists have focused mainly on how experiential knowledge, moral knowledge, self-knowledge, etc., enhance both the cognitive and the artistic value of fiction. A work like *To Kill a Mockingbird* seems to be both cognitively and artistically valuable, to the extent that it shows moral profundity. Less attention has been paid to propositional factual knowledge, which some works also transmit, and that tends to be set aside in these debates as less important.

Some cognitivists like Oliver Conolly and Bashar Haydar (2007), while attempting to defend cognitivism against the anticognitivist critiques, consider that not every kind of knowledge we get from fiction is artistically relevant. They argue that literature is well suited to communicate moral-psychological knowledge, and thus that this knowledge is artistically relevant, whereas factual knowledge does not contribute to artistic value.

The aim of my talk is to argue, contra Conolly and Haydar, that factual knowledge is not only artistically relevant in fiction but also an artistic merit. I claim that the transmission of factual knowledge is an artistic achievement. I proceed by dividing the talk into three parts. I start by giving a brief overview of the cognitivist and anticognitivist debate to set the scene to later examine Conolly and Haydar's cognitivist account. I challenge Conolly and Haydar's thesis by arguing that artworks, including works of literary fiction, are to be regarded as achievements and that factual accuracy can be an artistically relevant achievement in a work. I further argue that transmitting factual knowledge is not only artistically relevant but also an artistic merit.

References

Conolly, Oliver, and Bashar. Haydar. 2007. Literature, Knowledge, and Value. *Philosophy and Literature* 31 (1): 111–24.

Aesthetic Understanding: Art as a Laboratory of Essential Examples

Rebecca Zuccotti
University of Turin
rebecca.zuccotti@edu.unito.it

Those who believe that art is a source of knowledge have to face the *dilemma of paraphrase* (Livingston, 2006): assuming that we learn something from art, on the first horn, if the knowledge supplied by the work can be paraphrased then attending the artwork is not necessary; on the second horn, if a work of art cannot be paraphrased then it is questionable to consider it as knowledge. I will show how the dilemma can be solved by the use of a certain conception of paraphrase that contains *indexical predicates* (Terrone, 2016). *Indexicals* (Heal, 1997) in fact, are the only kind of linguistic device that allow us to outline the relevant features showed in a work of art without losing its singularity and without giving up on it. Hence, art can enhance our *understanding* (Gibson, 2008) of the world by providing a cognitively significant encounter with it. Moreover, *Aesthetic understanding* (Elgin, 1993) is strictly connected with *exemplification* considered as a central mode of symbolization (Goodman, 1973). This device is used both in art and science in order to outline certain features of a concept/phenomenon that we are referring to with the use of an *example*: both works of art and experiments can be considered as exemplifications that outline certain features. However, they have different functions: in the case of science the aim is to formulate a theory while in art the aim is the experience of the artwork itself. This analysis regarding (dis)similarities between art and science allows us to comprehend what kind of understanding we acquire from the former. The aim is to show how art can be considered a laboratory of *essential examples* (i.e., artworks are a kind of *examples* that are not replaceable with descriptions/concepts that interpret them, Terrone 2018) in which we learn new indexical predicates.

Reading with Eyes, Ears, and Fingers

Carola Barbero
University of Turin
carola.barbero@unito.it

Fabrizio Calzavarini
University of Turin
fabrizio.calzavarini@unito.it

When we consider how texts are experienced across different sensory modalities — visual (printed text), auditory (audiobooks), and tactile (Braille) — we encounter distinct differences in how time, space, embodiment, and interpretation shape the reading experience. Each modality offers a unique phenomenology: visual reading is spatial and self-paced, auditory reading is temporal and externally driven, while tactile reading through Braille is sequential and deeply embodied. These differences suggest that reading is not a unitary act but a family of sensory-specific practices.

Yet despite these contrasts, all forms of reading involve active cognitive engagement: interpreting symbols, constructing meaning, and navigating textual structures. Philosophical theories such as Iser's concept of meaning-construction or Kivy's idea of reading as silent performance highlight this shared core.

Surprisingly, recent neuroscientific evidence suggests that the brain may process these modalities through largely overlapping neural networks. Not only do high-level semantic areas converge across visual, auditory, and tactile reading, but even low-level regions like the so-called visual word form area — traditionally thought to be specialized for visual text — are recruited during Braille and audiobook processing. This supramodal neural organization challenges assumptions about the primacy of vision in reading and supports a more flexible, multimodal view of literacy grounded in shared cortical infrastructure.

The Epistemic Power of the Miraculous: Visual Strategies in Early Modern Religious Art

Veronika Knedlikova Wankova
University of Padua
veronika.knedlikovawankova@unipd.it

This paper explores the relationship between aesthetic experience and the desire for knowledge through the lens of religious imagery in Central Europe during the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods. It focuses on how visual representations of miracles were used to fulfill an epistemic longing—to understand, internalize, and emotionally engage with the mysteries of faith that lay beyond everyday experience. These images did not merely illustrate doctrine; they functioned as cognitive and affective tools, inviting viewers to witness the miraculous, imagine the divine, and participate in a form of visual devotion that was both sensory and intellectual.

Religious artworks served as epistemic mediators, designed to evoke memory, emotional resonance, wonder, and spiritual insight. Artists such as Karel Škréta and Paolo Piazza grounded their compositions in familiar gestures, objects, and spatial references, creating aesthetic anchors that opened cognitive pathways to the invisible and miraculous. Through this, the act of viewing became an act of knowing.

The paper compares visual strategies across different religious orders—Jesuits, Capuchins, and Carmelites—each of which cultivated distinct visual languages shaped by their theological goals. These differences reveal how specific artistic choices were employed to generate a sense of “knowing the unknown” through sensory means.

Methodologically, the paper integrates art historical analysis with close readings of contemporary religious and theological texts used by these orders, as well as insights from cognitive aesthetics and psychology. Religious images are thus examined not as passive devotional objects, but as active instruments of epistemic engagement.

Ultimately, the paper argues that religious imagery in this period fulfilled a deeply human need: the longing to understand what cannot be seen, and to access divine truths through embodied, visual experience. In this context, art became a medium of knowing—bridging faith, imagination, and cognition.

Optical Encounters: A Philosophical Account of the Epistemic Role of the Seeing Eye

Anita Merlini
University of Udine
anita.merlini@uniud.it

My talk discusses, from a philosophical perspective, the relationship between the eye, the work of art and the production of knowledge. In particular, I will focus on the work of the German art historian and philosopher Gottfried Boehm (*1942). Boehm is best known for announcing an ‘iconic turn’ in Western thought and for his leading role in the *Bildwissenschaft* (‘science of the image’), an interdisciplinary field of research focused on image-related issues. By declaring the advent of an ‘iconic turn’, Boehm aims at emphasizing the epistemic power of images. Drawing inspiration from the philosophers Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, Boehm asserts that works of art generate meaning, revealing a deeper truth of what is depicted – a truth that cannot be grasped through language. In his writings, Boehm develops several concepts in order to explain the specific functioning of iconic logic. Among these, I will focus on the role of the body and more specifically of the eye in the iconic production of knowledge. At the beginning of his career, Boehm argues that the production of meaning depends on the tensions that the eyes of the observer activate on the image’s surface. At each glance, the eyes establish new relationships between lines, shapes and colors, opening a space of exploration where new meanings can emerge. More recently, however, Boehm’s writings minimize the role of the observer in favor of far more problematic standpoints that highlight the power of the image itself. I will propose revisiting Boehm’s initial hypotheses and reconsidering their potential. In particular, I will insist on the need to think of images as relational entities, in which the production of meaning is the result of an encounter with otherness whose outcomes remain open and unpredictable.

Exploring Care Aesthetics Through Visible Mending and Aging

Sam Bennett

Eindhoven University of Technology

s.a.bennett@tue.nl

Visible mending not only restores function to worn or damaged textiles, but also acts as an aesthetic and epistemic practice, highlighting transitions and offering a tactile entry point into themes of change, aging, and care. This paper explores cross-cultural perspectives on aging and generative knowledge creation through a series of workshops and conversations on visible mending conducted in 2025, including at a cultural institute in Amsterdam and with a global cohort of menders online. Using James Thompson's framework of *care aesthetics*, which positions aesthetic experience as relational, embodied, and socially embedded, rather than individual, visual, or purely psychological, this work extends his theory that caring for objects fosters empathy and deeper capacities for caring for others. Each workshop invited participants to bring garments in need of mending, review examples of visibly mended textiles in a group method inspired by Rineke Dijkstra's *I Can See a Woman Crying*, learn mending techniques through darning, and reflect on their experience through writing, group discussion, and interviews. Through analysis of textiles, surveys, and participant reflections, this project maps the reciprocal dynamics of care and the epistemic potential of slowness, touch, and material engagement. It demonstrates how the aesthetic act of mending becomes a space for emotional resonance, shared knowledge, and intergenerational dialogue about transitions in aging. In doing so, it contributes to emerging interdisciplinary understandings of how aesthetic practices shape not just perception, but also emotion, connection, and the pursuit of meaning across the lifespan.

On the Intrinsic Value of Artworks

Alberto Voltolini
University of Turin
alberto.voltolini@unito.it

Pietro Kobau
University of Turin
pietro.kobau@unito.it

One often thinks that artworks are endowed with value only relatively to a culture and a time. Yet if this were the case, how could one account for the fact that we still appreciate the Greek tragedy? In his radical skepticism Hume contrasted two different sets of empirical evidences (“everyone has his own taste and tastes are infinitely variable” vs. “some artworks have kept their own reputation in different times and places; not all critics are equally good”).

In this talk, we will try to account for such problematic evidences by claiming that artworks do possess an intrinsic value. In this respect, we start from two preliminary remarks.

First of all, by “intrinsic value” we mean an aesthetic value that is *grounded on objective* perceivable lower-level properties of objects recognized as artworks. Granted, such properties are not specific of artworks. For also ordinary objects can have such a value. So, we will claim that there are monadic properties of objects, which can constitute objective real relational properties, such as affordances (Gibson 2002), which are (aesthetic) value-bearers.

Moreover, we will privilege the enjoyment of an aesthetic *experience* over the expression of an aesthetic *judgement*. For having an object aesthetic properties matches one’s enjoying an aesthetic experience of it.

On the basis of such remarks, in order to argue for our main claim, we will maintain, first, that the above properties enable a *categorization* of the artwork, which grounds its aesthetic evaluation (following and expanding Walton 1970). Second, we will maintain that, *qua* perceivable properties, these properties direct one’s attention while assessing an artwork. By virtue of such two factors, they determine an aesthetic experience, enabling one to grasp an intrinsic aesthetic value. For neither feature is relative to cultures or times.

Learning from Remote Art: A Schema-Based Account

Ancuta Mortu

University of Bucharest

ancuta-maria.mortu@lils.unibuc.ro

We often engage with art forms coming from remote times, places or cultures. In this process, we experience epistemic distance with respect to the content, context of production or intended audiences of such art forms (BJA Special Issue on Remote Art, 2024). What is it that motivates the tolerance of uncertainty and active seeking of experiences of remote art? Can epistemic distance be overcome in such cases?

In this talk I address the role remote art plays in learning, by proposing a reassessment of cognitive schemas and their impact on processing art. Introduced by the psychologist Frederic Bartlett as providing the basis for an active process of ordering unfamiliar sensory information in an “effort after meaning” (Bartlett, 1932; Davis, forthcoming), cognitive schemas have quickly been adopted as a fruitful conceptual tool to guide the understanding of a wide array of visual and verbal artistic cultures (Gombrich 1960; Davis 2011; Lopes 2018; Eco 1985; Herman 1997; Schaeffer 2020). My focus will be on remote artistic cultures, where the orderings of mental representation that may facilitate understanding are subject to challenging epistemic or psychological distance (Lieberman et al., 2007; Trope et al., 2010).

I first set out to describe some criteria of demarcation of remote artistic cultures (Matthen, 2020; Lopes et al., 2024) and then work towards an explanation of the ambiguity tolerance in experiences of remote art, which is modelled upon a schema-based account of learning.

Prototypes, Heresy and the Ontology of Pioneering Artworks

Elsa Saliba
University of Genoa
elsa.saliba@edu.unige.it

Throughout history, certain art pieces have been labeled as rule-breaking or pioneering. Such artworks elicited strong reactions and rejection initially, but ultimately broke conventional rules and introduced new art movements. Although revolutionary artworks play a key role in art history and society, established theories in philosophy of art have neglected this central topic. To address this gap in the literature, this paper offers an analysis of pioneering artworks by drawing on tools from the ontology of artifacts while also introducing new concepts.

I present two examples from modern art, *The Luncheon on the Grass* (1863) by Edouard Manet and *Fountain* (1917) by Marcel Duchamp, both pioneering artworks that sparked controversy in their times. I argue that the emergence of pioneering artworks is comparable to the emergence of prototypes in artifacts. These artworks enable the creation of new art kinds (Impressionism and ready-made), much like prototypes provoke the emergence of new kinds through the introduction of a new function. Furthermore, such artworks do not merely introduce a new function, as prototypes do, but more crucially one perceived as heretical—challenging artistic norms and provoking strong audience reactions. Art kinds are regulated by conventions that were established over time following historical practices. Artworks that have features that differ drastically from conventional artworks are seen as heretical by institutions that exercise conventional power. Pioneering artworks are therefore heretic-artworks generating tension within the world of art by introducing heretic-functions, a type of idiosyncratic functions that are also controversial. Audiences that choose to appreciate such artworks are practicing a heretic-use, in accordance with the heretic-function of the artwork until its wider acceptance by art institutions. I conclude that a functional understanding of pioneering artworks that takes into consideration their disruptive force reveals their unique nature.

