

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BEAUTY AND CHANGE

Aesthetics and Human Flourishing

Theories, Experiments and Applications

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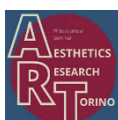


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Keynote Talks

Dancing Brains, Thinking Bodies and Algorithmic Aesthetics: New Frontiers in the Science of Embodied Experience

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This presentation explores the intricate interplay between dance, neuroscience, and technology, inspired by age-old questions concerning why do we dance, and what draws us to this mesmerizing art form? Unravelling the complexities behind our innate desire to dance, I navigate through contrasting perspectives, ranging from personal motivations to social bonds. Drawing inspiration from dance scholar Kimerer LaMothe, who posits that humans have evolved as creatures destined to dance for the very essence of our bodily becoming, I examine the psychological, neuroscientific, and AI dimensions of dance perception.

This interdisciplinary journey goes beyond a mere dissection of the phenomenology of dance, aiming to reveal new insights that diverse scientific disciplines offer into this universal form of expression. As dance remains a timeless conduit for social bonding, artistic expression, and recreation, my talk argues that the most groundbreaking revelations will emerge at the intersection of arts, sciences, and technology. Emphasizing the transformative potential of collaborative efforts, I contend that the future of dance research lies in transcending disciplinary boundaries and exploring the expansive realm of human experience through bodily movement.

Beauty and Wonder in Public Urban Spaces

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In my talk, I will address how urban design and public art can contribute to an open city. I will first survey the state of research on the impact of urbanicity on mental well-being. Here we see a mixed picture. On the one hand, common mental disorders are more prevalent (Wal et al., 2021) and stress processing is impaired in urban dwellers (Lederbogen et al., 2011). On the other hand, well-being seems to be generally higher in urban vs. rural spaces (Counted, et al., 2024).

I will address how beauty and interestingness of urban spaces could contribute to such well-being by presenting research from our citizen science, experimental philosophy approach to urban density and emotions. We (the *Research Platform Neurourbanism*) are currently conducting an *Ecological Momentary Assessment Study* (EMA) in Berlin, Germany. There we ask participants to rate their environment and emotions three times a day for a week. Initial data from our sample (n =1645, August 2024) suggest that the perceived beauty and interestingness of the surrounding space had the largest impact on our well-being measure. I will present an interpretation of those data that highlights urban aesthetics as affordances to engage both in social activities and exploration. I will then address the effects of extraordinary architecture and public art in changing the perspective of urban dwellers. In particular, I will discuss the role of wonder in transformative experiences based on a large-scale assessment of emotions in art encounters (Miller et al. 2024) that we recently extended to include public artworks.

Panel – Aesthetic Experiences, Perceptual Processing, and Human Flourishing: Insights from Healthy and Pathological Brains

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Aesthetic experiences are often seen as privileged access points to the inner functioning of the human mind. The powerful, affectively laden experiences that we undergo when confronted with natural or artistic beauty call into play in complex ways perception, cognition, attention, learning, and memory, as well as crucial motivational and affective phenomena, including reward, liking, and curiosity. It is unsurprising, then, that a growing stream of empirical research is turning to the study of the arts and aesthetics to cast light on normal and pathological psychological functioning and to find ways to enhance mental health.

This symposium will offer a timely overview of how current research in empirical aesthetics and neuroaesthetics can shed light on healthy and pathological cognitive functioning and be applied to enhance well-being across the lifespan. Lucia Sacheli will present evidence from neuroimaging studies on aesthetic appreciation and creativity in the domain of visual art that casts new light on the fingerprints of artistic expertise. Irene Ronga's talk will focus on the case of the aesthetic appreciation of musical consonance to show how studying its neurophysiological bases across the lifespan (from infancy to the elderly) and in mild cognitive impairment may unveil the defining features of implicit learning in healthy and pathological neurodevelopment and aging. Finally, Helmut Leder will present some of the latest evidence on the impact of aesthetic experiences on our emotional states and provide insight from field- and museum studies on their possible role in promoting health and well-being.

