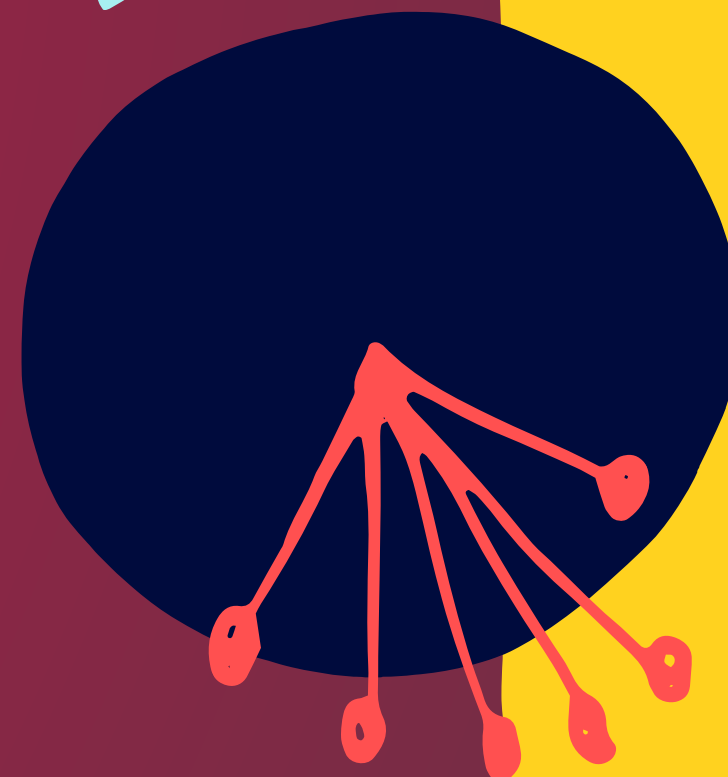




BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



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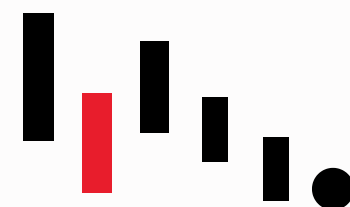
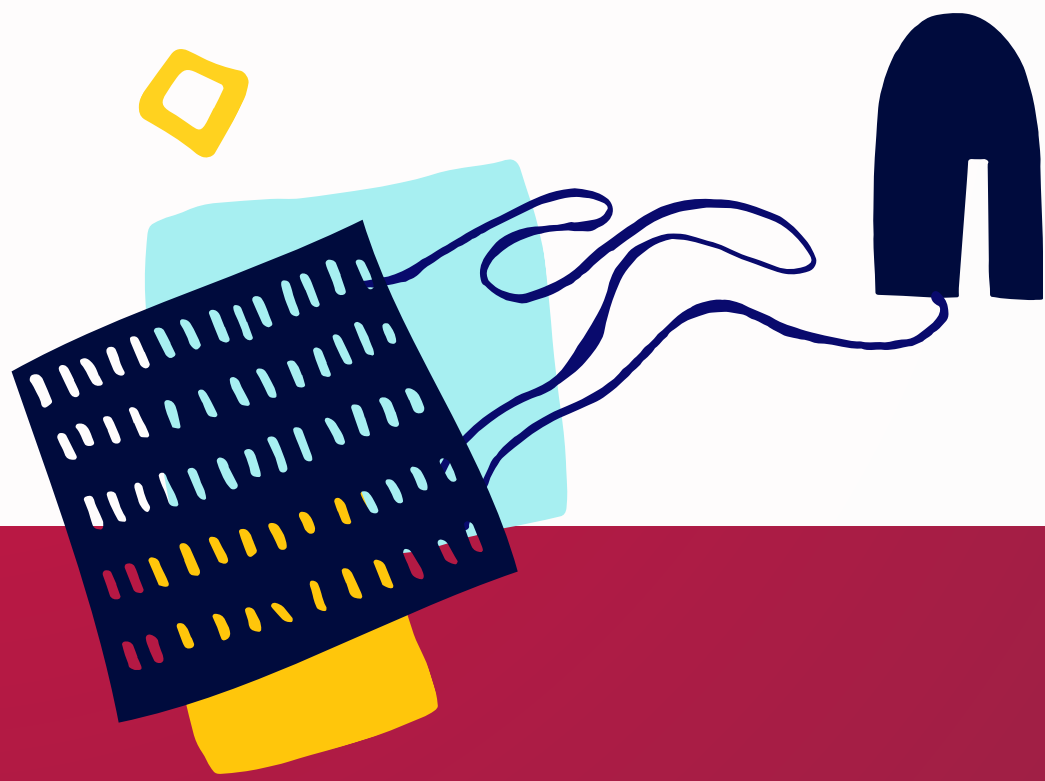
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Federico Bellini (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan)
Questions of Form in the Modernist Representation of Habit