Epistemic Framing of Aesthetic Experience: How Knowledge about the Artist and the Context of Creation Shape the Perception of Artworks

Jerzy Luty
University of Wrocław
jerzyluty@gmail.com

This talk examines the epistemic and ontological dimensions of aesthetic judgment, focusing on how knowledge about an artist and the context of an artwork's creation shapes its reception and valuation. I argue that aesthetic experience is mediated not only by formal properties or affective responses but by essentialist assumptions regarding authorship, origin, and moral narrative.

Building on Paul Bloom's notion of humans as "natural-born essentialists" (2010), I propose that our cognitive predisposition to perceive objects as bearing authentic, historically embedded essences significantly influences how we engage with visual art. What we believe about an artwork's genesis and the artist's identity profoundly informs our evaluative stance.

Empirical support for this claim is drawn from a three-part study conducted in the Human Being Lab, within the paradigm of experimental philosophy of art. Study 1 examined how perceived effort affects valuation of artworks. Study 2 investigated the impact of an artist's moral character on aesthetic and emotional appraisals. Study 3 involved participants from non-WEIRD societies (e.g., Papua New Guinea, Burkina Faso, the Cook Islands, and Aboriginal Australia), who consistently rated works by recognized master artists as more beautiful, valuable, and compositionally superior than those by less experienced creators.

These findings suggest that aesthetic judgment is deeply epistemic and morally inflected, shaped by beliefs about authorship, virtue, and authenticity. Such tendencies may reflect evolved cognitive mechanisms—prestige bias, social evaluation, or adaptive heuristics—geared toward detecting indicators of skill, trustworthiness, and status.

This research contributes to contemporary debates in the philosophy of art by challenging formalist autonomy and emphasizing the cognitive and moral scaffolding underlying aesthetic experience.

Blow to the Art: Epistemic Access to the Self through Aesthetic Engagement

Patrick Hayes
University of Glasgow
Patrick.Hayes@glasgow.ac.uk

Stock, Stokes, and others have explored how aesthetic agents may gain counterfactual and modal knowledge by engaging with fiction but comparatively little has been written to expand these accounts to non-fictional and non-representational works. This paper aims to ameliorate our understanding of the epistemic role had by aesthetic objects to not only motivate agents to experience self-realisation but also provide those agents access to and knowledge of their holistic selves. By building on Dover's account of the conversational self, Nanay's notion of aesthetic attention, and Echeverri's framework of emotional justification, I will present a preliminary sketch of an account of art and aesthetic objects as epistemic actants which goes beyond relying on notions of self-identification which remain widely inapplicable to the broad diversity of aesthetic objects we encounter.

The first step in this sketch will be to identify the affective/cognitive content of aesthetic objects as subjective or intersubjective utterances. Once this conception is on the table, parallels will be drawn to the kind of distributed and focused attention given to human interlocutors and to that given to aesthetic objects when we attend them. I will argue that it is by giving attention to both in such a way that we are taking the conversation and the cognitive content seriously. By engaging, attending, and being in an emotional space to have the cognitive and affective content or mood resonate with us with a serious attitude, we are giving agency to the object and abdicating our interpretive sovereignty, as we would in conversation, to become both part object of the experience and part subject initiating that experience. In this act of attending, we become exposed both to ourselves and to the aesthetic object, and this exposition and the accompanied reflections on the values and the self revealed grant us knowledge of how we are as aesthetic agents and agents more broadly.

Reading and Interpretation of the Self: Theoretical-Practical Implications of the Interconnection of the Poetic World and the World of Action Following the Poetic Reflections of Paul Ricoeur

Beatrice Sofia Vitale
Complutense University of Madrid
beatricv@ucm.es

The following proposal aims to explore how reading (of fictional and historical stories) produces in the reader an invitation, a reevaluation, a new interpretation of his own identity as being in the world with and for others. Paul Ricoeur and the three volumes of *Time and narrative* (1983; 1984; 1985) will be our main references for investigation. We will start from Ricoeur's proposal of a horizontal fusion (recalling Gadamer) between the poetic world and the world of action to highlight the theoretical-practical repercussions that this interconnection (of a bidirectional nature) assumes for the reader. We will see how the reader (or interpreter) will be "called" to reconfigure his own perception of the self and of its implementation in the world through the act of reading. We will demonstrate how the aesthetic experience of the text (historical and fictional) represents an essential tool for rethinking not only the relationship that every human being tries to establish with respect to the interpretation of the self, but, equally, constitutes a fundamental element through which the reader, as a being in the world with and for others, reevaluates his own action in the world and the ethical relationship that is being configured between a hermeneutic self and a constituent otherness of the self. Finally, we will delve into how the aesthetic experience of the text is a "community experience" that influences not only the way in which the reader accesses the text (through his expectations of meaning) and interprets it but demonstrates how a text, in its aesthetic experience, is the infinite product, the eternal work of a multiplicity of interpretations.

Shaping the Classical Concert Experience: How Musical Style and Sequence Correlate with Audience Satisfaction

Ori Grossman
Bar-Ilan University
ori.a.grossman@gmail.com

Classical concerts face substantial challenges in attracting and retaining audiences. To address these challenges, several marketing strategies have been proposed to enhance the appeal of classical music performances. However, while some of these strategies have been explored, the influence of repertoire structure and composition on audience satisfaction, often manifested through favorable affective responses and a great likelihood of service recommendation, remains underexamined. The present research addresses this gap by investigating how classical musical style, categorized by composition period, and the sequential arrangement of musical styles correlate with satisfaction levels among classical concert attendees, with a focus on primacy and recency effects. Using a quasi-experimental design, the findings reveal that Romantic music was associated with higher customer satisfaction, particularly when placed in the middle or at the end of the performance. Conversely, Baroque music positioned at the conclusion was linked to reduced satisfaction. Notably, the inclusion of Contemporary art music at the opening enhanced overall experience, consistent with primacy effect theory. These results provide actionable insights for orchestra managers, cultural programmers, and arts marketers, highlighting how strategic repertoire sequencing can shape listener experience, foster greater engagement, and potentially improve financial performance.

Can Aesthetic Talk Be of Any Use in Science?

Victor Popa

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris

ioan-victor.popa@ens.psl.eu

Many scientists talk about the beauty of a theory, or praise the elegance of a demonstration – from your typical math teacher contemplating Euler’s identity to world-renowned researchers such as Paul Adrien Marie Dirac, who famously privileged beauty over truth when doing science. But what can be the scientific utility of such aesthetic considerations? Commonsense seems to dismiss those as scientifically irrelevant, merely metaphorical and even detrimental to any serious scientific pursuit. After all, elegant and beautiful theories have been proven wrong in the past (as the Ptolemaic system), and many aesthetic predicates seem out of place when applied to scientific theories and demonstrations (think of the term “garish”). However, practice shows that when one evaluates two competing theories having the same exact epistemic virtues (empirical adequation, respected protocols etc.) one chooses the most elegant, simple one – for instance, the one which has the least number of exception cases. As observed in Eddy Zemach’s *Real Beauty*, a failed test of some given theory doesn’t invalidate it – it merely harms its elegance, as one may still save it by adding exception cases etc. But is this validation criterion really an aesthetic one? And if so, what can be its place among the other standards of the scientific community? Taking into consideration previous works on this topic (such as James McAllister’s *Beauty and Revolution in Science*), this talk aims at showing that aesthetic predicates can play an important role in science – if in the context of theory evaluation they can only be a provisional criterion for choosing between competing theories, they are important guides in scientific research, especially for orientating the quest for fruitful, promising hypotheses. The reason for that is that aesthetic predicates track desirable features of scientific theories and demonstrations, features that indicate a greater potential for passing scientific evaluations.

Day 2

Aesthetic Emotions Are Epistemic Emotions

Joerg Fingerhut
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
joerg.fingerhut@hu-berlin.de

In this paper, I argue that aesthetic emotions are epistemic emotions. This can help resolve an apparent contradiction that relates to the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness. On the one hand, disinterestedness—being free from desires, practical concerns, and intense psychological involvement—is often regarded as central to aesthetic experience and appreciation. On the other hand, we nonetheless affectively engage with the arts – with a strong motivation to explore, by developing attachments, and by vividly felt emotional episodes. I will argue for a distinct way to navigate this tension. Disinterestedness is not a phenomenal property of an aesthetic attitude or pleasure. Disinterestedness is rather related to what an emotion is directed at, namely no pressing material or social concerns but cognition itself. It is in this sense that disinterestedness can be understood as being central to aesthetic emotions, that, so my argument will go, are also epistemic emotions.

To empirically substantiate my philosophical argument, I draw on a *philosophically guided supplementary analysis (PGsA)* of empirical data. This analysis offers indirect support for the claim that aesthetic emotions—i.e., emotions that track artistic value—are inherently also epistemic emotions—i.e., they enhance cognitive processing and understanding. More specifically, the data support the *wonder hypothesis*, the idea that the emotion of wonder may serve as a central means of tracking artistic goodness. More broadly, the PGsA highlights the value of investigating fine-grained clusters of emotions and their relation to artistic value and cognitive expansion in theorizing about the transformative potential of art.

Reconciling Curiosity and Aesthetic Disinterestedness

Claudia Cano

Institut Jean Nicod – EHESS, Paris

ccanomalaret@icloud.com

One main objection to aesthetic cognitivism is the claim that aesthetic experience is disinterested. While aesthetic experience must certainly involve some degree of interest — if only to avoid the dreaded “blank, cow-like stare” — curiosity, understood as a satisfiable desire for knowledge acquisition that is clearly distinct from the mere emotion of interest, appears incompatible with the “disinterestedness clause,” and thus with many of our aesthetic experiences. Yet recent cognitive and empirical approaches to aesthetics increasingly emphasize the fundamental role that curiosity and other inquiry-driven states play in our aesthetic lives, thereby describing — or even explaining — aesthetic experience in such terms. If further cooperation between analytic and empirical aesthetics is to be pursued, the following dilemma must be addressed: (a) aesthetic experiences are disinterested; (b) some, if not all, aesthetic experiences involve curious mental states. One way to resolve the dilemma is to reject the proposition (a): although widely defended, the notion of disinterestedness has also been heavily contested. However, even some aestheticians who move away from the traditional notion often retain related concepts in line with the intuition according to which aesthetic experience is free from pragmatic purposes. Moreover, curiosity may not be entirely incompatible with some accounts of disinterestedness, as it is often associated with intrinsic motivation, and could thus even be found to be coherent with the aesthetic concept. Rather than discarding (a) then, we propose to reevaluate aesthetic disinterestedness and its compatibility with an accurate account of curiosity. While it is true that cognitive philosophy and psychology have at times conflated curiosity and interest, their clear distinction does not preclude the existence of a relationship between them. Once the latter clarified, it will become plausible to claim that aesthetic experience can be both curious and disinterested and thus solve the apparent dilemma.

Curiosity in Language Processing: Insights from LLMs

Francesca Piovesan
University of Turin
francesca.piovesan@unito.it

Whether in its most accomplished artistic incarnations (such as poetry and literature) or in its more ordinary forms, language consistently elicits a wide range of evaluative responses: from the sense that a certain expression is beautifully or poorly formulated, to subtle feelings of pleasure or displeasure, confusion or boredom, suspense or resolution. Analytic philosophy has historically struggled to account for these aesthetic qualities of language, due to its emphasis on content and truth-conditional semantics over the experiential dimension of linguistic comprehension. Recently, however, it has become possible to study the aesthetics of language in a truly interdisciplinary way, bringing centuries of humanistic reflection on the subject into dialogue with the latest findings from psychology, neuroscience, and computational linguistics.

In this talk, I will present a novel, systematic effort in this direction. I will begin by isolating a set of features that have been recurrently attributed to aesthetically effective linguistic expressions by a long tradition of philosophers and literary scholars. I will then propose a Bayesian framework for understanding these features grounded in findings from psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and computational modelling. According to this framework, linguistic interpretation is a problem-solving activity in which we try to reduce the uncertainty about the interpretation of the verbal chain continuously as new linguistic material arrives. If the reduction in uncertainty follows certain dynamics, we may experience curiosity, suspense, insight, pleasure, confusion, boredom, and the other feelings that accompany and underpin our evaluative responses to language. To support this hypothesis, I will present the outcomes of a new preliminary study that used a large language model of the GPT family. In closing, I will point to the philosophical implications of the proposed framework, highlighting its connections with broader debates in aesthetics and philosophy of mind. The upshot will be a picture of our aesthetic encounters with language that does justice to age-old philosophical intuitions, engages with contemporary research in cognitive science, and opens up new avenues for theoretical and empirical exploration.