From Perception to Emotion: Visual Art and Aesthetic Experience

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Art, among the various characteristics and qualities it possesses, can also be considered for the continuous challenges it presents to our visual system. There are problematic situations when artworks are ambivalent and ambiguous. Gombrich (1960) asserts that any given experience can be illusory, and illusion is hard to describe. I will consider visual illusions as a starting point to show how visual perception can be tested, and works of art as stimuli that engage our ability to understand and attribute their meaning. However, seeing something also involves considering the affective and emotional qualities expressed by an object through the organization of perceptual stimuli. As Arnheim (1949) states, this relates to the dynamics of visual form and the expression it communicates. The dynamics of visual form can convey expressions of two kinds: cognitive and emotional. The cognitive expression can relate, for instance, to the motion perceived in a picture, and the emotional expression can be grasped by the affective qualities communicated. Cognitive and emotional expressive qualities are closely connected and dependent on one another. Affective qualities can be considered a fundamental starting point of our experience with art. I believe that such an experience with visual art, to be properly defined as aesthetic, should occur within a museum context where art can be fully appreciated. To support this claim I will present some research conducted in various art museums aimed at observing visitors behaviour, with a particular focus on motivations, emotions, personality traits, physiological reactions, and well-being, to show also the flourishing power of the art experiences.

The Pattern of Losing Oneself and Finding Oneself in Aesthetic Experience

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I consider Gadamer's claims about the nature of play and aesthetic experience, and specifically his idea that in certain cases we lose ourselves in such experiences. What that means depends upon the concept of self we employ. I adopt a pattern theory of self and discuss how the self-pattern changes in a variety of experiences. Specifically I look at ongoing debates about expert performance in athletics and performing arts. I also consider whether variations of selfless experience in these contexts are similar to or different from the selfless experience described in the mindfulness meditation literature. Finally, I ask whether any of these variations of diminished self corresponds to what Gadamer has in mind.

Panel – Architecture, Urbanism and Human Flourishing: Insights from Scientists, Architects and Policy Makers

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SPEAKER TBA

Architecture and urbanism play a major role in shaping our individual and collective lives: they influence the way we scaffold our actions and our cognitive activities, they define the way we interact socially, and they have a profound influence on our mental health and wellbeing. To the scholar of aesthetics, they represent a particularly fecund field of study, where considerations about art and beauty intersect with social, political, and environmental issues. To the architect and the policy maker, they represent a challenge that must be met in the best possible way to ensure the flourishing of urban communities in an era of increased urbanisation. This panel will point to some of the complexities of the contemporary reflection on, and practice of, city design, with a focus on how architecture and urbanism can support and promote mental health and wellbeing. It will do so by bringing together leading researchers, architects, and policy-makers, with an eye on how scientific research in the field can usefully inform, and be informed by, the practice of architects, urbanists, and institutions.

Art, Architecture, and Human Wellbeing

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I will discuss the conceptual underpinnings of aesthetic experiences in light of two core questions. What is the nature of aesthetic experiences? Why do aesthetics matter? We can have aesthetic experiences of natural kinds (e.g. people and landscape) and human artifacts. I will organize these questions our engagement with art and architecture. Despite the fact that our response to artifacts is more variable than it is to natural kinds, I argue that general principles of human experience can be derived. I will review the development and applications of a taxonomy that we developed to characterize the impact of art, and psychological dimensions that we identified for our response to the built environment. In both instances, I will propose specific ways that art and architecture can be deployed to contribute to human wellbeing.

Parallel Sessions

Day 1: Theories

What Is an Aesthetic Experience? Let's Talk About Breadth, Length, and Depth

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There has been much discussion on how to define “aesthetic experience” both within psychology as well as philosophy, but none of this discussion has led to a clear definition, leading to both philosophers and psychologists arguing to abandon the term (Shusterman, 1996; Skov & Nadal, 2021). Rather than aiming to end this discussion, I aim to shape future discussions by proposing this mid-way continuum perspective, as well as proposing 3 dimensions—breadth, length, depth—as a way to organize our thinking, to systemize different aspects, and to reshape our discussion. By breadth, I mean the wide variety of experiences that have been referred to as “aesthetic experience”. By length, the temporal aspect can vary from (milli)seconds to hours, which warrants a more explicit discussion. By depth, the stark contrast in the intensity of this wide variety of experiences. My argument will be that some contrasting views of aesthetic experience can be united by acknowledging the breadth and allowing for variations in length and depth. Specifically, I will argue that defining “aesthetic experience” is like a sorites problem: one grain of sand doesn't make a pile, nor does it make a desert. Nonetheless if I keep adding grains of sand then at some point a pile or even a desert will appear. This means that a categorization of aesthetic vs. non-aesthetic is misleading, and we should rather conceptualize aesthetic experience as a continuum: from rather short and subconscious experiences to prolonged engagements with (art) objects or stimuli that can impact us deeply.

The talk takes into consideration philosophical perspectives and also relates to the notion of flourishing, as related to the "depth" dimension of aesthetic experiences.