Abstract. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, interest in the notion of habit became a crucial catalyst in the development of literature across the modernist constellation. This occurred first of all at the thematic level, through the gradual mapping of the routine and prosaic dimensions of existence. Yet this new attention also brought with it the need to identify forms and develop techniques capable of giving aesthetically compelling representation to what had traditionally been understood as little more than the background to events. In my talk, I propose to interpret a significant part of the formal innovation of the early twentieth century in light of the need to give literary form to reflections on habit developed over the preceding decades. I will focus in particular on the evolution of strategies of narrative voice, also drawing on recent developments in narratological research. My case studies will be, on the one hand, the work of Samuel Butler, in which many of the crucial thematic articulations of habit are already present, but not yet the formal resources capable of fully expressing them; and, on the other, the evolution of techniques of focalisation in Virginia Woolf. Through these techniques, the ordinary and repetitive dimension of existence—what Woolf called the “cotton wool of daily life”—ceases to be merely thematic material and becomes a structuring principle of narration, capable of reshaping at once the organisation of character, the rhythm of the narrative, and the orientation of aesthetic experience.



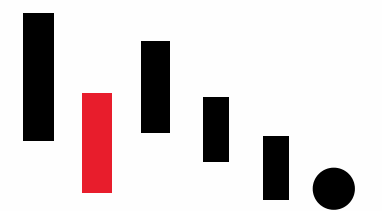
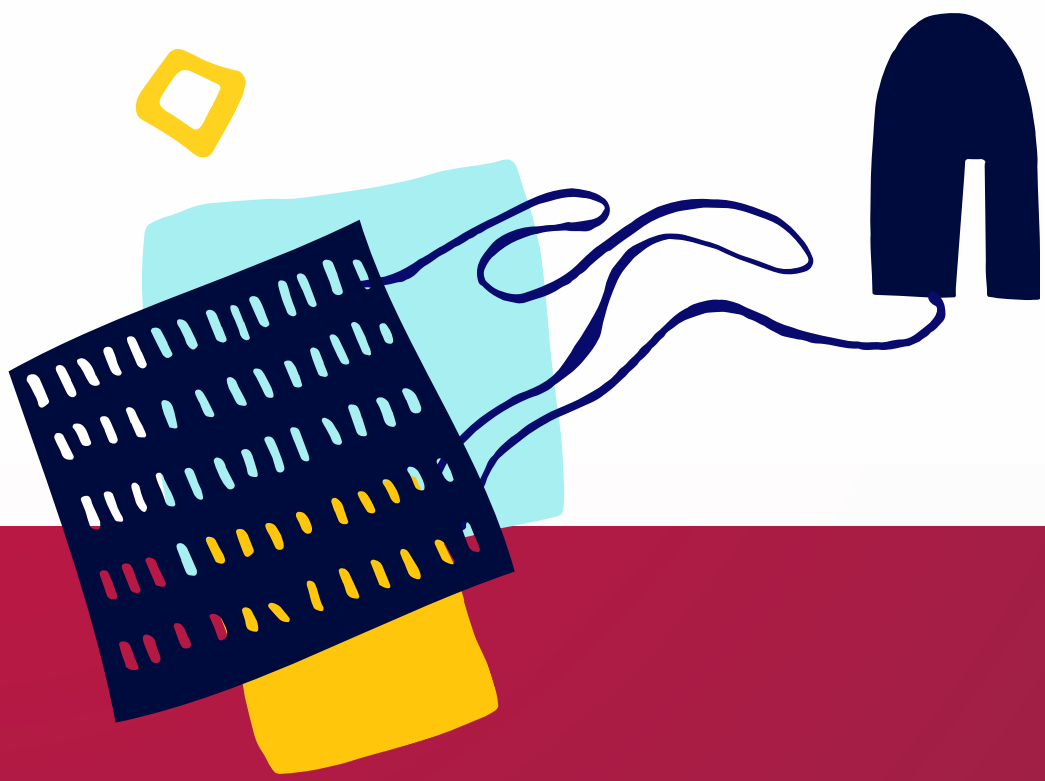
Alessandro Bertinetto (University of Turin)
Habits and Aesthetic Agency