Thrills Around the Border of Not Knowing and Knowing

Magda Stanová
Academy of Fine Arts in Prague
m@magdastanova.sk

Crossing the border between not knowing and knowing can set off a thrill. This fact is utilized by various experience triggers: gossips, riddles, jokes. And then, there are experiences that occur when we linger in front of this border. Visitors of magic shows know that a magician knows how a trick works, but they themselves enjoy not knowing it. Gift wraps prolong the time of not knowing right before knowing. Artists usually aim to trigger an ambiguity that lasts. An ambiguity akin to a tomb of an unknown soldier— we don't want to find out to whom the body belonged. If we found out, the magic would disappear. Unlike with magic tricks, neither the artist, nor the visitors know how an artwork works. Everybody's I know | I don't know border is somewhere different. In all novelty-based disciplines, there are those who invent thrill triggers (let's call them trigger miners) and those who pass these triggers on (let's call them distributors). Trigger miners are pathfinders running the risk that their newly invented triggers won't work. Distributors use tried and tested triggers. They guess where a particular group of people has the border between I know and I don't know, they place themselves on this borderline and start to welcome/teach/preach. If there is no new idea, a new audience will do. Old discoveries in one field are new discoveries in another field. Specialists surf on a wave of novelty. Others prefer to swim. In this visual talk, I will map how various disciplines work with thrills around the border of not knowing and knowing and how this border moves forwards and, occasionally, backwards.

Emotions and Sense-Making in Conversations of Art Experiences

Gemma Schino

Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien Tübingen

g.schino@rug.nl

Coauthors:

Lisa-Maria van Klaveren (University of Groningen & Amsterdam Public Health Research Institute)

Theisje van Dorsten (University of Groningen)

Barend van Heusden (University of Groningen)

Ralf F. A. Cox (University of Groningen)

Art fosters both self-reflection and interpersonal understanding, inviting individuals to engage emotionally and cognitively with their own and others' experiences. Building on Dewey's view of experience (1934) as an active, affective engagement with the environment, this interdisciplinary study explores how epistemic emotions interact with sense-making during art reflection.

Eighteen dyads of adults (N = 36) participated in a study where each brought a personally meaningful artwork and discussed it with a peer in a recorded, semi-structured conversation. Emotional responses were measured through pre- and post-session self-reports, and an additional sentiment analysis of the conversation provided dynamic affective data. Sense-making was qualitatively coded using four semiotic strategies, namely: perception, imagination, conceptualization, and analysis (based on van Heusden, 2015).

Results revealed that the semiotic strategy of conceptualization evoked the most emotionally intense and expressive responses, followed by imagination, perception, and analysis. An Exploratory Graph Analysis (EGA Golino & Epskamp, 2017) of sentiment networks highlighted distinct affective patterns across sense-making strategies. Importantly, emotional engagement was found across all strategies, suggesting that epistemic emotions are integral to sense-making in art experiences, not just byproducts. A Multinomial Log-linear Model demonstrated that affect and cognitive strategies interact to shape perceived emotional responses to art.

Crucially, interaction with another person led to measurable affective changes, highlighting the socially situated and intersubjective nature of understanding of, during and with art experiences. These findings support 4E cognition perspectives, suggesting that emotions are not merely responses to art but integral to embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended cognitive processes. This study provides empirical grounding for philosophical claims about the epistemic value of the arts, showing how art itself can be a way of sense-making and the encounters with art and conversation about it can scaffold insight, reflection, and shared understanding.

Changing Judgement, Changing Preferences: The Influence of Higher-Order Evidence on Aesthetic Judgement in Cases of Peer Disagreement

Isabel Heckmann
Goethe University Frankfurt
s1275187@stud.uni-frankfurt.de

After going to the cinema, a friend and I sit down for coffee. We have just seen *Licorice Pizza* – I thought it was moving and nostalgic, my friend instead thought it was flat and boring. Given that we often like the same films, I start to wonder: “Did I misjudge the film? Maybe it was not as good as I thought it was?” This raises a puzzle: Somehow, I am influenced by my peer’s disagreement, but how can this be explained?

Peer disagreement is a form of higher-order evidence. Accepting its influence on aesthetic judgement is difficult to justify. It seems to violate general epistemic rules, as higher-order evidence does not entail direct evidence for or against the aesthetic judgement in question. It also seems to stand in conflict with the acquaintance principle, which requires aesthetic judgement to be based on first-hand experience (Briesen 2025). If my peer’s disagreement would influence me, my first-hand experience would still provide me with a different judgement.

Since Whiting introduced higher-order evidence to the aesthetic realm (Whiting 2023), little has been said about solving the puzzle that peer disagreement raises.

I present a principle-based solution, focusing on preferences instead of judgement: Aesthetic preferences are a constituting part of aesthetic judgement. They are formed and challenged by ourselves and our surroundings. Because preferences are sensitive to change, higher-order evidence can influence them, and, through them, the aesthetic judgement. Therefore, general epistemic rules are not violated. Moreover, focusing on preferences also solves the tension with the acquaintance principle: The first-hand experience remains the same but is now judged differently according to the newly influenced preference. My approach explains how higher-order evidence can influence our aesthetic judgement indirectly, without violating either epistemic rules or the acquaintance principle.

References

- Briesen, J. (2025). The acquaintance inference and hybrid expressivism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 103,1: 133–156.
- Whiting, D. (2023). Higher-order evidence in aesthetics. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 63, 2: 143–155.
- Madison, G., & Schiölde, G. (2017). Repeated listening increases the liking for music regardless of its complexity: Implications for the appreciation and aesthetics of music. *Front. Neurosci.* 11:147.
- Margulis, E. H. (2013). *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*. Oxford University Press.
- Walton, K. (1990). *Mimesis As Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Harvard University Press.

Audience-Led Performances

Jodi Miller

University of Glasgow

j.miller.7@research.gla.ac.uk

An audience comes to appreciate a work of art by having an aesthetic experience with the expressive content of the work. An audience member with a deeper knowledge might come to appreciate the work for other value-based reasons but this isn't necessary for the ordinary audience when they experience a work. In the case of audience-led performances, this seems to not be the case. It initially seems that the audience would have to have a deeper knowledge of an artwork, or of the art-creation process in order to engage with these kinds of artworks, I do not believe this to be the case. I liken the relationship between the artist and the audience in these artworks to an act of 'reciprocity' as defined by Hornsby (1995). I suggest that there are instances that are apparent in works like these where an audience knows much about the work or has too many expectations of an artwork when approaching them. I argue that this causes harm to them in their capacity to make aesthetic judgements, drawing from literature from Hill (2020) which identifies the behaviours of the 'non-virtuous agent'. I draw from audience-led performance artworks created by Marina Abramović, comparing 'Rhythm 0' (1974) to 'The Artist is Present' (2010) and suggest that the occurrence of non-virtuous activity in these works actively harms the experience of the artwork for both these audience members and others. I suggest that it is an excess of knowledge which results in this non virtuous activity. I think that an excess of knowledge of the artist's body of work results in the audience entering the performance space with more expectations than is necessary. These expectations result in an insincere engagement with the artworks which harms them in their capacity to experience the expressive content of the work.

Shaping Fiction with Participative Imagination

Antonello Caravelli

University of Turin

antonello.caravelli@gmail.com

Recent philosophical accounts of fiction, following Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990), agree that fictional propositions function as props that prompt imaginings in their audience. Engaging with fiction involves participating in games of make-believe, where readers are guided to imagine scenarios that often transcend ordinary reality. This paper examines the form of imagination required for such engagement, first focusing on the debate between mental imagery (Kind, 2001) and propositional imagination (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002). While visual imagining may accompany fiction as part of a complex phenomenology, it is not always operative. Rather, as Walton and Stock argue, propositional – or better, suppositional – imagination constitutes the minimal and necessary condition for understanding and grasping fictional content. However, suppositional imagination alone cannot fully explain the complexity of our attitudes toward fiction, including phenomena such as imaginative resistance or emotional engagement. Building on recent scholarship (Moran, Camp, Barbero & Voltolini), this paper introduces a reformulated concept of participative imagination – a richer, socially grounded and cooperative form of imaginative engagement. As presented here, this form of (participative) imagination draws its strength from the Voltolini's view of fiction as a socially shared game of make-believe and a pre semantic pragmatic practice. It requires readers to co-construct fictional contexts by importing their own cognitive and cultural resources and, in turn, to export aspects of fiction into real-world perspectives. Participative imagination is characterized by a dual-level operation: navigating the interplay between fictional and real worlds. It also involves distinguishing authorial intent from reader inference and managing the import/export flow of content between fiction and reality, drawing on Perner's multiple-model theory. The paper ultimately argues that participative imagination is fundamental for understanding not only how we engage with fiction, but also its broader cognitive, affective, and conceptual functions.

Aesthetic Experiences Teach Us Emotions Through Affective Affordances

Marta Benenti
University of Murcia
marta.benenti@um.es

Aesthetic experiences are often considered capable of improving our affective skills. Movies and novels' narratives invite recipients to simulate the affective experiences of the characters (Walton 1990, Currie and Ravenscroft 2002), thereby contributing to a "sentimental education" which improves recipients' sensitivity to the subtleties of emotional experiences (Robinson 2008). Moreover, through their expressive profiles, musical pieces and abstract paintings can show us what certain affective states look like. Thus, by manipulating and experiencing auditory and visual materials, authors and audiences can learn about affects via the cognitive monitoring of the expressed emotions – and of those felt in response (Davies 2011; Robinson 2008). Finally, akin to epiphanies that demand affective responses to the displayed values, some aesthetic experiences have the power to reconfigure the recipients' identities (Pelowski and Akiba 2011; Chappell 2019; Fingerhut et al. 2021). Given the manifold nature of these experiences, however, it is difficult to provide a unified account of how these learning processes, resulting in improved affective sensitivity, occur.

Motivated by the intuition that aesthetic experiences enrich us emotionally – rather than only exploiting emotions as means for other kinds of (cognitive or experiential) enrichments – I propose to rely on affective affordances to offer a minimal explanation (Caravà & Benenti 2024). I suggest that aesthetic experiences paradigmatically make us focus our attention on affective affordances understood as perceivable values. While the perceptual nature of affective affordances allows for an explanation of learning processes in terms of perceptual training, their being perceived as valenced accounts for the evaluative nature of the targeted experiences (D'Arms and Jacobson 2023; Teroni forthcoming). I argue that the power of aesthetic experiences to improve our affective sensitivity amounts to the improvement of detection and discrimination capacities for affective affordances. By acknowledging such a minimal level of learning, one can ground the explanation of learning processes involving higher-level psychological functions, such as beliefs and imaginings about emotions, but also characterize the role of emotions in the value-motivated exploratory relationship with objects of aesthetic appreciation.

On the Epistemic Role of Moral Disgust in Fiction: What Can We Learn from Affective or Empathetic Engagement with Vicious Perspectives

Efi K. Kyprianidou
Cyprus University of Technology
efi.kyprianidou@cut.ac.cy

One of the most interesting aspects of our engagement with fiction is that we often enjoy imaginatively engaging with morally flawed narratives or vicious perspectives. Yet, it sometimes happens that our ability to imaginatively engage with certain kinds of vicious perspectives is reduced or even suspended. In this paper, I will consider a particular aspect of resistance, namely, resistance to emotional or empathetic engagement with fiction (affective puzzle). To do so, I will examine a specific shortcoming within the current discourse. In addressing the relative difficulties in engaging with vicious perspectives, existing accounts of imaginative resistance acknowledge that readers may experience disgust or aversion, but they do not differentiate between distinct types of moral-related disgust or trace how each type influences our engagement with fiction. As the role of disgust in morality is debated and there are contrasting accounts of the nature of moral-related disgust, I argue that to fully explore the phenomenon, we must distinguish between two different types of moral-related disgust, each influencing our imagination in distinct ways. On the one hand, physical disgust that inscribes within the realm of morality by being causally linked to moral disapprobation, and, on the other hand, genuine moral disgust, that is a response to the morally reprehensible and is itself a moral emotion. I will describe the differences between these emotions and explain how they interact with implicit beliefs, biases, and attitudes - such as desires- prompting us to control our affective engagement with a vicious perspective. Ultimately, this finer grained account illuminates the epistemic role of moral disgust: it shows how the limitations in our engagement with vicious perspectives are sometimes an indication of biased ways of seeing the world, while other times, they are a sign of moral character.

The Effect of Perceived Emotion on Art Preference is Mediated by Feelings of Being Moved

Tanushree Agrawal
Soka University of America
tagrawal@soka.edu

Anna Bruns
New York University
adb8485@nyu.edu

The drive to gain social knowledge – information about other people – is a fundamental aspect of life. The way someone responds to art can tell us a lot about their social and mental traits (e.g., emotionality, prosociality, intelligence). Here, we test whether feelings of being moved help explain why people enjoy sad art (i.e., “aesthetic sadness paradox”). People may enjoy the overall feeling of being moved (rather than the sadness itself), which is intensified by sad art.

In a pre-registered study, 203 online participants rated music excerpts, representational paintings, abstract paintings, and nature photographs (12 each) in terms of liking, perceived sadness/happiness, and feelings of being moved. For each stimulus type, we fit two linear mixed-effects models: a full model predicting liking as a function of sadness, happiness, and being moved, with participant and stimulus as random effects; and a reduced model excluding being moved. Sadness coefficients in the full vs. reduced models reveal that being moved fully mediates the effect of sadness on liking for music and all three types of images. Surprisingly, being moved also partially mediates the effect of stimulus happiness on liking for images and songs. Finally, we find that participants' levels of empathy, aesthetic reward, and art expertise modulate relationships between perceived emotion, liking, and being moved. Thus, being moved may not only explain the enjoyment of sad art across multiple domains, but may also explain the enjoyment of emotional art more generally.