Fiction, Fantasy, and Human Flourishing

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Freud, in his essay “Creative Writing and Daydreaming” (1908) links the creative activity of artistic expression to fantasizing. More recent studies in analytic aesthetics, in dialogue with empirical psychology, have debated the nature of fiction in relation to imagination. Since Walton’s influential *Mimesis as Make-Believe* (1990), there seems to be a consensus that claims: (a) fiction is essentially connected to imagination, and (b) imagination, in the artistic context, is the prescription to make-believe. Following Currie (1990, 1995, 2014), many speech act theorists consider fiction to be a sui generis illocutionary act, one that is contrasted strongly with belief. In his most recent work (2020), Currie steers away from defining the nature of fiction and is more interested in exploring the “shape of fiction” in terms of what role it plays in our lives, both imaginatively and cognitively. However, Currie continues to speak of fictional imagination as make-believe. This raises three important interrelated questions this paper will consider: (1) How closely should we equate artistic fiction to make-believe? (2) What is the relation between artistic fiction and reality (and in turn fantasy)? and (3) What is the value of artistic fiction in our lives (aesthetically, cognitively, emotionally) insofar as it promotes human flourishing? Drawing from Currie as well as other recent philosophers of fiction (see below), most of whom engage with empirical aesthetics, this paper will argue that although artistic fiction signifies a distinct cognitive attitude, it should not be equated with make-believe. Rather it is best understood as world-imagining, a sui generis illocutionary act that is structurally distinct from daydreaming and fantasizing. Unlike fantasy, the world-imagining of artistic fiction plays an essential psychological role for human flourishing in a variety of aesthetic, cognitive, and emotional ways.

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Utopian Dream or Dystopian Nightmare? Why Aesthetically Appealing Environments Matter for the Flourishing of Their Inhabitants

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Why do aesthetically appealing environments engender positive emotions? Why does the modification of a local environment frequently invoke aesthetic objections from those most affected even though it is considered economically beneficial or environmentally benign? What is responsible for cognitive dissonance of this kind? Why is there a stark disconnect between what ordinary people deem aesthetically desirable and what actually gets implemented or built? These are among some of the questions raised in this paper. I propose that the aesthetic desirability of an environment is of particular significance for understanding its potential to promote or impede the flourishing of its inhabitants. The argument I present entails the proposition that an environment's aesthetic character is the tangible expression of the relational dynamics established or imposed by cultural, economic, political and social ideological forces. In order to examine this proposal, I argue that we must divest ourselves of a conventional approach to environmental appraisal where aesthetic value is thought, primarily, to concern an environment's formal, visual, appearance its 'scenic' properties or 'expressive' qualities, for example, in favour of a contextually thick relational approach. In advancing this view I aim to show how an environment's aesthetic value can be indicative of the merit of the relational dynamics that it is perceived to embody or express. On this view aesthetically appealing environments can be understood to embody or express meaningful, integral, relations while those that prove aesthetically unappealing can be understood to exhibit arbitrary and fragmented relations of various kinds. Drawing upon theories in environmental aesthetics, human geography and positive psychology I show how the relational dynamics that specific environments embody impacts the well-being of their inhabitants. This relational approach to aesthetic appraisal aims to provide new, pragmatic, insight where planners are necessarily required to consider the aesthetic preferences of the inhabitants they serve rather than rely on a set of aesthetic criteria developed by theorists or designers.

The Aestheticization of Analytic Philosophy

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The aesthetic only partially overlaps with the fictional and the artistic. I will discuss the aesthetic aspects of such a typically non-fictional and non-artistic discourse as philosophy. I argue that an overemphasis on aesthetic aspects in philosophy is a bad thing and hampers human flourishing, rather than fostering it.

Philosophy, alongside other kinds of non-fiction (for example, scientific communication, or historiography), is understood to (have to) be largely in the realm of non-fiction and to be free from aesthetic concerns. Only non-analytic philosophy, in particular of the so-called “Continental” variety, or philosophy presented in the form of fiction, e.g. Plato’s, sometimes indulges in stylistic affectations. By contrast, the implicit widespread narrative has it, analytic or mainstream philosophy pays no heed to aesthetic considerations in its presentation—only to epistemic ones. There is no style of analytic philosophy or, if there is, it is only a “style of no style”. As Lamarque (2009), “Poetry and Abstract Thought” for instance puts it: “In philosophy a conclusion is derived through principles of reasoning. Logic not rhetoric dictates whether the conclusion has adequate support”.