Abstract. This talk examines the role of habits in aesthetic agency. The relationship between habits and aesthetic agency is often presented as a tension. According to one influential view, habits hinder—or even preclude—genuinely aesthetic agency because their tendency to reproduce established patterns of action conflicts with the openness, responsiveness, and creativity characteristic of aesthetic engagement. By contrast, other authors regard habits as indispensable to the exercise of aesthetic agency within specific aesthetic domains. I argue that this apparent opposition rests on an unduly narrow conception of habit as mere mechanical repetition. Once habits are understood as dynamically evolving dispositions that organize not only action but also perception, attention, and thought, they emerge not as obstacles to aesthetic agency but as one of its enabling conditions. They provide the practical and perceptual resources that make meaningful aesthetic agency possible while remaining open to transformation through their very exercise. On this view, aesthetic agency consists neither in the rejection of habits nor in their mechanical reiteration. Engaging with recent literature, and especially with Klinger’s theory of aesthetic action (2024), I argue that aesthetic agency is constitutively appreciative and depends not only on practical and technical habits and skills, but also on specifically aesthetic habits—and, more particularly, on taste, understood as a habit of appreciation. Aesthetic agency can thus be understood as a form of situated practice in which acquired dispositions orient action without predetermining its concrete aesthetic sense, while remaining open to revision and reorganization in response to the qualitative and normative development of the activity itself. Aesthetic habits are therefore best understood as plastic, potentially self-modifying dispositions with an appreciative and hedonic dimension: they stabilize aesthetic agency without ossifying it, enabling responsive and creative engagement with changing aesthetic situations. Within this framework, improvisation becomes a paradigmatic case for grasping the dynamic relation between habit and action in the aesthetic domain.



Laura Ferreri (University of Pavia)
Understanding and modulating musical reward: from pleasure to memory and shared musical experiences

Abstract. Music is a ubiquitous human experience that engages multiple cognitive, emotional, and social processes. This talk will present research on the neurocognitive mechanisms underlying musical pleasure, focusing on how reward processes contribute to the experience of enjoyment and emotional engagement with music. It will then discuss the relationship between reward and memory, examining how reward system activation influences the formation and retrieval of memories for music and related information. Finally, the talk will explore how shared musical experiences shape pleasurable responses, using behavioral and hyperscanning paradigms to investigate the affective and neural dynamics of shared music listening. Together, these studies provide insight into how reward, memory, and social interaction contribute to the ways in which we experience and engage with music.



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Tamar Levi (University of Turin)