Overall, we show that feelings of being moved may be crucial to understanding the broader effects of emotion on art preferences, and may serve as an important link between art engagement and social knowledge. This work thus lays the foundation for considering being moved as a social epistemological emotion, particularly when evoked by art.

The Posterior Cerebellum's Role in Feeling Moved by Visual Art: A Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation Approach

Ryan Joseph Slaby
University of Padova & University of Milano-Bicocca
ryan.slaby@unipd.it

Coauthors:
Andrea Ciricugno (IRCCS Mondino Foundation, Pavia)
Marco Tettamanti (University of Milano-Bicocca)
Zaira Cattaneo (University of Bergamo)

The Predictive Processing account for aesthetic experience suggests that the brain employs implicit learning to compare incoming sensory information (e.g., a painting) with previous knowledge to make sense of and engage with artwork. Grounded within functional and anatomical connections throughout the cerebrum, the posterior cerebellum has shown a particular role within social and affective cognition, perhaps stemming from its predictive functionality to promote navigation and make sense of one's environment. Accordingly, feeling moved is an intense social and bodily emotion that may occur through engaging with an artwork in a self-relevant context. Empathic processes alongside previous experience with the arts may serve as vehicles to promote aesthetic engagement and, subsequently, feeling moved. We utilized cerebellar transcranial direct current stimulation (ctDCS) over the right posterior cerebellum to investigate the role of feeling moved by visual artwork in relation to individual differences in trait empathy and art experience. We found that interactions between trait empathy and art experience moderated the change in feeling moved by visual artwork following anodal right-posterior ctDCS. In general, those individuals with higher trait empathy or art experience were less moved by artwork following ctDCS in comparison to those with lower and moderate trait empathy or art experience. Anodal ctDCS over the right posterior cerebellum may have called forth internal models that hampered feeling moved within those individuals with a higher subjective ease to engage with artwork, such as through routes of empathy and art experience. Thus, the posterior cerebellum may be employed within a predictive fashion via its social and affective functionalities to feel moved by visual artwork, yet this is grounded within one's individual differences towards aesthetic engagement.

Other Minds and the Aesthetic Value of Animals

Luca Marchetti

University of Genoa

luca.marchetti@edu.unige.it

In this paper, I argue that consciousness – or the mental more broadly – can be a source of aesthetic value, and that our epistemic interest in non-human minds can give rise to distinctively aesthetic experiences. These experiences are not directed at the perceptible features of animals, but at what we come to know about their cognitive architecture, behavioural capacities, and evolved psychological functions. The aim of the paper is, in particular, to account for the aesthetic value of other minds by identifying several specific aesthetic properties that arise in engaging with animals' minds, and, more generally, to propose an expansion of cognitivism in environmental aesthetics by treating animals' minds as legitimate objects of aesthetic appreciation.

In this paper, I argue that consciousness – or the mental more broadly – can be a source of aesthetic value, and that our epistemic interest in non-human minds can give rise to distinctively aesthetic experiences. In particular, I argue that when we engage with the minds of other animals – whether through direct scientific study, indirectly through scientific literature, or through conceptual exploration – we encounter a distinct class of aesthetic properties. These properties are not perceived in the ordinary sensory way, as with colours or forms, but are instead accessed conceptually: they emerge from what we come to understand about how other minds are structured, how they function, and how they are adapted to the ecological environments in which they operate. The aim of the paper is, in particular, to account for the aesthetic value of other minds by identifying several specific aesthetic properties that arise in engaging with animals' minds, and, more generally, to propose an expansion of cognitivism in environmental aesthetics by treating animals' minds as legitimate objects of aesthetic appreciation.

I identify several specific aesthetic properties that arise in engaging with animals' minds. The first one is functional beauty. This refers to the way a mind appears well-suited – evolutionarily speaking – to the demands placed upon it. A second property is complexity, which concerns the layered and often intricate organisation of mental systems. Relatedly, another aesthetic dimension is coherence – the degree to which various parts of a cognitive system appear to work together harmoniously. Then, I claim, many animal minds are appreciated for their strangeness or otherness. These are cases where the very difference between their cognitive makeup and ours becomes a source of aesthetic value. Minds may also exhibit a kind of economy or parsimony. This refers to the use of minimal cognitive resources to generate effective behaviour. In such cases, we appreciate the mind for its efficiency, for doing a great deal with very little. In addition, there is often room for the aesthetic experience of surprise or ingeniousness. Some cognitive solutions appear unexpected yet effective, and the recognition of such solutions can generate a distinctive kind of aesthetic pleasure. Finally, we might find aesthetic value in a mind's resilience or robustness – its ability to maintain functional integrity under varying conditions.

References

Allen, Colin, and Michael Trestman. 2024. "Animal Consciousness." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2024 Edition). Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.).

- Davies, Stephen. 2012. *The Artful Species: Aesthetics, Art, and Evolution*. OUP Oxford.
- Dawkins, Richard. 1986. *The Blind Watchmaker*. Norton & Company, Inc.
- De Waal, Frans. 2016. *Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?* WW Norton & Company.
- Feagin, Susan L. 1984. Some Pleasures of Imagination. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43 (1): 41-55.
- Godfrey-Smith, Peter. 2013. On Being an Octopus. *Boston Review*.
- Godfrey-Smith, Peter. 2016. *Other Minds: The Octopus, the Sea, and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Grandin, Temple. 2006. *Thinking in Pictures: My Life with Autism*, 2nd ed. New York: Vintage Books.
- Heinrich, Bernd. 2007. *Mind of the Raven*. Ecco Pr.
- Horowitz, Alexandra. 2010. *Inside of a Dog: What Dogs See, Smell, and Know*. Simon and Schuster.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1974. What is it like to be a bat? *The Philosophical Review* 83 (4): 435-450.
- Kind, Amy. 2019. Mary's Power of Imagination. In Sam Coleman (ed.), *The Knowledge Argument*, 161-179. Cambridge University Press.
- Kubala, Robbie. 2023. The Aesthetics of Crossword Puzzles. *British Journal of Aesthetics* 63 (3): 381-394.
- Paris, Panos. 2020. Functional beauty, pleasure, and experience. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 98 (3): 516-530.
- Paris, Panos. 2024. Delineating beauty: On form and the boundaries of the aesthetic. *Ratio*, 37 (1): 76-87.
- Parsons, Glenn. 2007. The aesthetic value of animals. *Environmental Ethics* 29 (2): 151-169.
- Parsons, Glenn. 2023. *Aesthetics and Nature*. Bloomsbury.
- Parsons, Glenn, and Allen Carlson. 2008. *Functional Beauty*. OUP Oxford.
- Peacocke, Antonia. 2021a. Phenomenal experience and the aesthetics of agency. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 48 (3): 380–391.
- Peacocke, Antonia. 2021b. How literature expands your imagination. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 103 (2): 298-319.
- Riley, J. Roger, Uwe Greggers, Andrew D. Smith, David R. Reynolds, and Randolph Menzel. 2005. The flight paths of honeybees recruited by the waggle dance. *Nature* 435 (7039): 205-207.
- Rowlands, Mark. 2002. *Animals Like Us*. Verso.
- Rowlands, Mark. 2019. *Can Animals Be Persons?* OUP Oxford.
- Safina, Carl. 2015. *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel*. Henry Holt & Co.
- Schmalzried, Lisa. 2013. Inner beauty – The friendship-hypothesis. *Proceedings of the European Society of Aesthetics* 5: 613-635.
- Takuya Niikawa, Uriah Kriegel. (2025). The Sublime of Consciousness, *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 65, 1: 113–130.
- Timberlake, William (2007). Anthropomorphism revisited. *Comparative Cognition & Behavior Reviews*, 2: 139–144.
- Todd, Caine (2018). Fitting feelings and elegant proofs: On the psychology of aesthetic evaluation in mathematics. *Philosophia Mathematica*, 26 (2): 211-233.
- Wilkomm, Jennifer, and Anna Boersma. 2022. Hearing like an animal: Exploring acoustic experience beyond human ears. In Schillmeier, M., Stock, R., & Ochsner, B. (Eds.), *Techniques of Hearing: History, Theory and Practices*, 125-138. Routledge.

Architectural Aesthetics and User Creativity: Bridging Embodied and Neuro-Architecture Approaches

Laura Malinin
Colorado State University
Laura.Malinin@colostate.edu

Architects have long been concerned with how buildings aesthetics shape creative experiences. In the 1960's Jonas Salk hired Louis Kahn to design the Salk Institute as a place for scientific creativity. He believed architecture could play a powerful role, attributing the inspirational design of an Italian monastery as vital to his breakthrough on the cure for polio. Strategies Kahn developed remain prevalent in workplace and educational buildings today: inspirational exterior and interior spaces to foster ideation; spatial configurations that link destinations with hallway nooks, sunken gardens, and courtyards to encourage social serendipity; and reconfigurable architecture to provide flexibility. Yet, empirical investigations into the impacts of architectural designs on users' creative cognitive processes have been relatively rare and often with mixed results due to several factors, including how 'creativity' and 'space' are conceptualized.

How people perceive 'space' and 'place' is a point of philosophical debate and, increasingly, a focus of empirical investigation in cognitive science. Yet designing spaces and places for creativity is of practical concern for architects. The concept of architectural embodiment considers the body and its multi-sensory interactions with the designed environment in shaping users' perceptions and aesthetic experiences (Mallgrave, 2013). Neuro-architecture, on the other hand, focuses on identifying physical-environment factors affecting neurological processes, perception, emotion, navigation, and memory (Arbib, 2015; Eberhard, 2009). Although they share common ground through cognitive-systems approaches to the perception of designed space, tension remains between the philosophical 'art' of creating multisensory aesthetic experiences for users and the 'science' of predicting users' psychophysiological responses to specific environmental variables.

The starting point for this talk is the question of how to bridge these two approaches with a conceptual theoretical framework that addresses the complexity (and subjectivity) of aesthetic experiences in buildings while also considering the psychophysiological mechanisms involved in people's conceptions of creative 'space' and 'place.'

Curb Your Curiosity: The Role of Processing Fluency on Curiosity Judgments and Eye Movements for Internet Memes and Mooney Images

Samrawit Ayele

IMT Lucca

samrawit.ayele@imtlucca.it

Coauthors:

Luca Cecchetti (IMT Lucca)

Rolf Reber (University of Oslo)

Processing fluency, the ease with which information is processed, has been shown to influence aesthetic preferences for many kinds of stimuli. This study investigates how processing fluency can affect curiosity, understanding, and visual attention when individuals view ambiguous visual stimuli: internet memes and Mooney images. Using eye-tracking technology, we examined gaze patterns (fixations, saccades, pupil dilation) and their relationship with behavioral responses, including liking, understanding, curiosity, and Aha experiences. Forty-one participants viewed fluent (easy to process) and disfluent (difficult to process) memes and Mooney images while their eye movements and pupil diameters were recorded. Fluent memes were rated as more likable, easier to understand, and evoked greater curiosity and stronger Aha experiences than disfluent memes. In contrast, while fluent Mooney images were better understood and more accurately identified, curiosity and Aha ratings did not differ significantly across fluency levels. Eye-tracking data revealed that fluent memes elicited fewer fixations, longer fixation durations, and shorter saccade amplitudes, indicative of an "exploitative" attentional strategy focused on familiar content. Disfluent memes showed the opposite pattern, reflecting larger exploratory search behavior. For Mooney images, only saccade amplitude varied with fluency, suggesting that disfluent images required broader visual exploration. These findings highlight that processing fluency modulates curiosity and visual attention in a stimulus-dependent manner. Memes, with their conceptual ambiguity and multimodal nature, engage curiosity through the resolution of disfluency, whereas Mooney images rely more on perceptual insight. Our results suggest that fluency not only shapes subjective experience but also alters the dynamics of attention, with implications for understanding aesthetic engagement in digital media.

Motor Fluency and Likeability: Some Data from the QWERTY Paradigm

Mara Stockner
Sapienza University of Rome
mara.stockner@uniroma1.it

Coauthor:
Francesco Ianì (University of Turin)

What cognitive processes underlie the evaluation of the liking of tasks, objects and other stimuli that we encounter in everyday life? Are these processes purely abstract judgments that are independent of perceptual and motor systems, or are they closely related to motor resources and movement patterns that result from previous experiences with these stimuli as suggested by the embodied cognition approach (Robinson & Thomas, 2021). Here we present some data supporting the latter view, suggesting how preference judgments depend heavily on previous motor experiences involving interactions with a given stimulus. Specifically, we adopt the QWERTY keyboard experimental paradigm to test the role of motor simulation and motor fluency in preference judgements of letter dyads. Participants were asked to judge the likeability of same-hand dyads and different hands-dyads. Same hand dyads (e.g. RT) are those usually typed with the same finger of the same hand, whereas different hands dyads are typed with fingers of two different hands (e.g. IR). Assuming the classical assumption according to which same hand dyads are non-fluent dyads (e.g., Rumelhart & Norman, 1982), we found that, when participants received the instruction to orally judge (in order to avoid possible motor interferences with the expected sensorimotor typing simulation, see Beilock & Holt, 2007; Yang et al., 2009) each item, our results show that fluency affects likeability of letter dyads, but in different ways for slow and fast typists: slow participants showed a preference for fluent dyads, while past participants did not (Stockner et al., 2025). In a second experiment, we did not take the classical distinction between same and different-hands for granted and we obtained subjective (i.e., self-report Likert-scaled responses) and objective (e.g., Response Times and Inter-Key-Intervals; IKI) measures of motor fluency for a series of letter dyads. We found that both objective and subjective fluency measures predicted subjective likeability ratings (unpublished data from Stockner et al., 2025).