My aim is to present philosophical and empirical considerations that, pace this narrative, suggest that formal, stylistic, or broadly speaking aesthetic considerations are in fact important to the way in which analytic philosophy contributions are often evaluated—both aesthetically and epistemically. Once this state of affairs is made explicit, it presents us with a choice. Either we, as analytic philosophy practitioners, accept that aesthetic considerations are important to philosophical quality, and hence embrace, in this respect, a sort of Continentalization of analytic philosophy, or, alternatively, we denounce the current predicament as a form of undue aestheticization of analytic philosophy, and seek remedial measures to reduce formal and stylistic considerations in philosophical evaluation.

Aesthetics and Human Flourishing: The Case of Architecture

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We do flourish *more* and *better* in spaces that we value aesthetically. This is so, I will argue, because aesthetically preferable spaces – and, by extension, large built environments such as cities – are spaces that afford flourishing. My argument is based, mainly, on three reasons. The first is that we *see* (i.e. we appreciate) aesthetic value in spaces insofar as (a) they afford for the realization of a range of possibilities of *significance* for us, and (b) they enhance positively the felt quality of realizing those possibilities. The second is that the *significance* of those possibilities is determined by our *ideal of life*, which I take to be our (usually vague, unexplicit, pre-conscious, and largely undefined) perception at *this very moment* of how we want to live our life. And the third is that, everything else being equal, we commonly experience ourselves *flourishing* more or better (a) when we can realize our ideal of life, (b) when we can realize that ideal more continuously (i.e., with less periods of time in *wasted* spaces: in spaces that do not afford us the possibility of realizing or of realizing with enhanced positive quality) and (c) when the felt quality of the experience of realizing activities which are significant for us is enhanced. All this means that, of two different cafés, we prefer aesthetically the one that allows *me* to have a better-quality *having-a-coffee experience* (which certainly involves more than just *drinking* a coffee) *at this moment of my life*. And of two cities, we prefer aesthetically the one that allows us to develop more, and with a more positively felt quality, our ideal of life at a particular moment in our life. (This explains why we might not be willing to live again in the city where we spent the best period of our life).

On the Science and Aesthetic Analysis of Ideological Works

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What after all could the aesthetic be so that we can use the notion in an explanatory account of the psychology of political ideology? As an analytic aesthete, I realize that “ideology” in the popular sense of “world view,” “narratives,” or “sets of beliefs” is not one of the central examples that we may conjure up when we think of “aesthetic objects.” Not at least within the tradition. Yet, as it seems to me, the psychological and sociocultural effects of at least some ideologies, could not be understood without presupposing that ideological works are aesthetic works. Concurrently, I suspect that the psychological principles that organize our experience of a given ideology rely on the aesthetic aspect of ideological works. My intention in this piece is to establish the case for such an analysis. In doing so, I hope to provide reasons to reconsider the contribution of aesthetics to our understanding of human cultural phenomena and experience. I propose (a) a metaphysics of aesthetic properties to account for the connection between aesthetic properties, and moral/political properties presented in and by means of ideological works, and (b) an account of the psychological effects of ideology that deploys in relevant ways that specific metaphysics of the aesthetic. I argue that a metaphysics of aesthetic properties that aims to be epistemically useful must meet two theoretical constraints: (i) a causal explanatory constraint; and (ii) an empirical constraint based on the facts of human cognition. I believe that my account meets both.

Improvised Action in Aesthetic and Anaesthetic Environments

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Human sensitivity (αἴσθησις) receives, processes, and transforms information from the environment, which therefore appears with a certain degree of resistance and unpredictability, ensuring authentic creativity in experience (Montani 2014). Our sensitivity indeed has a natural interactive and improvisational character; one could say that we live by improvising in response to the contingent emergencies we face (Ingold & Hallam 2007). In the first part, I will delve into improvisational practice and the rarefied agency connected to it, highlighting how a dynamic of passive activity is established between the subject and the object, and how creativity is a prerogative of this spontaneous navigation of the unexpected according to a developed sense-making (Bertinetto 2021, Bergamin 2024). However, what happens if the environment loses its genuinely unpredictable character and becomes a self-referential and programmed performance? If it is true that improvisation contemplates and does not deny repetition, habit, or crystallization into routines (Bertinetto 2014, 2021) – or as Dewey said a necessary dose of anesthetic experience – excessive technical delegation can lead to an imbalance towards the object, resulting in the impoverishment of our exploratory capacity and the creativity of experience (Montani 2014). Improvised action, although it may seem like a response that escapes individual control to rely entirely on chaos, is never automatism, unconscious action, or self-loss: the subject is indeed a fundamental component of creativity (Tedeschini 2021). Therefore, a self-referential and not genuinely interactive milieu, in which sensitivity is channeled into specific predefined responses provided by the object, cannot produce creative results, which remain closely connected to human aesthetic experiences. Drawing on Montani's (2014) and Dewey's (1934) reflections on anesthetic environments, as well as some experiments offered by neuroscience on improvisational agency (Limb 2008, Sol 2021), I will attempt to highlight the extremely personal and interactive character that improvisation – and consequently creativity – requires.