Aesthetic Habit and Gesture. Elements for a Shared Inquiry

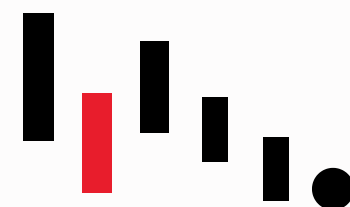
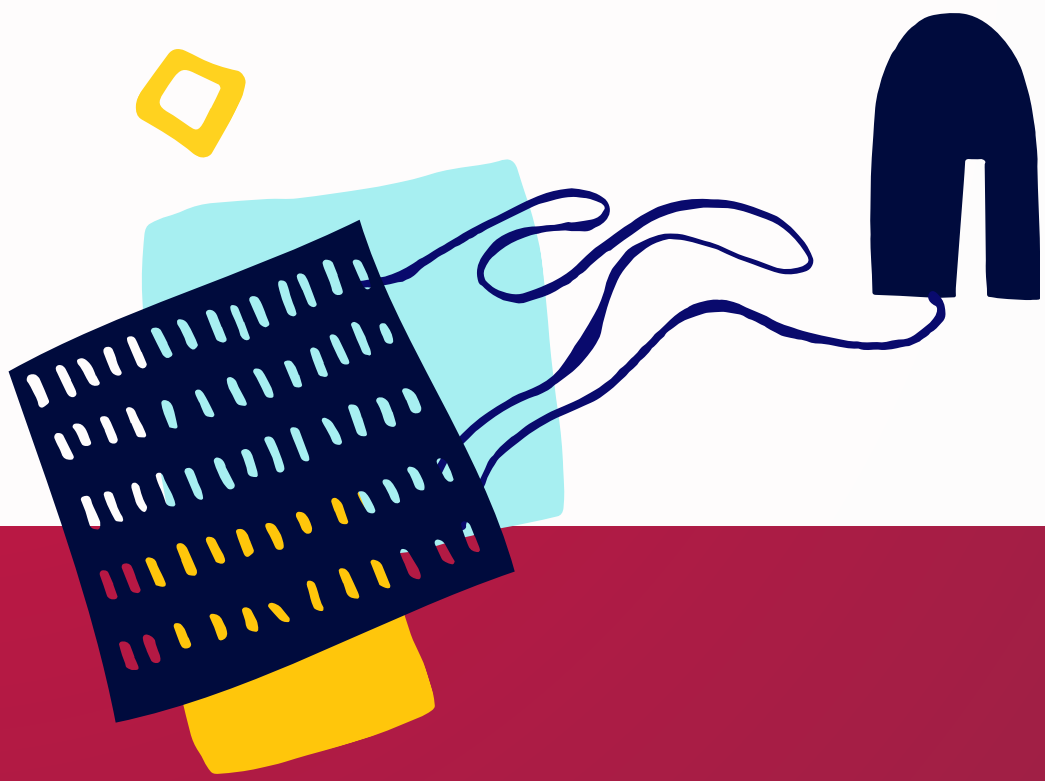
Abstract. The relationship between habit and gesture has been discussed within different philosophical traditions. In phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty describes gesture as a dynamic structure mediating between the actual and the habitual body: the not-yet-automatized gesture opens the subject onto a new field of experience before becoming stabilized, through repetition, within the habitual body. A parallel account can be found in the pragmatist tradition of Peirce and Mead, where gesture plays a generative role in the formation of habits and the emergence of shared patterns of action. According to Peirce, habit constitutes the “final logical interpretant” of the semiotic process, insofar as it introduces regularity and continuity into the interpretive chain through gesture, while Mead describes the formation of social habits through “conversations of gestures.” Despite their different theoretical starting points, these approaches converge on a conception of gesture as a transitional structure: gestures are shaped by established habits while simultaneously contributing to their formation and transformation. The talk will examine this relationship within the aesthetic domain, starting from the notion of aesthetic habit. From an ecological perspective, aesthetic habit designates a relational disposition that emerges through the interaction between organism and environment and is characterized by improvisational plasticity, i.e. the capacity to articulate repetition and variation in response to the demands of a situation. Within this framework, gesture can be understood as a form of aesthetic habit in which embodiment, normativity, and mediality converge. Through repeated bodily enactment, gesture acquires a degree of stability and assumes a recognizable and reproducible form. At the same time, as a “means without end” (Agamben 1996), it remains a potentiality for meaning rather than the actualization of predetermined meaning. Its specifically aesthetic character thus lies in its capacity to generate meaning in the course of its own enactment. In the performing arts, this dynamic takes a particularly concrete form: gestures operate as “habits in action,” drawing on established cultural forms while taking shape in response to the circumstances of their enactment.