Day 3

Musical Profundity: Where Phenomenology and Analytic Philosophy Meet

Martina Stratilková
Palacký University Olomouc
martina.stratilkova@upol.cz

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1964) pointed to the expressive and dialogical character of aesthetic experience, which represents a direct, intimate, and immediate encounter. A work of art, with its place in the historical process and its own present, speaks to the recipient, enters into interaction with them, leading them to new emotions, thoughts, or values. In other words, a work of art tells the recipient: “You must change your life!”. Recent research also confirms the transformative power of aesthetic experience (Marta Pizzolante et al., 2024), which manifests itself in both immediate and long-term benefits for personal growth, understanding of oneself and the world, as well as in value issues, such as increased tolerance for ambiguity and the weakening of existing beliefs.

In the field of aesthetic concepts related to music, the concept of profundity stands out in this context. It can be considered a general characteristic of aesthetic experience, identifiable, for example, in Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgement (Gabriele Tomasi, 2019). Profundity is often regarded as a traditional attribute of an artistic message that is based on the analysis of the aesthetic experience of art. It became the focus of phenomenological aesthetics, while a less discussed elaboration of it was presented by Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977). His notion of profundity in musical experience serves here to confront the concept of musical profundity as worked with by analytic philosophers, who either take the position of its cognitive nature (a line of thinking settled by Kivy, 1990) or an experiential one (e. g. Bence Nanay, 2021; Jürgen Lawrenz, 2023). The present paper focuses on profundity as a conjoint source of what music conveys and the experientially rich encounter between a person and a musical work of art, which yields the transformative potential music bears.

Being in Concert: The Effects of Audience Participation on Motion, Emotion, and Connectedness

Dana Swarbrick
University of Jyväskylä & University of Oslo
dana.cr.swarbrick@jyu.fi

Coauthors:

Dan Bosnyak (McMaster University, Hamilton)
Susan Marsh Rollo (McMaster University, Hamilton)
Martin Hartmann (University of Jyväskylä)
Nicole Fu (McMaster University, Hamilton)
Laurel Trainor (McMaster University, Hamilton & Rotman Research Institute, Toronto)
Jonna Vuoskoski (University of Oslo)

Concerts are important sociocultural aesthetic experiences that involve gathering in groups to listen to live music. Music has profound effects on emotions and the body by evoking self-transcendent feelings and movement, which can trigger feelings of social connectedness when moving together with others (Vicaria et al., 2016). What motivates people to attend concerts despite their cost and inconvenience, especially when recorded music is easily accessible and affordable? One unique aspect of live music in contrast to other forms of mediated music is the ability for audience members and performers to interact with each other. An evolutionary theory of the origins of music posit that more participatory musical experiences will lead to more social bonding (Savage et al., 2021). Therefore, we aimed to examine how emotions and behaviour differ between songs in which performers encourage audience participation with clapping and singing along (Participatory) and songs without this encouragement (Presentational) and between a Live concert (n = 80) where the audience attended in person and the Livestreamed concert (n = 79) where the audience watched the concert at home.

Questionnaires gathered audience feelings of engagement, connectedness, feeling moved, and awe. Live audience head motion was recorded with optical motion capture technology while members of both audiences had their body sway recorded using accelerometers from their own smartphones.

Participatory songs evoked more head motion in the live audience and facilitated more engagement than the Presentational songs regardless of the group (Live and Livestreaming). Feelings of connectedness were facilitated by being in the Live group and during Participatory songs. Performers felt more connected to their Live than Livestreaming audience and accurately identified audience engagement levels. Analyses of the other transcendental emotions are forthcoming.

Together, the results of this study lend support to the theory that more participatory musical experiences lead to more social bonding.

References

- Vicaria, I. M., & Dickens, L. (2016). Meta-Analyses of the Intra- and Interpersonal Outcomes of Interpersonal Coordination. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 40(4), 335–361.
- Savage, P. E., Loui, P., Tarr, B., Schachner, A., Glowacki, L., Mithen, S., & Fitch, W. T. (2021). Music as a coevolved system for social bonding. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 44.

The Form of Aesthetic Understanding

Matthew Heeney
Nazarbayev University, Astana
matthew.heeney@nu.edu.kz

What does a person understand, when she understands a work of art? In this paper, I propose that we can illuminate such aesthetic understanding by way of an extended analogy with the way we understand and explain intentional actions

Our understanding of a person's intentional action involves the coordination of two orders of reasons: one that consists in a set of reasons pertaining to how the action is done, and another pertaining to why it is done. For instance, in understanding a person's arm-raising as a request to ask a question, we must understand the non-actional bodily movements that explain how the request is rendered, as well as the point or purpose towards which the agent directs the intentional action of arm-raising.

Analogously: understanding a work of art involves understanding how the work has the aesthetic properties that it does, and why the work, with those aesthetic properties, enjoys whatever aesthetic value that it has. This will involve specifying the non-aesthetic properties that embody or manifest the work's aesthetic properties (the analog of the How-question), as well as the aesthetic point or purpose satisfied by the work's aesthetic properties (the analog of the Why question).

I argue that this account can satisfactorily answer several questions at issue in the literature on aesthetic understanding, such as:

- Whether someone who understands a work is in a position to communicate an interpretation of that work;
- Whether someone who understands a work is in a position to render aesthetic judgments and aesthetic verdicts about the work's aesthetic merits;
- Whether aesthetic understanding is "objectual" or "propositional";
- Whether aesthetic understanding can be communicated to someone who has not encountered the work.

I am confident that the project will be greatly improved by conversations at the intersection of epistemology and aesthetics at the conference.

Responsibility in Art

Milica Czerny Urban
University of Rijeka
murban@uniri.hr

Responsibility in art is a multifaceted concept involving the ethical, social, and political obligations of artists, audiences, and society. It raises critical questions about the limits of freedom of expression, the impact of art on society, and the moral duties connected to both creating and engaging with art. Recognizing the responsibility in art assumes that artistic expression holds meaningful value and can influence thought, emotions, and actions.

Artists are commonly the focus of responsibility discussions, particularly regarding ethical creation and the content they present. Art can mislead, aestheticize immorality, or propagate harmful ideologies. Controversial works illustrate how art can profoundly affect society and highlight the artist's potential accountability. Artists may be responsible for their creative processes and emotional, educational, or cognitive effects on audiences.

Although often set aside, the audience's role is equally significant. Audiences have been seen as active participants, completing the artistic experience through emotional engagement. Rancière expands this idea with his concept of the "emancipated spectator," arguing that audiences actively create meaning and thus share responsibility for their interpretations and reactions. Similarly, Nussbaum suggests that art shapes moral awareness, raising questions about whether audiences must act within the context of an artwork.

Examples like Jovanović/Janša's *Pupilija*, *Papa Pupilo* and the *Pupilceks* directly invite audience interaction, sharing ethical responsibility between performers and spectators. In contrast, Habacuc's performance *You Are What You Read*, featuring a starving dog, challenges the audience's moral accountability for inaction.

This analysis underscores the need for continued dialogue about responsibility in art. It encourages artists and audiences to reflect on their roles and fosters greater awareness. Also, it is through aesthetic experience that we can better understand ourselves and the world and gain different types of cognitive insight.

What is in an Aura? Emotion Sharing Between Contemporary Artists and Viewers of the Post Digital Age in Original and Digital Contexts

Alexandra Victoria Alvarez
University of Vienna & University of Continuing Education Krems
alexandra.alvarez@donau-uni.ac.at

Coauthors:

Dr. Eva Specker (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)
Theresa Demmer (University of Vienna)
Adrian Biel (University of Vienna)
Kristoffer Sturm (University of Vienna)

In the post-digital age, an era defined by the ubiquity of digital technologies in everyday life, museums, hospitals, and educators increasingly rely on digital surrogates to present artworks to their audiences. Yet, the epistemic and emotional implications of this shift remain underexplored. While prior research has independently demonstrated that artists and viewers can share emotional responses, and medium affects art experience, these threads have rarely been brought together. This project addresses that gap by investigating how mediation, the technological and contextual reshaping of an encounter, influences emotional resonance between contemporary artists and viewers across original and digital contexts.

We collaborated with four professional, internationally exhibiting artists, each commissioned to create two original artworks and systematically record their felt emotions during the creation and the specified intended emotions of each piece. The artworks were shown in two mixed-media gallery conditions, each displaying eight paintings: one original and one same-sized digital surrogate from each artist. Viewers' reported their felt emotions using an expanded 16-item scale of phenomenal experiences, and were also asked to infer both the artists' intended emotions and felt emotions during painting. Preliminary patterns suggest that emotional transmission occurs across both modalities, though possibly in different forms. Building on findings by Specker et al. (2020), we also consider how perceived genuineness of the artwork may moderate affective engagement.

Rather than framing digital formats as diminished, our design explores how the psychological encounter with an artwork is preserved, transformed, or even amplified. We propose that affective synchrony between artist and viewer offers an empirical pathway to conceptualizing the artwork's aura (Benjamin 1936) in an increasingly mediated world.

Experiencing Art and Learning about it Using VR-Replicas

Maximilian Kenzo Molitor
Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen
m.molitor@iwm-tuebingen.de

Coauthors:

Jens Maiero (Leibniz-Institute für Wissensmedien, Tuebingen)
Laura Peiffer-Siebert (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)
Birgit Brucker (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)
Eva Specker (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)
Peter Gerjets (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)

This pre-registered study (available [here](#)) examined the effectiveness of Virtual Reality (VR) as an extension for museum exhibitions, exploring its impact on learning and art-experience. Three research questions addressed whether VR-replicas, VR copies of physical exhibition-rooms, can induce learning and aesthetic experience comparable to the physical exhibitions, whether integrating 360°-images of the exhibition rooms into VR replicas enhances learning and art-experience, and whether the museum-location positively influences learning and art-experience in VR-replicas. Two within-subject studies (Study 1: N = 40; Study 2: N = 41) tested these effects using a highly immersive and embodied VR replica of two physical exhibition rooms of an art-history museum, developed in Unreal Engine for this study. Participants subsequently experienced either two VR-replicas with and without 360°-images at a laboratory-location (Study 1) or a physical exhibition room and a VR-replica without 360°-images at the museum-location (Study 2). Dependent variables included knowledge-tests and questionnaires on presence, motivation, situational interest, motion-sickness, and art-experience (composed of arousal, liking, valence, interest, and understanding). Following mixed-model analyses, results indicated that the VR-replica was able to achieve similar results concerning knowledge-gains and art-experience compared to the physical exhibition room. Further, results showed that the 360°-images caused significantly worse knowledge-gains but higher presence ratings. It is theorized that a negative novelty effect occurred due to the more difficult learning conditions of using the 360°-VR-replica's controls. Lastly, analyses revealed no significant positive effect of the museum-location on learning and art-experience in VR-replicas. The findings provide empirical backing for employing VR-replicas as an accessible and remote museum extension that may be able to deliver museum-like experiences, while identifying further research gaps in confirming why 360°-images had a negative effect on learning in VR-replicas.

Designing for Motivation: Development of a VR Application Based on Hedonic Visual Stimuli

Marta Mondellini

Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan & National Research Council of Italy – STIIMA, Lecco
marta.mondellini@unicatt.it

Coauthors:

Giovanni d’Errico (Salento University, Lecce)

Giulia Pellegrino (Salento University, Lecce)

Andrea Bonanomi (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)

Lucio de Paolis (Salento University, Lecce)

Marco Sacco (National Research Council of Italy – STIIMA, Lecco)

Alessandro Antonietti (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)

Recent research has highlighted the potential of art in neurorehabilitation, particularly in post-stroke recovery, where exposure to aesthetically engaging stimuli has been shown to improve motor performance, a phenomenon known as the “Michelangelo effect”. Although aesthetic preference is often considered subjective, the literature on visual arts highlights recurring patterns associated with greater perceived pleasantness. Importantly, emerging evidence suggests that such hedonic qualities may foster intrinsic motivation, a critical but often compromised factor in adherence to post-stroke rehabilitation.

This interdisciplinary project – involving the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Department of Psychology), STIIMA-CNR, and the University of Salento (Department of Innovation Engineering) – aims to explore the motivational potential of visual aesthetics in a rehabilitation context.

In Phase 1, 156 healthy participants (M=85, F=68, n/a=5; ages 18-60+) evaluated 60 abstract paintings selected from the VAPS database. Abstract artworks were chosen to minimize the impact of prior experience on perception, excluding artworks with text, logos, anthropomorphic elements, or redundancy. Participants rated each painting based on hedonic value and emotional dimensions (valence, arousal, dominance). Rasch model analysis led to identify the 10 most and 10 least pleasant stimuli.

Phase 2 involved the development of a virtual reality (VR) application with the HTC-Vive Pro 2. Users interact via hand tracking to solve puzzles with five levels of difficulty (from 4 to 36 tiles). Two versions of the game were created: one with hedonic paintings, the other non-hedonic. Performance data will be recorded and clinicians will supervise sessions via a dedicated interface.