Dark Comedy in the Face of Tragedy

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By making an effort to better understand how dark comedy works, we gain a useful means to deal with tragedy. In the concentration camps of WWII, Jewish cabaret performers would tell jokes to other inmates in an attempt to relieve the horror of the ongoing situation they found themselves in (Herzog 2011). Dark comedy, through making light of tragic and polarising events, can help survivors and their friends and family cope with those events. We just need to understand how to implement the jokes without further marginalising victims. Firstly, I use Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren's benign violation theory to explain humour as violations of our expectations that can simultaneously be interpreted as playful or nonserious (2010). Secondly, I argue dark comedy requires strong violations – and ongoing tragedies are an example of these. Thirdly, I illustrate these violations cannot be watered down, nor replaced with less threatening ones; instead, the focus needs to be on making them sufficiently benign. Fourthly, I argue that writing jokes so the victim could realistically laugh at them too ensures that the jokes aren't just shocking and distasteful, but are dark and empathetic. Lastly, I state that with these conditions met, comedians and everyday people can hope to deliver jokes about tragedies that addresses them head-on, temporarily somewhat relieves the pain of the tragedy victims, and allows individuals to flourish in the face of great strife.

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The Beauty of Repetition

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On the one hand, it is a commonplace to claim that the aesthetic appreciation of something, typically an artwork (sometimes, even a natural object), is intimately connected to its cognitive value, to the kind of novelty that something conveys to the appreciator. Hence, re-experiencing that something seems less aesthetically valuable, since it is no longer new. Subsequent repetitions of such experiences may even be disvalued, since they are seemingly linked to a negative form of compulsion, in the Freudian sense.

Yet on the other hand, people undeniably look for repeating the very same experiences with an artwork. Children want fables to be retold in exactly the same way, they are upset if the narration changes. Adults want to relisten to the very same piece of music, or to rewatch the very same scene of a movie, as unfolding exactly as before.

Traditionalists may so explain this tendency: people enact a suspension of knowledge (Forabosco 2008); they make as if they had never experienced the relevant something before, in order to be fascinated by it as they originally were.

In this talk, we want to claim that traditionalists are wrong. From a cognitive point of view, people enjoy repeating their experiences with the relevant piece (of literature, music, depiction) because they have certain expectations as to how that piece unfolds, in order to refeel the emotions they felt when originally experiencing that piece, and to overall reappraise it accordingly. Such expectations indeed prompt the experiencers, when they start re-experiencing that piece, to have protensions of their subsequent aesthetically-endowed experiences of it. This explains why they would be upset if that piece did not unfold as usual. Craving for such repetitions is more focused than enacting an aesthetic habit (Bertinetto 2023), although the former may ground the latter.

Reconsidering the Life of Power: Ritual, Body, and Art in Critical Theory and Chinese Philosophy

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Subjectivation, the post-structuralist notion that contingency compels normative subjects to perform ritual norms in order to acquire recognition, autonomy, and the means for survival, is a compelling theory for describing the self as relational, bodily, discursive, and ritually-impelled. However, the framework advanced by Michel Foucault and extended by Judith Butler downplays creative growth through aesthetic bodily practice, a notion which is, however, well explored in classical and contemporary Chinese philosophy.

Bodily practice helps subjects remember how they are produced by ritual techniques and technologies, and how they might set these to work in constituting themselves, thereby unsettling prevailing power structures, even if that is not an intended aim. This particular type of bodily (or somaesthetic) self-cultivation has the potential to generate a new mode in the bodily desire to persist; and just by itself this change in character of the original passionate attachment threatens power mechanisms, even if overt resistance is not involved.

By setting bodily desire to work, to labor on itself artistically, the body can take on a sense of purposiveness without purpose as determined by the wider social field. This kind of work helps, in piecemeal fashion, to reset the reigning expectation that the subject body indisputably “should” act in certain ways so as to cause certain social effects, e.g., continued survival. This type of artful bodily practice does not set forth an end or a hard “should,” like bold resistance projects, but this approach nevertheless accomplishes similar goals.

Such artful practice can reveal the contingency of the ritual artifice of society and the individual subject. Combining approaches from critical theory and Chinese philosophy demonstrates how conscious attention to social formation in artful ritual practice can lead bodily self-consciousness to take on a life of its own, as a different type of Other.