Judith-Frederike Popp (Freie Universität Berlin)

Persistence out of the corner of our eye - On the challenge of determining the non-aesthetic surroundings of aesthetic practices

Abstract. To systematically characterize aesthetic phenomena, most approaches emphasize the importance of distinguishing them from other, non-aesthetic phenomena, experiences, or objects. The talk explores how this requirement gains a specific momentum when aesthetic phenomena are not comprehended as isolated and static snapshots but as processual activities that develop over time and space. It is argued that the momentum is rooted in a practiced combination of attitude and attention that joins productive and reproductive dimensions especially in the context of everyday life. This combination is characterized by a close juxtaposition of being peripheral and being right in the middle that enables aesthetic processes to manifest in a tension between low-threshold accessibility and exclusive surplus. This view relies on reading the aesthetic dimension into the conditionalities of life practices instead of extracting it from them, which brings its limits into focus. The talk will follow the hypothesis that these limits also occur as both peripheral and central: To create something, the engaged subject must assume that everything can be aesthetic and that not everything is aesthetic. The non-aesthetic gains temporary shape here as an indirect but resistant presence, against which the aesthetic becomes tangible. It is argued that both attributes are two sides of the same coin and keeping them apart shows both as characterized by a formal movement referring to the respective other: While aesthetic practice reaches beyond by opening up, the non-aesthetic resistance narrows down by clutching on.



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Mariagrazia Portera (University of Florence)

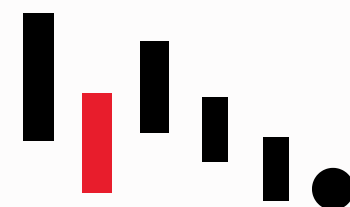
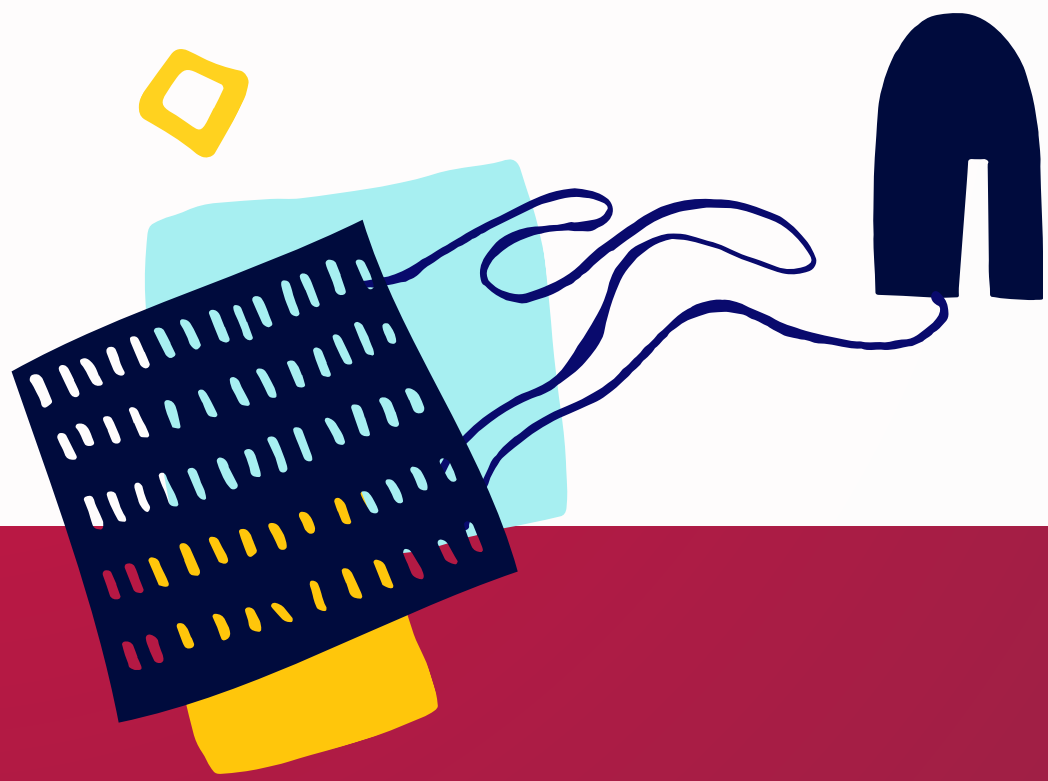
From the Thematic to the Operative: The Poetic Text as a Transcendental Device of Habituality