Phase 3, the protocol must be submitted for ethics approval and will involve 36 post-stroke inpatients trained in functional planning. Each participant will use both versions for four weeks in a crossover design. Motivation and engagement will be assessed before and after each condition to assess whether aesthetic pleasure increases willingness to engage in rehabilitation.

The Vanishing Script: Handwriting as an Aesthetic and Epistemic Practice in the Digital Age

Anca Simion
Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
anca.simion@ubbcluj.ro

Handwriting is rapidly declining in everyday and educational contexts, increasingly displaced by digital typing and voice input. Yet this shift may come at a cost that is not merely practical but epistemic and aesthetic. This paper explores handwriting as a form of embodied epistemic engagement—an activity that not only supports learning and memory but also evokes curiosity, aesthetic appreciation, and a sense of personal expression. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights from psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy, I argue that handwriting offers a uniquely rich interaction between the aesthetic and the epistemic. From the pleasure of fluid pen strokes to the satisfaction of seeing thoughts materialize on paper in one’s own script, handwriting engages both sensorimotor systems and affective-emotional processes. Neuroscientific research has shown that handwriting activates brain regions involved in motor planning, memory consolidation, and reward, suggesting a deeper cognitive investment than typing. At the same time, handwriting allows for an idiosyncratic, expressive form of aesthetic pleasure—one that links fluency, rhythm, and visual balance with meaning-making. By examining handwriting as a lost site of epistemic emotion—curiosity, insight, and even wonder—I propose that its decline reflects more than a technological transition: it signals a cultural shift away from slower, reflective, and aesthetically infused modes of thinking. The paper is considering the implications of this shift for education, creativity, and our broader understanding of aesthetic cognition in an age of digital acceleration. This perspective invites us to re-evaluate not only what we gain with digital tools, but also what we risk losing: the embodied aesthetic of thought made visible.

The Unknowable Core: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Aesthetic Experience and the Drive for Knowledge

Natalia Pérez Juncal
Complutense University of Madrid
napere04@ucm.es

This paper offers a psychoanalytic contribution to the theme of “Aesthetic experience and the drive for knowledge”, grounded in the Freudian-Lacanian articulation of the concept of sublimation and its relation to the unknowable. In contrast to models that link aesthetic pleasure to cognitive mastery or epistemic fluency, psychoanalysis approaches the aesthetic as an encounter with a limit: a confrontation with what cannot be fully known, named, or represented, yet which paradoxically functions as the source from which new knowledge may spring.

Following Freud (1930), sublimation is understood as a destiny of the drive in which libidinal energy is diverted toward aims that are socially valued, such as artistic or intellectual creation. Lacan (1959-1960) reconfigures this concept by tying sublimation to the subject’s relation to *das Ding* — the Thing — a non-assimilable kernel of experience that stands at the heart of the subject’s desire and at the edge of symbolic knowledge. The aesthetic object, in this sense, is not what we come to understand, but what allows us to maintain a relation to the unknowable; to approach, without grasping, the inaccessible truth of the Thing. As Lacan (1959-1960) writes, sublimation elevates the object to the dignity of the Thing, not to resolve it, but to contour it, to orbit it without consuming it.

Aesthetic experience, then, brings us closer to a truth that resists capture, by enabling the subject to sustain the tension of what escapes representation and by fueling its libidinal disposition toward knowledge. Yet, in a cultural context marked by sensory saturation and accelerated consumption, the subjective disposition required for such an encounter may be increasingly difficult to sustain (Recalcati, 2006). Therefore, this paper reclaims the relevance of psychoanalysis in contemporary debates on aesthetics and epistemology, highlighting its unique insight into the relation between libidinal economy, knowledge, and the unknowable.

References

- Freud, S. (2001) Civilization and its discontents. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XXI: The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and its Discontents, and Other Works*. Vintage Classics.
- Lacan, J. (1992) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. Routledge.
- Recalcati, M. (2006). Las tres estéticas de Lacan: arte y psicoanálisis. *Del cifrado*, 2011.

From Epistemic Doubt to Aesthetic Truth: Revisiting the Case of Anxiety

Rona Cohen
Tel Aviv University
cohenron@tauex.tau.ac.il

Anxiety has been conceptualized as an epistemic emotion, intimately related to the pursuit of information. However, unlike the understanding of anxiety as a state triggered by uncertainty or the risk of holding false beliefs, in philosophical thinking, anxiety reveals a moment of truth. In this lecture, I wish to address the question of anxiety as an aesthetic affect and its relation to truth, rather than falsity.

Anxiety serves as a prominent topic in philosophical discussions on authenticity, such as those by Heidegger, Sartre, Kierkegaard, and others. But in recent years, it has been included in the aesthetic discussion on art, as art theorist Thierry de Duve claims that modern art extends beyond the Kantian pleasure and displeasure to a wider spectrum of emotions, which, following Freud, he calls emotions 'beyond the pleasure principle.' Anxiety in this context is linked not to the risk of error but to a confrontation with one's desire (Lacan) or with one's temporality (Heidegger). What stands from one perspective as a limit to knowledge, from a different perspective stands as the road to (a different kind of) knowledge.

Following Ronen's seminal study of anxiety as an aesthetic emotion, this lecture seeks to rethink anxiety raised in the context of art as a safe space within which to experience and come face to face with knowledge about ourselves, knowledge that is not properly accessible otherwise.

Biodiverse Nature Videos with Instrumental Music Promote Recovery from Induced Stress

Hilary Serra
University of Turin
hilary.serra@unito.it

Coauthors:

Vasiliki Meletaki (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia)
Nora Youn (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia)
Raffaella Ricci (University of Turin)
Anjan Chatterjee (University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia)

Introduction: Exposure to natural environments has been associated with psychological and physiological recovery from stress, as outlined in the Stress Recovery Theory. However, much of the existing research has focused on green landscapes—primarily those dominated by vegetation—neglecting the potential benefits of broader biodiversity or dynamic forms of nature. This study investigates whether viewing digital nature scenes that depict a variety of ecosystems and are accompanied by tailored instrumental music can enhance recovery following stress.

Method: A total of 107 (experimental group = 55; control group = 52) participants completed a stress-inducing task, the Markus and Peters Arithmetic Test. During the recovery, the experimental group watched a nature video for 15 minutes, while the control group sat alone in a room without external stimulation. Anxiety and affect were evaluated using the 6-item State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) before and after the task and recovery. Heart rate (HR) and skin conductance level (SCL) were continuously monitored using a wearable sensor.

Results: Linear mixed effects model analyses revealed no significant differences between groups in anxiety and affect scores. However, when examining the physiological response during recovery—divided into three 5-minute intervals to capture physiological changes over time—the experimental group exhibited lower heart rate ($p < .01$) and skin conductance levels ($p < .05$) in the later phase of recovery compared to controls. This suggests a greater decrease in physiological arousal and, therefore, a faster recovery in those who watched a nature video after the stress-inducing task.

Conclusions: These results indicate that digital exposure to biodiverse natural environments can aid physiological stress recovery, even when this improvement is not reflected in self-reported responses. Experiencing biodiverse nature through digital formats may offer a practical solution for enhancing well-being, particularly in contexts where direct contact with nature is limited.

Neurophenomenology, PNEI, and Epigenetics: A Framework for Understanding the Health and Cognitive Benefits of Art and Aesthetic Experiences

Marta Pizzolante
Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan
marta.pizzolante@unicatt.it

Coauthors:
Davide Biganzoli (Policlinico of Milan)
Andrea Gaggioli (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan & IRCCS Istituto Auxologico Italiano, Milan)
Elia Biganzoli (University of Milan)
Valentina Bollati (University of Milan, Policlinico of Milan)

The fields of neurophenomenology, psychoneuroendocrinoimmunology (PNEI), and epigenetics provide innovative and complementary perspectives on understanding the positive effects of art and aesthetic experiences on human wellbeing and health. Neurophenomenology integrates subjective experiential reports with neuroscientific data, offering valuable insights into how aesthetic experiences elicit positive emotional responses, alleviate stress, and enhance cognitive and emotional development. Such experiences often involve epistemic emotions such as curiosity, wonder, and insight, which play a key role in motivating behaviour and in shaping our engagement with the world. PNEI, by contrast, examines the bidirectional communication among the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems, providing the basis for investigating how specific psychological experiences, including positive and knowledge-seeking ones, influence physical health. Epigenetics, in turn, can serve as a bridge between these domains, as the biological translator that connects environmental and experiential factors to gene expression. This perspective argues for an integrative framework linking neurophenomenology, PNEI, and epigenetics, elucidating how art and aesthetic experiences can promote health and wellbeing. By examining the shared mechanisms and pathways across these fields, we aim to outline their collective implications for scientific research, health promotion/disease prevention and clinical applications.

On the Origins and Consequences of Natural Play and Performing Arts Practices

Gunter Kreutz
University of Oldenburg
gunter.kreutz@uni-oldenburg.de

Natural play (NP) is one key to survival in the animal kingdom. Human play serves to protect children's mental and physical wellbeing. Taxonomies of NP suggest that some forms map onto performing arts practices (PAP) such as, for example, singing, dancing and acting. NP and PAP share the elicitation of neurobiological reward mechanisms in practitioners and spectators alike. However, the evolution from human NP to PAP in the modern world also raises questions about the consequences of the transition within PAP from amateur or lay culture to professional performing arts. It appears that, as deliberate practice, aesthetic appreciation, and professionalization arise, so do social exclusiveness and cultural segregation of PAP. Indeed, NP in animals and humans are both rarely harmful and of high adaptive value. By contrast, while amateur PAP are often beneficial, high-level PAP are prone to increased physical and/or mental health risks. A simple model is developed that suggests a trade-off between moderate, but wide-spread forms of lay or amateur PAP, on the one hand, and the maladaptive effects of excessive deliberate practice that characterize high-level PAP of highly selected groups, on the other. There is need for more research to investigate the emergence of PAP and their consequences as originating in NP.

From Play to Knowledge: The Aesthetic Childhood

Avani Sanghvi
University of South Florida
aesanghvi@usf.edu

When we think of knowledge, or learning, we often think about what we learn in school: physics, chemistry, astronomy, or even history. When we study the arts, we study it as an object: its historical periods, important figures or styles. We seldom study art as a field with which we can gain new knowledge about our world and ourselves. And yet, before science—perhaps even before we were capable of the complex thought we applaud ourselves for today, humanity used art to make sense of existence. What could have possessed man to ground berries into paint and slather their cave walls? Art, broadly construed, engages the mind in a way that other fields do not: it is rarely, if ever, about one subject. It encapsulates our lives and its features in a multitude that often evades the artists themselves. As such, both artist and her witnesses are compelled to consider its contents imaginatively. We already engage with these complexities through art as children: we invent stories for a family in the car next to us, we mimic our lives with toys. Children’s play is arguably evidence that aesthetic imagination is a source of knowledge. I argue that the arts are not just an object of study but also play a key role in epistemology—inspiring us to consider our relationships, morals, and actions in ways that may bleed outside moral, epistemological, ethical, or pragmatic norms. The arts free us with “play,” much like the sort we engage in as children. In this way, aesthetic experiences drive epistemic emotions like curiosity and prompt us to reckon with the complexity of human existence.

From Nutrients to Art: Hedonic Foraging, a Common Basis for Motivated Behaviour

Olivier Penacchio
Autonomous University of Barcelona
penacchio@cvc.uab.cat

Why do organisms as different as roundworms and humans seek what they find pleasurable? Could a single mechanism underlie behaviour across such a wide range of species and complexity? Hedonic evaluation—the assignment of positive or negative value to experience—is essential for adaptation, yet the process that connects this simple judgement to the diversity of behaviour remains unclear.

Active inference holds that all behaviour serves a single imperative: minimising free energy, the difference between actual and preferred states. We introduce hedonic foraging, in which hedonic evaluation aligns reward seeking with this free-energy minimisation. Within this framework, habits, wanting (expected free energy), and liking (variational free energy) interact dynamically to motivate and monitor behaviour.

Our simulations show that hedonic foraging accounts for behaviour across a broad continuum: from basic allostatic regulation common to all organisms, to statistical learning and to higher-order processes such as the curiosity-driven sense-making involved in art appreciation.

By integrating hedonic evaluation with active inference, hedonic foraging offers a unified account of motivated behaviour across species and levels of complexity.

Individual Differences in How Category Learning Shapes Aesthetic Appeal

Luis E. Morales
City College of New York
lmorales@ccny.cuny.edu

Coauthors:

Aubrey Valdez (City College of New York)
Ashley Gurung (CUNY Graduate Center)
Andrew Frankel (CUNY Graduate Center)
Edward A. Vessel (City College of New York)

Recent work from our lab has found that category learning in structured stimulus spaces of artworks—constructed using machine learning models of perceptual similarity—reshapes internal representations and modulates aesthetic responses.