Repeated Experiences of Music and Texts

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P. Kivy (2006) argues that reading is performative, akin to musical performance, where both require interpretive engagement to bring the material to life. This analogy highlights that both activities involve active, interpretive decisions and can be silently performed involving an internal auditory imagery experience of inner voice (see Calzavarini & Barbero 2024). However, Kivy contends that, unlike music, reading is not inherently repeatable because the primary motivation for reading novels is to uncover the story, and once known, the artistic satisfaction diminishes. We challenge Kivy's view with both theoretical and empirical evidence. First, both literature and music involve cultural traditions of repetition, such as children re-reading favorite stories or audiences enjoying repeated performances of ancient Greek theatre and Javanese Wayang Kulit (Walton 1990). Secondly, literature contains multiple layers of meaning that can be appreciated through rereading, similar to how repeated musical performances reveal new nuances (Iser 1989). Finally, empirical studies (Dixon et al. 1993; Kuijpers & Hakemulder 2018) show that rereading literary texts enhances appreciation and comprehension, much like repeated listening to music increases liking and understanding (Hargreaves 1984; Madison & Schiölde 2017; Margulis 2013). These findings suggest that both reading and music can offer rich, repeatable experiences that deepen with each engagement.

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Matterphorics and Japanese Aesthetics

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In the last two decades, new materialisms have produced new epistemologies by theorising ‘scapes’ that direct ontologically flat mobilities through flows of energy-matter. Acknowledging that matter is not inert but vibrant (Bennett 2010), they have demonstrated the necessity of thinking in terms of intra-action to understand that entities materialise from relations, and not the other way around (Barad 2013). Matter, on this relational view, is constituted as condensations of responses to the desires / desirings of humans and other-than humans, including flora, fauna, rocks, minerals, and clouds.

This form of perceiving-thinking, called matterphorics (Barad 2021), is a ‘putting into practice’ of Bohr’s famous statement that ‘concepts are material arrangements’, and not ideas in people’s heads (Bohr 1923). It is also an embodied and environmentally embedded form of perceiving-thinking located in durational emergence and complexity, similar to Nagatomo’s notion of actional and affective attunement (Nagatomo 1992).

By focusing on three Japanese aesthetic forms that deal with complexity across the human-non-human divide – *yūgen*, *wabi sabi*, and *cha-ya-nou* – this paper develops a theory of cultivation based on matterphorics and actional-affective attunement, as related to their respective provenances: quantum physics and Asian mind-body practices. In the final section, the paper turns to a comparison of the postulated theory of cultivation to affect theory (Berlant 2011; Angerer 2017) to pinpoint the values of this specific approach in a contemporary climate of disaffection and sensorial overload.

Aesthetic and the Good Habit of Taste

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It is a compelling notion that the aesthetic dimension of experience – the appreciation of beauty in both the arts and everyday life – is crucial for individual fulfilment and, more broadly, for human flourishing. In this regard, Schiller's conception of aesthetic education, which encompasses both an education in the arts and beauty as well as an education through them, takes on significant importance. The argument I propose is that aesthetic education – as the development of people's appreciative and consequently creative capacities, hence as a practice of acquiring and refining taste (that is, aesthetic sensitivity in and for various domains of experience) – concerns the learning of good aesthetic habits. Specifically, aesthetic taste is fundamentally a key aesthetic habit. It requires constant practice, sustained by engaging with a variety of unexpected experiences. Aesthetic education, therefore, transcends the notion of an instrumental process with a singular purpose: rather, it is an ever-evolving journey of taste (trans)formation, realized through an improvisational, attentive, and responsive engagement with situational contingencies and cultural-material affordances.

Nietzsche, Nihilism, and Aesthetic Experience

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We are 'on the point of tipping over into nihilism—into the belief in absolute valuelessness, that is, meaninglessness' (KSA 13:7[54]).

I am curious about how best to understand, and learn from, Nietzsche's reflections on what he terms 'highest values' in relation to nihilism. Nietzsche's concerns about nihilism constitute a focused and sustained investigation into a pathology of modern culture, his belief that it is unable to sustain higher values. In this paper, I argue that aesthetic experience can preclude Nietzschean nihilism. First, higher values are distinguished from lower values in their tendency to the tragic, powerful emotions, importance, specialness, community-forming, and demandingness. With this guideline, I go on to interpret aesthetic experience as a higher value. Next, I address a triviality objection of Santayana that might be raised to this interpretation by referring to Nietzsche's distinction between active and passive happiness. "The happiness of overcoming" (TI I:44), and "the feeling that power is growing" (A 2) distinguish active experiences of pleasure from mere desire satisfaction of passive pleasure. Correspondingly, I claim that passive aesthetic experience is indeed trivial or a lower value, but that active aesthetic experience constitutes a highest value. Lastly, I find support for the argument of this paper by reference to contemporary aesthetic theorists Dissanayake and Davies. Dissanayake argues that aesthetic behaviours are universal, ancient, and intrinsically rewarding. Davies maintains that aesthetic behaviours are a non-incidental, important aspect of our biologically rooted human nature. Assuming that aesthetic experience is an indicator of fitness-relevant human qualities and part of human nature, and insofar as human beings continue to pursue active aesthetic experience, Nietzsche's concerns about nihilism are premature.