Abstract. The interplay between habit and its disruption is a fundamental dimension of artistic practices in general and of poetry in particular. Recent work on the role of habituality in artistic and aesthetic practices has shown that both artistic production and aesthetic experience emerge from a background of sedimented habits, while also emphasizing that such sedimentation never constitutes an inert or permanently established ground. Habits persist by being reactivated in ever-changing circumstances, and are therefore both reinforced and exposed to variation. Improvisation, from this perspective, is not simply the negation of habit: it presupposes sedimentation while exploring, from within it, possibilities that have yet to be actualized. Habit and variation are thus not mutually exclusive moments, but poles of a dynamic in which repetition is always potentially transformative.

This paper addresses a more specific question, though one with potentially broader theoretical implications. Rather than asking how poetry thematizes habit, or simply acknowledging the role of habituality in the production and reception of poetic works, I approach the poetic text in its operative dimension. Can poetic texts themselves function as devices for producing, stabilizing, and transforming aesthetic habits? I take as my point of departure Heinrich Lausberg's notion of reusable literature. In Lausberg's distinction between *discourse for single use* (*Verbrauchsrede*) and *discourse for repeated use* (*Wiedergebrauchsrede*), the latter – of which poetic and literary discourse is a paradigmatic instance – is intended to be spoken, read, or performed repeatedly under analogous circumstances: circumstances that are neither wholly identical nor radically different. What matters here is not simply the persistence of the text through repetition, but the particular relationship between identity and variation that such repetition establishes. A text persists as a recognizable structure precisely because it can be actualized anew; and each actualization, while reiterating the same linguistic configuration, necessarily occurs within a world that is at least partly different. Poetic reuse can therefore be understood as a form of repeatability structurally open to contingency. The text does not merely survive changes in the circumstances of its enunciation; it incorporates such change into the very conditions of its functioning.

On the basis of this particular form of iterability, I propose to understand certain poetic texts as generative devices of aesthetic habituality and, in a sense to be further specified, as transcendental structures of habituality. My hypothesis is that, in certain cases, the poetic text brings the function of reuse to a kind of *degree zero* (to borrow an expression from Italo Testa): it minimizes its representational or thematic function in order to intensify its operative one, becoming a structure that can be repeatedly inhabited by experience. Rather than simply representing a particular encounter with the world, such a text provides a form through which further encounters can take place, become recognizable, and generate relatively stable perceptual and affective dispositions. Deixis offers a privileged site for observing this process, since – per definition – deictic elements retain a relative linguistic identity while their reference is determined anew in each situation of enunciation, thereby making the logic of poetic reuse especially visible.

Through selected readings of Leopardi, Rosselli, and Hölderlin, I will examine how specific poetic configurations – also through the use of deixis – can transform the repeatability inherent in the literary text into a practice of encountering the ever-changing world. The central question, then, is not what poetry says about habit, but what poetry, through its analogical repeatability, does to habit: how it produces and transforms habits, and how it draws upon them to make the world newly available to experience.



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Irene Ronga & Jacopo Frascaroli (University of Turin)

Habits and Plasticity in Psychology and Neuroscience: From William James to the Bayesian Brain

Abstract. Habit is often understood as the way past experience becomes sedimented into relatively stable patterns of perception, thought, and action. Yet habits are possible only because organisms remain plastic: able to adjust those patterns when circumstances change. This talk traces this tension between stability and change across psychology and neuroscience. We begin with William James's reflections on habit and plasticity, move through behaviourist theories of learning, and consider how contemporary approaches such as enactivism and predictive processing reconceive habits as flexible, dynamically maintained dispositions rather than rigid routines. We then turn to the brain, asking how repeated experience shapes expectations and how those expectations are revised when something surprising occurs. Drawing on Bayesian approaches to cognition and on research on auditory and musical experience, we show how the brain continuously balances what it has learned from the past with the need to remain sensitive to novelty. On this view, habit and plasticity are not opposing forces, but complementary dimensions of adaptive engagement with a changing environment.