Categorization performance declined near category boundaries and in untrained regions of the space, revealing how structured knowledge supports generalization and perceptual certainty. Participants' ratings of familiarity, uniqueness, and aesthetic appeal varied systematically across the representational space: uniqueness was highest in a “zone of learning” proximal to the training set, and aesthetic responses were positively associated with both uniqueness and, to a lesser extent, familiarity. Together, these findings support a learning-based account of aesthetic experience, where interest and appeal are highest when stimuli are neither fully predictable nor wholly novel, suggesting that subjective pleasure arises from partial uncertainty resolved through structured internal knowledge. Here, we examine individual differences in the relationship between familiarity, uniqueness, and aesthetic appeal—measures that capture variation in aesthetic representations. We collected measures of personality traits (BFI), mood (PANAS), aesthetic responsiveness (AReA), and familiarity with artistic movements from 48 observers who were trained to distinguish artworks of 2 similar artists in one session, and tested on categorization performance, familiarity, uniqueness, and aesthetic appeal in a second session. Data analyses are ongoing. By linking these trait measures to statistical relationships in categorization performance and aesthetic judgments, we examine how stable individual factors influence representational reshaping and preference within structured visual spaces. This approach contributes to an interactionist model of neuroaesthetics, emphasizing how top-down traits shape bottom-up perceptual engagement. Broadly, this work advances the idea that aesthetic pleasure reflects a “pleasure from understanding,” in line with theories positioning aesthetic experience as a response to epistemic affordances. By integrating personality data with perceptual judgments, we offer new insight into how individuals engage with uncertainty and structure in art.

Posters

Art as Epistemic Practice: Olga Markova's *Musaget* and Post-Soviet Literary Authority

Aida Anderson
Nazarbayev University, Astana
aida.linnik@nu.edu.kz

This paper examines the literary seminar *Musaget* (1999–2008), founded by Olga Markova in Almaty, Kazakhstan, as a case study in how aesthetic experience can serve as a vehicle for epistemic transformation in a post-institutional context. Operating amid the collapse of Soviet cultural structures such as the Writers' Union, *Musaget* functioned as a counter-institution that redefined literary legitimacy through rigorous aesthetic engagement.

Markova's pedagogical approach emphasized meticulous attention to form and language, fostering an environment where writers engaged deeply with texts to uncover layers of meaning. This process evoked a sense of discovery and insight — the kind of intellectual engagement where aesthetic attention and the search for meaning become inseparable.

Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, the paper explores how *Musaget* cultivated a new form of cultural authority rooted not in institutional endorsement but in the shared pursuit of literary excellence. The seminar's practices also resonate with Groys' analysis of the avant-garde's role in shaping societal values through art, highlighting the transformative potential of aesthetic experience.

Through interviews with former participants and analysis of seminar materials, the study illustrates how *Musaget* not only nurtured literary talent but also instilled a profound commitment to the epistemic value of art. The seminar's legacy, evident in subsequent initiatives like the Open Literary School of Almaty (OLSHA) and the *Daktil* journal, underscores the enduring impact of Markova's vision.

By situating *Musaget* within broader discussions on the interplay between aesthetics and the drive for knowledge, this paper contributes to our understanding of how artistic practices can foster epistemic growth, particularly in contexts marked by cultural and institutional upheaval.

“I feel you”: Emotion Sharing between Artists and Viewers in Original and Digital Contexts

Adrian Beil
University of Vienna
beil.adrian@icloud.com

Coauthors:

Alexandra Victoria Alvarez (University of Vienna & University for Continuing Education Krems)
Theresa Demmer (University of Vienna)
Eva Specker (Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien, Tübingen)
Kristoffer Sturm (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Due to the daily rush in today’s fast-paced technologically driven world, life often leaves little room for taking a moment to pause and connect with oneself or others. Art, with its evocative power to activate epistemic emotions, serves as a conduit for us to slow down, to feel, and to empathize with another person, to attempt to connect or to feel what they feel ((Pelowski et al., 2020, Vischer, R. (1873)). However, the context of this encounter - real or digital - can significantly shape our experience.

To bridge the art world and the psychology of aesthetics, we explore how interpersonal differences like empathy (IRI) and art knowledge (AreA) influence subjective reports of felt emotions (ExtTM model) during an art encounter. We aim to connect these findings to understand differences in art engagement and understanding across medialities.

Our investigation aims to look at how contemporary painters transmit emotions to viewers in original artworks compared to their digital reproductions, as well as the ability of viewers to identify the intended emotions of the painters, in an exhibition presentation.

This study involved eight distinct artworks created by four emerging professional contemporary painters. Each painter contributed two original artworks that were displayed in two arrangements, with each arrangement featuring one original and one digital reproduction per painter. Our team worked in close cooperation with the painters to curate a diverse exhibition, with varying artistic styles, such as abstract, still life, portrait, and pastoral scenes.

With data collection set to be complete by June 15, we expect to find a significant interaction between empathy and individuals’ ability to determine the painters’ felt and intended emotions during creation across real works and their digital reproductions, in viewers feeling a broader range of emotions in general.

References

- Pelowski, M., Specker, E., Gerger, G., Leder, H., & Weingarden, L. S. (2020). Do you feel like I do? A study of spontaneous and deliberate emotion sharing and understanding between artists and perceivers of installation art. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 14(3), 276–293.
- Vischer, R. (1873). On the optical sense of form: A contribution to aesthetics. In H. F. Mallgrave (Ed.), *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics 1873–1893*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Elegant Problems: The Role of a Personal Aesthetic Factor in Creative Thought

Sandra Kay
Western Connecticut State University &
Bridges Graduate School of Cognitive Diversity in Education, Los Angeles
skayelegantproblem@gmail.com

A personal aesthetic factor distinguished the professional artists from the semi-professional artists and nonartists in an empirical study based on the line of research begun by Catherine Patrick in 1937 then continued by the 1964 & 1976 studies by Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (Kay, 1989, 2000). The role played by aesthetic preferences in guiding individual curiosity and wonder that led to creative productivity at the most advanced levels of expertise in those producers of ideas also informed them as consumers or appreciators. Professional artists' lives include a network of colleagues who support each other's ideas with constructive feedback at studio visits and gallery openings. "Contricipation", the requisite aesthetic interaction between an art form and audience was described by the renowned psychologist & creativity scholar M. I. Stein as worthy of continued research as a type of collaborative creativity (1984). Theoretically what might aesthetic education or aesthetic literacy for appreciators look like? In its beginning, Baumgarten defined aesthetics as 'learning to perceive' or the science of sensitive/sensory knowing (Berndt, 2020). Audience engagement is learned from a level of observation or noticing that requires focused attention to the information provided by the senses (Kay, 1998; 2013). It is these sensory stimuli that are embedded in our long-term memory for easy retrieval and later use by the imagination. Paradoxically, it is current work in neuroscience that brings research in aesthetics full circle to its beginning with the conundrum described by Zheng, J., & Meister, M. (2024) that compares the information throughput of a human being at about 10 bits/s to our sensory systems that gather data at ~109 bits/s. Presenting an emic approach for guiding aesthetic development for ages ten to doctoral students, from 1983-2025, provides procedures and instrument for empirical research on a method found to be rewarding for all ages, contexts, levels of education or interest.

References

- Berndt, F. (2020). Facing poetry: Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's literary theory. *Paradigms: Literature and Human Sciences*, vol.12.
- Getzels, J. W. and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1964). *Creative Thinking in Art Students: An Exploratory Study*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kay, S. I. (1989) Differences in Figural Problem-Solving and Problem-Finding Behavior Among Professional, Semiprofessional, and Non-Artists. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms International.
- Kay, S.I. (1998). Shaping elegant problems for visual thinking. In J. Simpson, J. M. Delaney, M. S. Kerlavage, K. L. Carroll, J. L. Olson, S. Kay, & C.M. Hamilton (Eds.), *Creating Meaning in Art: Teacher as Choicemaker*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Kay, S. I. (2000). On the nature of expertise in visual art. In R. Freeman & B. Shore (Eds.), *Talents Unfolding Cognition and Development: Selected Proceedings of the 1992 Esther Katz Rosen Symposium*, pp. 217-232. Washington, DC: APA.

- Kay, S. I. (2013). Designing Elegant Problems for Creative Thinking, In F. Reisman (Ed.) *Creativity: Process, Product, Personality, Environment & Technology*, pp. 28 -36, KIE Conference Book Series: Cambridge, England.
- Patrick, C. (1937). Creative thought in artists. *Journal of Psychology*,4,35-73.
- Stein, M. I. (1984) *Making the Point*. Buffalo, New York: Bearly Limited
- Zheng, J., & Meister, M. (2025). The unbearable slowness of being: Why do we live at 10 bits/s?. *Neuron*, 113(2), 192-204.

Turning Off SEEKING: (An-)Aesthetics of Depression

Irene Lozzi
University of Verona
irenelozzi@gmail.com

From a phenomenological-Gestalt perspective, depression is not merely a clinical syndrome but a relational and co-constructed creative adaptation: an emergent process through which the individual reorganizes experience when repeated attempts to connect and be met in the relational field fail. Depression can therefore be described as a lived withdrawal from the unbearable, an experiential organization centered on the minimization of contact and the reduction of vulnerability. In its phenomenological configuration, depression expresses an aesthetics of detachment, a paradoxical but experientially coherent absence of presence.

This (an-)aesthetics is not characterized by vitality or intentional tension, but rather by the flattening of the perceptual-affective field and the withdrawal of desire and curiosity as orienting forces. Depression does not just affect what is felt, but transforms the epistemic openness. The (an-)aesthetics of depression should not be considered as purely conceptual: it may reflect patterns deeply rooted in the affective neurobiology of mammals. Jaak Panksepp's neuroevolutionary model of primary emotion systems highlighted how the SEEKING system, which underlies exploratory behavior, desire, and engagement (partially overlapping with the reward circuitry), drives a continuous tuning toward novelty, potentially supporting uncertainty reduction and relational adaptation. When relational efforts to engage the environment are chronically frustrated, the PANIC/GRIEF system – associated with separation distress and social pain – becomes overactivated, gradually suppressing the SEEKING system and weakening the drive to explore, connect and make sense of experience. This neuroaffective dynamic resonates with the phenomenological field of clinical depression while also mirroring and actively supporting the very process of adaptation through which the individual, in response to relational uncertainty, gradually withdraws from contact.

By integrating the phenomenological-Gestalt approach with affective neuroscience, depression is proposed as an aesthetic and relational process, deeply embedded in our neurobiology, yet resisting any reductive biologism. Neurophysiological evidence and clinical implications supporting this perspective will be discussed.

Meta-Museum

Mapi Lucia
Sapienza University of Rome
mariapia.lucia@uniroma1.it

Coauthors:

Michela Franzò (Sapienza University of Rome)
Valeria Minucciani (Politecnico of Turin)
Michela Benente (Politecnico of Turin)
Marco Iosa (Sapienza University of Rome)

Meta-Museum, a Horizon project funded by the European Union, investigates how empathy, cognition, and emotion help citizens engage with cultural heritage and its evolving interpretations, preparing them to face societal transformations with greater confidence. Ten European partners participated, conducting experiments in the Egyptian Museum of Turin (Italy), the Muséoparc of Alesia (France), and the Archaeology Museum of Catalonia (Spain).

In the first study, 104 participants (55 females) explored Room 6 of Egyptian Museum of Turin wearing devices to measure galvanic skin response (Shimmer 3 GSR); 39 also wore a 10-channel electroencephalographer (Mindtooth), and 24 used eye-tracking glasses (Tobii Pro 3). Emotional arousal followed a U-shaped pattern—peaking at entry and again near the end of the room visit—while cognitive workload started high and decreased, and brain hemispheric asymmetry (stimulus withdrawal) remained stable. High inter-individual variability probably reflected the free-exploration protocol, with visit durations ranging from 10 to 20 minutes. Participants showed higher physiological indices at the start of the visit to Room 6, followed by a period of stabilization during exploration. Around minute 15, mean arousal rose again, likely linked to a prominent Chapel artifact at the end of the room. This observed U-shaped trend of emotional arousal was not merely due to more engaged participants spending longer time in the room, but reflected a renewed GSR rise in some individuals.

These findings show that wearable devices can capture cognitive and emotional responses to cultural heritage. Emotional engagement varies widely, influenced by artifacts, spatial layout, and visit duration. Initial impact tends to be strongly engaging, stabilizing during exploration, yet new engagement peaks may emerge—driven by reflective or anticipatory responses. The project will continue investigating the factors that can enhance visitors' emotional engagement, an aspect of great importance for both researchers and museum exhibition designers.

Game as a Ceremonial Form of Aesthetic Experience: A Dialogue Between Simone Weil and Maria Lai

Letizia Masia

University of Perugia

letizia.masia@dottorandi.unipg.it

This contribution aims to explore the relationship between aesthetic experience and the drive for knowledge from a philosophical perspective. The thesis' purpose is to identify the dimension of game as a ceremonial form of aesthetic experience as well as a privileged context for the activation of epistemic emotions (curiosity, interest, wonder, etc.), as promoters of cognitive development.

The study develops a dialogue between Simone Weil's philosophical thought on ceremony and Maria Lai's corresponding use of game as an aesthetic experience. Firstly, the value of the Weilian conception of ceremony is analysed as an aesthetic experience. Simone Weil describes the ceremony as a space in which the emotional sphere of the human being is strongly stimulated. Within this space, "enthusiasms" play a central role in the very experience of the rite. Such "enthusiasms" are interpreted here as epistemic emotions. They are seemingly activated by participation in the aesthetic experience: they act as a stimulus to exploration and open the possibility of a cognitive journey, both personal and collective.