Day 2: Experiments

Empathy Strengthens Emotion's Effect on Beauty

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Introduction: Past research shows that emotion affects beauty judgments of images and music. It is widely supposed that our faculty of empathy facilitates aesthetic experience. Given this, we wondered whether individual levels of empathy modulate the effect of emotion on beauty.

Methods: 164 participants rated the perceived beauty, happiness, and sadness of 12 art images, 12 nature photographs, and 24 songs. The stimuli were presented in two blocks, and participants took the PANAS mood questionnaire before and after each block. They viewed a mood induction video between blocks either to increase their happiness or sadness or not affect it. We also measured (trait) empathy with the Questionnaire for Cognitive and Affective Empathy.

Results: We used structural equation modeling to analyze the effect of empathy on emotion, beauty, and the relationship between them. We assessed four emotion variables: participants' felt happiness and sadness (mood questionnaire ratings) and perceived happiness and sadness (stimulus ratings). We find that higher empathy is associated with stronger positive relationships between emotion and beauty, for both images and music ($\beta \sim 0.06$ per empathy point on a 10-pt. scale, $p < 0.001$). We also find that perceived happiness and sadness boost beauty directly for images and music. However, the sadness effect is larger for music than images ($\beta = 0.51$ vs. 0.12 , all $p < 0.001$), and empathy amplifies this relationship for music but not images.

Conclusion: Our results indicate that, for more empathic people, more emotion produces more beauty.

While Viewing the Artwork, I Felt... The Identification and Characterization of Supraordinate Varieties of Art-Experience

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Standing in awe at a painting, mesmerized by beauty, gripped with anger or a moving sadness, finding oneself transformed—the range and intensity of these reactions stand as a constant basis for our lasting interest in the arts from both the humanities and science. However, because of the wide variety of factors in arts engagement, empirical investigations on the scope of possible experiences are scarce. This leaves us without a firm understanding of what kinds of reactions we might *actually have*, how they may relate to typically assessed evaluations, and if/how reactions might be shared across individuals and artworks.

In this talk, we present new results from a large-scale museum study, consisting of over 2700 responses from museum visitors across a wide range of artworks (31 total, from 11 art institutions). After viewing a specified artwork, participants shared in-depth reports of their experience, indicating to what extent they subjectively felt/experienced each of 90 phenomenal, emotional, and cognitive terms while viewing the artwork. The list of terms was selected based on a literature review of previous museum studies and theoretical models of aesthetic experience (VIMAP, Pelowski et al., 2017).

On the individual level, reports varied greatly, even between responses to the same artwork. To investigate higher-order patterns in participant responses, network modelling and latent class methodologies were applied. From these analyses, five classes of art-experience were identified, representing supraordinate varieties, each with a distinct phenomenal profile that reoccurs between individuals and across artworks.

We will discuss the characterization of these Experience Types and how they map onto aesthetic evaluations (beauty and meaningfulness) and experiential impacts (on wellbeing, transformation). Alongside results, we will consider the theoretical implications of the methodological approach and specific Types identified, as well as applications of this framework for future research into contributing factors and underlying mechanisms.

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

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The Predictive Processing account for aesthetic experience suggests that the brain employs perceptual learning to compare incoming sensory information (e.g., a painting) with previous knowledge to explain the aesthetic experience in hand. High perceptual learning may base peak aesthetic experiences, such as feeling moved, which may result from an eventual coherency between the self and the artwork via empathic processes alongside experience with the arts. Grounded within functional and anatomical connections throughout the cerebrum, the posterior cerebellum may be a predictive mechanism to promote navigation throughout one's environment within an empathic context and has further been implicated within aesthetic experience. 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 ctDCS. In general, those individuals with higher individual differences were less moved by artwork following ctDCS in comparison to those with lower and moderate individual differences. Given the general inhibitory tone of the cerebellum on the cortex, these results may stem from anodal right-posterior ctDCS's disruption of cerebellar activity (i.e., cerebellar blocking) that subsequently promotes cortical resources for the task on hand. Within an aesthetic context, this may induce counterproductive effects in feeling moved for individuals that demonstrate an ease in high perceptual learning. Thus, right-posterior ctDCS in individuals with high trait empathy or art experience may hinder perceptual learning via an unnecessary utilization of cortical resources (e.g., default mode network) that results in feeling less moved by visual artwork.