Luisa Sampugnaro (University of Turin)

Habit and creativity. Sketching a theoretical framework for reconciliation

Abstract. Habit is routinely cast as creativity's antagonist: repetition against novelty, automatism against invention, sedimented past against open future. This paper argues that this opposition rests on an impoverished concept of habit and sketches a framework in which habituation is the very condition of creative action. The argument is built in dialogue with three classical accounts that assign a pivotal role to the body. First, Félix Ravaisson's double law of habit, in which receptivity fades as spontaneity grows, so that habit culminates not in inertia but in grace and virtuosity. Second, Marcel Mauss's techniques of the body, where acquired montages of acts are instituted by and for social authority yet transmitted through an imitation that leaves room for experimentation. Third, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: a structured disposition working as a matrix of regulated improvisations that yields bounded yet unlimited responses to unforeseen situations, while hysteresis and field crises open intervals of reflexive innovation. Taken together, these accounts support a conception of creativity as repetition that continuously differentiates itself rather than creation "ex nihilo", with implications for debates on skill, expertise and embodied agency.



Sofia Sandreschi de Robertis (Roma Tre University)

Habit and Intuition: Bergson, Art, and Philosophy

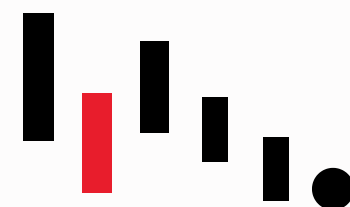
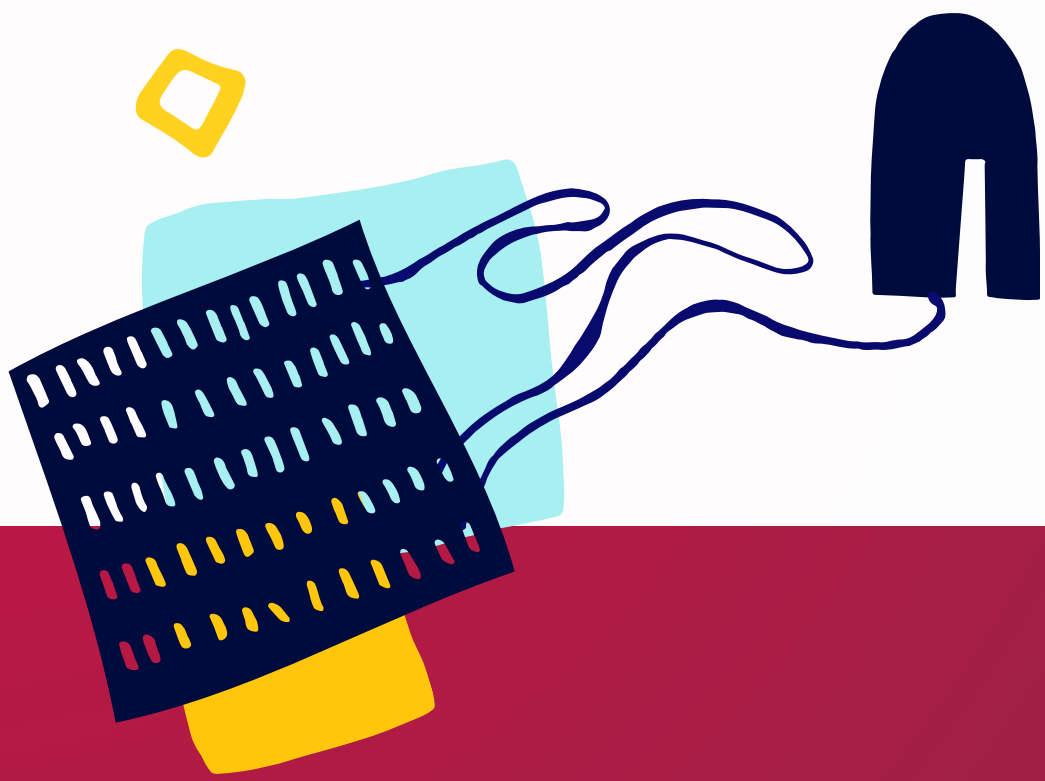
Abstract. Starting from the collection *La pensée et le mouvant*, this paper reconstructs Bergson's notions of habit and intuition, outlining the complexity of their relationship beyond their simple—and perhaps only partial—opposition. Although not systematically theorised, the problematic connection between habit and the intuitive method offers fruitful insights for rethinking the relationship between two concepts that are significant both for philosophical inquiry and for artistic practice.