Here lies the theoretical basis for the analysis of Maria Lai's work *Il Volo del Gioco dell'Oca* (2002), a paradigmatic example of her conception of art as a game: a powerful tool for growth and knowledge. *Il Volo del Gioco dell'Oca* is configured here through the lens of Weilian categories as a ceremonial form of aesthetic experience. Indeed, through the activation of epistemic emotions such as curiosity, interest and wonder, the game leads to an exploration aimed at knowledge of the self and the world. This perspective's intention is to put Weil's thought in dialogue with Lai's artistic practice, achieved through game as a ceremonial form of aesthetic experience. It showcases how, in Weil and Lai, aesthetic experience can stimulate epistemic emotions and open a path to knowledge and self-realisation.

Emotion and Attention in the Aesthetic Response

Francesca Camilla Mattioli
University of Murcia
francesca.mattioli20@gmail.com

One prominent view of emotion in the contemporary philosophical debate is the one ascribing an epistemic role to them. Emotions can indeed have epistemic value as a result of their links with attention. According to Brady (2013), emotions can both direct and focus our attention and capture and consume it: we thus have an initial automatic appraisal, and a second assessment in which our attentional persistence facilitates a better grasp of the evaluative reasons. According to Brady, these two functions make emotions a perfect tool for understanding explained as the capacity to grasp the genuine reasons behind our (aesthetic) judgements.

I'll argue that while it is true that emotions play a role in our attention regulation, understanding (as the ability to answer the why question) might be an overestimation of emotions' possibility to detect in each situation the genuine reasons. This is true especially in cases of attentional persistence, cases that Brady considers to be exemplary of our ability to understand. Considering different aspects of the relation between emotion and attention – like the (in) voluntary shifting/maintenance of attention – and drawing from examples in the aesthetic realm, I will attempt to assess differently the epistemic role of emotion as a form of affective knowledge (Gorodeisky). Whereas genuine reasons, although always present, can remain unavailable, the emotional response – if both accurate and responsive – can disclose us with immediate information regarding our evaluative take.

Neurophysiological Responses to Digitalized and Digital Art: A Pilot Study on Generations Z and Y in Virtual Museums

Federica Piccoli
IULM University, Milan
federica.piccoli1@studenti.iulm.it

Coauthors:

Marco Bilucaglia (IULM University, Milan)
Margherita Zito (IULM University, Milan)
Vincenzo Russo (IULM University, Milan)

The increasing digitalisation of the cultural and artistic sector has led to the development of virtual museum environments, which are designed to provide remote visiting experiences by either reproducing physical artworks or presenting natively digital content. While these innovations have increased access to art and introduced new ways to engage with it, the extent to which they can elicit emotional responses, create a sense of authenticity and encourage sustained user involvement remains unclear.

This pilot study aims to investigate whether the nature of the artistic stimulus (digitalized vs. natively digital) and the communicative framing preceding the experience influence the aesthetic and neurophysiological responses of users, particularly those belonging to Generations Z and Y. Adopting a multidimensional approach, the study examines user reactions to two types of virtual museum: (A) a digital reproduction of a physical museum (digitalized art), and (B) a natively digital museum (e.g., featuring cryptoart or NFTs). A brief introductory framing was implemented as an experimental manipulation, and participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: no brief, congruent brief, and incongruent brief.

Neurophysiological data were collected using EEG, eye-tracking, galvanic skin response (GSR), and heart rate monitoring (HR). Additionally, post-experience questionnaires were administered to assess aesthetic evaluation, perceived authenticity, immersion, time perception, and behavioral intention.

It is hypothesized that the congruence between the stimulus and the communicative framing will significantly affect both neurophysiological and subjective responses. The expected outcomes aim to deepen our understanding of the cognitive and emotional mechanisms underpinning digital aesthetic experiences and to offer practical insights for the design of more engaging and effective virtual museum environments tailored to digitally native audiences.

Aesthetics and Creativity in Neurological Patients: Validation of a New E-Health Rehabilitation Protocol (CLICK)

Enrico Selini
University of Bergamo
enrico.selini@unibg.it

Coauthors:

Greta Varesio (University of Turin)
Francesca Colombi (University of Bergamo)
Elia Amighetti (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)
Maura Crepaldi (University of Bergamo)
Giulia Fusi (University of Bergamo)
Irene Ronga (University of Turin)
Alice Cancer (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)
Alessandro Antonietti (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)
Giuliano Geminiani (University of Turin)
Maria Luisa Rusconi (University of Bergamo)

Introduction. Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) is considered a transitional stage between healthy and pathological aging and it can be considered as the prodromal stage of Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. Cognitive stimulation may protect against cognitive decline by activating existing neural reserves and/or promoting the recruitment of alternative neural circuits. This process enhances brain plasticity, potentially reducing the risk of dementia or delaying its progression. Previous studies suggest that aesthetic appreciation can improve patients' learning skills and motivation, also in taking part in cognitive stimulation sessions. The primary goal of this study is to investigate whether the use of an aesthetic gratification protocol - based on self-selected pleasurable music - prior to neurorehabilitation training, can enhance attentional and cognitive performances in patients with MCI. Secondly, this study aims to explore the possible positive effect of aesthetic gratification on psychological variables, such as anxiety.

Methods. A 10-session individual online training program (5 sessions per week over, for two weeks) will be administered to a group of MCI patients. Participants will be randomly assigned to an experimental and an active control group. The experimental group will receive the neuroaesthetic module (PleaseMe). This consists of 15 minutes of self-selected, appreciated music, followed by 30 minutes of cognitive training. The training includes exercises designed to stimulate mnemonic, attentional-executive, and language skills through the Brainer platform. The active control group will follow the same procedure in terms of time, duration, and cognitive stimulation activities, but the motivational module (PleaseMe) will be administered after the cognitive training. Cognitive functions, treatment motivation, and anxiety levels will be assessed in both groups before and after the training sessions. Enrollment is ongoing and preliminary data analyses will be discussed.

Expected results. The expected results include improved cognitive function, increased motivation for treatment and reduced anxiety levels in the experimental group.

Skin Tone Colour Perception and Facial Attractiveness Among the Indian Population: Quantifying the Effects of Different Colours and Facial Features

Mehjabin Shirin
University of Hyderabad
mehjabinshirin001@gmail.com

Coauthor:
Shiva Ram Male (University of Hyderabad)

Introduction: Aesthetic experiences spark curiosity and evoke epistemic emotions, influencing how knowledge is acquired and retained. This study from the University of Hyderabad, under the guidance of Dr. Shiva Ram Male, investigates how Indian cultural beauty norms, particularly the preference for lighter skin tone, affect cognitive functions in aging populations. Combining philosophical inquiry with scientific method, it explores the cognitive consequences of long-standing aesthetic values.

Background: In India, fairness is often idealized, shaped by historical, colonial, and caste-related narratives. Media and advertising further reinforce this preference. These cultural influences affect visual attention and aesthetic judgment. Meanwhile, cognitive decline in conditions such as Alzheimer's disease impairs facial recognition, which can weaken emotional bonds and identity. This study examines how these visual preferences relate to epistemic emotions and cognitive decline.

Methods: This research used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and experimental psychophysics. One hundred participants rated facial images that varied by skin tone using the Fitzpatrick scale. Reaction times, accuracy, and pupillometry data were collected. The study focused on two objectives. The first was to assess cultural and perceptual influences on attractiveness judgments across diverse Indian demographics. The second was to evaluate face memory and perceptual accuracy among thirty-two participants using eye-tracking and cognitive tests, including individuals with Mild Cognitive Impairment.

Results: Medium-light skin tones received the highest ratings for attractiveness, with statistical significance ($p < 0.01$). South Indian participants showed a 23 percent weaker preference for lighter tones. Media exposure increased fairness preference by a factor of 1.8. Contrast sensitivity accounted for 34 percent of variance in ratings. The Face plus Noise task proved to be the best discriminator of cognitive performance. High performers scored 79 percent accuracy, while low performers scored 59 percent. Skin tone perception further separated cognitive groups.

Conclusion: This study offers a culturally grounded perspective on how beauty standards influence cognition. It highlights the potential for early screening tools that are both scientifically rigorous and culturally relevant.

Plastic Dolls: Immanuel Kant, Aesthetic Practices and the Modern Body

Eero Suorsa
University of Turku
eero.k.suorsa@utu.fi

In my talk, I review how Immanuel Kant's concepts of beauty and aesthetics are represented in modern-day aesthetic practices. I define aesthetic practices as habits related to body modification, including bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, and body art.

My main question is: Are Kantian concepts of beauty and aesthetics visible in modern aesthetic practices? Kant has been viewed as a philosopher who does not discuss physical beauty or aesthetic practices in themselves. Some commentators have even viewed Kant as hostile to the body and all things concerning the body, such as human sexuality.

I argue, through a closer reading of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1791) and *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764), that Kant has written extensively about the body in the sense that his vision of beauty and aesthetics resonates with modern aesthetic practices.

I use two case studies to back up my argument: David Fincher's movie *Fight Club* (1999). Through an analysis of *Fight Club*, I demonstrate that Kantian concepts of beauty are evident in the idealised vision of the aesthetic male body.

My second case study is Larry Peerce's movie *Ash Wednesday* (1973). In an analysis of *Ash Wednesday*, I demonstrate that Kantian concepts of beauty are evident in the representation of the female body's transformation.

In both case studies, I demonstrate that the concept of the body is extremely flexible and volatile. By this, I demonstrate that Kant's concepts of the body are akin to a plastic doll, always in the process of being shaped in different gendered contexts.

Ultimately, I ask: Are Kantian concepts of beauty and aesthetics valuable for our current Western aesthetic practices? In this analysis, I draw on Sherri Irvin's examination of aesthetic practices and Rae Langton's theory of objectification.

An Unsupervised Machine Learning Approach to Investigating Structural Brain Differences in Professional Dancers: Gray-White Matter Fusion Analysis with tIVA

Erdem Taskiran
University of Trento
erdemtaskiran3557@gmail.com

Coauthor:
Alessandro Grecucci (University of Trento)

Dance expertise entails specialized sensorimotor and cognitive demands that can drive experience-dependent plasticity across large-scale brain networks. In this study, we applied transposed Independent Vector Analysis (tIVA)—an unsupervised machine learning technique—to examine differences in structural brain network organization between professional dancers and non-dancer controls, using combined gray matter (GM) and white matter (WM) MRI data. The sample included 14 right-handed dancers (10 females, 4 males; Mean age = 27.43, SD = 6.85) and 11 right-handed controls (5 females, 6 males; Mean age = 30.46, SD = 6.64). The minimum description length criterion identified 11 joint GM-WM components. tIVA decomposed the data into spatially independent components with subject-specific loading coefficients, which were entered into a logistic regression model to predict group membership.

Two components significantly differentiated the groups. Component IC9, involving regions such as the middle frontal gyrus, inferior parietal lobule, supramarginal gyrus, and middle temporal gyrus, showed increased expression in professional dancers. In contrast, IC3, involving the lingual gyrus, middle temporal gyrus, and sub-gyral white matter, showed decreased expression in dancers. Although some anatomical regions overlapped, the spatial representations and GM–WM co-variation patterns were distinct, suggesting that prolonged dance training may reorganize shared brain substrates in domain-specific ways.

These findings highlight distinct patterns of gray–white matter network organization associated with dance expertise. Notably, this is the first study to apply a data-driven unsupervised machine learning approach to examine structural brain differences in professional dancers. By integrating gray and white matter into joint components, this method provides a more comprehensive and unbiased view of group-level structural variation. However, the results should be interpreted with caution due to the modest sample size. Future research with larger cohorts and multimodal data integration is needed to better understand the neural characteristics associated with long-term dance training.

Studying Wonderment by Designing for Awe

Niels van Velzen
Eindhoven University of Technology
n.i.v.velzen@tue.nl

Coauthor:
Minha Lee (Eindhoven University of Technology)

Awe is a complex emotion encompassing wonder and surprise, created by perceived vastness that challenges our mental convictions. We may be captured by nature's or art's beauty, or a grand theory of physics. Thus, aesthetics often play a central role. Furthermore, awe helps us flourish by promoting prosocial behavior and well-being. As such, it occupies an interesting intersection of moral, epistemic, and aesthetic dimensions.

Yet, current research overlooks the relationship between the elicitor and awe's effects. While it has been suggested that the wonder from awe arises from a sense of connection to our external environment, we still know little about how different aesthetic elicitors shape awe's wonder. Do the effects differ between beauty from nature compared to art, or within their various forms? And how is wonder from awe affected by non-aesthetic elicitors?

An illustrative instance of this relationship comes from current research being centered on grand experiences of awe, such as from mountain ranges. In environmental ethics, this has been linked with policies focusing on grand nature, overlooking everyday nature. Wonder for everyday nature — urban trees, local wildlife, seasonal changes — could be equally vital, especially in the context of ongoing environmental crises. We thus advocate for studying and cultivating awe in everyday life.

As technologies become more ubiquitous, they present opportunities to induce awe in everyday life. The rise of conversational chatbots is one example; these could support reflections on awe-experiences, heighten awareness of our everyday surroundings, or induce new experiences e.g. through interactive storytelling. We suggest design strategies for awe which in previous research have shown increased meaning-making and engagement with the technology. These unconventional strategies offer a way to explore how aesthetic design can shape human's wonder. However, to what extent should we want our disposition for awe to be driven by technology?