Italo Testa (University of Parma)

Reusing Forms: Art, Critique, and Social Transformation

Abstract. This paper proposes reuse as a critical category for social and aesthetic theory. Social forms—habits, practices, languages, media, institutions, and imaginaries—persist only through their repeated reactivation. Yet this repeatability also exposes them to displacement, refunctioning, and transformation. Art is a privileged site of this ambivalence. By reusing inherited gestures, images, objects, and conventions, artistic practices interrupt their ordinary functions and make their contingency perceptible. The paper therefore understands art as a form of critical reuse and defines critical imagination as the capacity to reconfigure the materials of the present, opening them toward alternative forms of life.



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Feng Zhu (King's College London)

Aesthetic askēsis in competitive team hero shooter games?

Abstract. The cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities arguably requires the exercise of non-formalizable “reflective judgments” (Hui, 2019; Kant, 1987 [1790]). The *felix aestheticus* eschews conventional partitions and categorizations of the world that come with a dominant sensory order (Rancière, 2004); they must engage in exercises that allow them to perceive the world properly. It is a training that proceeds without a clear end of what one will become (Baumgarten cited in Engberg-Pedersen, 2023). These aspirations initially appear far removed from the realm of competitive videogame play (and other competitive practices). Goal-oriented pursuits with scoring systems and registers of success and failure arguably entrain instrumentalizing mindsets that impose “determinative judgments” based on maximizing a given metric. This paper will, however, explore the possibility that the kind of disciplined practice or *askēsis* needed for skilled competitive gaming is not incompatible with an aesthetic dimension. There are at least three aspects to this. First, just as the “feel” of a tennis serve is capable of yielding aesthetic satisfaction (Arnold, 1990), the same is true of what it feels like to grapple with challenges in a virtual world. This play can even furnish moments of mind-body oneness (*shinjin ichinyo*) (Yuasa, 1993) or “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) experiences. Second, expert skilled practice is in fact sensitive and discerning in looking beyond appearances in a given situation (such as a gameplay state) and refraining from the *de facto* judgments resorted to by the less highly skilled. This is so even when complex decisions are made seemingly instantaneously. The skilled practitioner makes reflective judgments based on a formal indeterminacy or lawfulness without a law. Third, the patterned form of the practice may be regarded as being part of the practitioner’s “aesthetics of existence” (Foucault, 1984 [1983]). The practice or work itself, which forges a “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1990 [1980]; Crossley, 2004), can itself be regarded as aesthetic insofar as this highlights its constructedness; the attention and care required for it; the need for judgment instead of rules; and the final result, that may be regarded as beautiful (Bennett, 1996).

My focus will be on this third aspect – *askēsis* as an aesthetics of existence – but my argument will be that all three aspects are tightly woven together. This is arguably an insight that has already been arrived at in Eastern self-cultivation techniques, which see the state of mind-body oneness, arrived at through dedicated practice, as ethically and aesthetically significant for the individual as well as key to achieving peak performance in skilled practices, such as Japanese theatrical arts (Nō drama) and martial arts (Nagatomo, 1993). Drawing upon case studies of professional players of team hero shooter games, I will argue that although an aesthetic *askēsis* is in principle achievable, there are some practical difficulties germane to the culture around the game genre and the affordances within the game that inhibit its realization.