Transformed by Beauty: Exploring the Influence of Aesthetic Appreciation on Abstract Thinking and Self-Transcendent Emotions

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One of the most prominent ideas in philosophical aesthetics is that beauty involves disinterest and distance. Kant (1790) argued that the beauty gives rise to disinterested pleasure: when observers find an object beautiful, it pleases immediately and in itself, and not because it satisfies any practical interest we may hold. Glossing the same general idea, Edward Bullough (1912) suggested that beauty has the power to transform people, by disconnecting the object or phenomenon from the practical self, and practical concerns.

To empirically explore whether there is a special aesthetic distant state of mind, theories from social psychology might be able to help. More specifically, the Construal Level Theory of Psychological Distance (Trope & Liberman, 2010) has established that psychological distance tends to be associated with higher levels of cognitive abstraction. Abstract thinking is notoriously difficult to define and there are numerous measures of it. In this study we focus specifically on Action Identification Theory (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985), for which the Behavior Identification Form is the most commonly used measure of abstraction.

In this study (N=187), conducted in the naturalistic environment of a museum, we explored these ideas. Half the participants were instructed to rate the beauty of pottery objects created by a renowned artist, while the other half engaged in a control task that did not involve evaluating beauty. Based on Construal Level Theory, we used the BIF to explore whether aesthetic experience encourage abstract thinking, and in turn, psychological distance. We also predicted that beauty appreciation would lead to greater transformative and transcendent emotions. Indeed, appreciating the beauty of artworks led participants to think in a more abstract way, especially for those who practice an art hobby themselves, as well as to transformative, and self-transcendent emotions.

Observed Touch in Visual Art Impacts Viewers' Affective States and Aesthetic Experience

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Touch is a cornerstone of social interactions, playing an essential role in conveying social meaning, providing emotional comfort, and nurturing close relationships. It is well-established that observed touch, such as holding hands or hugging, evokes pleasurable emotions, enhances feelings of security, and fosters closeness among individuals similar to physically giving and receiving touch. However, the impact of observed touch in visual art on emotional states and aesthetic experience has been left unexplored. The current pre-registered study aimed to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the extent to which observed touch in artworks impacts emotional states and aesthetic experience of art. Using artworks depicting touch versus no touch and a multi-level Bayesian modelling approach, we found that participants (N = 50) assigned higher ratings of emotional valence, emotional intensity, and aesthetic appreciation for artworks depicting touch rather than artworks depicting no touch. Our findings suggest that observed touch in visual art contributes to positive and intense emotions and enhances the aesthetic appreciation of art. This work shines a light on our ability to experience positive and intense emotions from viewing artworks depicting affective touch and how such emotional states contribute to successful engagement with arts.

Natural Aesthetics Emotions: Neurophysiological Signatures of Art Perception in Museum

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Perception in natural conditions of exhibition gives an opportunity to be impressed by the true colors, real sizes and art features of paintings, something that isn't possible in laboratory settings. There are few neurophysiological neuroaesthetics investigations carried out in ecological conditions [i.e. Konston et al.,2015; Mazacanne et al.,2023; Giorgi et al.,2023]. Elsewhere, we hypothesized that the perception of art is tightly bound with art experience in participants [Else et al.,2015]. This study aimed to investigate EEG activity in artists and non-artists (30 subjects, 30-70 years old) during the natural experience of viewing and aesthetic evaluations of M. Vrubel's (1856-1910) canvases. Participants moved freely with mobile EEG devices through the exhibition (1-1.5 hour), stopped at a comfortable distance in front of the painting and marked the start of its viewing by a single marker button pressing; 1-3 minutes later with a series of button clicks (1-10, where 1-4 - low scores, 7-10-high scores) they evaluated the subjective aesthetics response to the painting. The group of artists was characterized by a lower EEG spectral power in alpha-1 (8-10 Hz) and alpha-2 (10-13 Hz) frequency bands compared to non-artists. The decision on the high aesthetic attractiveness of paintings in artists compared to non-artists was accompanied by EEG event-related synchronization in the frequency range 11.5-27 Hz in the frontal and central regions of the cortex at 580-360 ms before the response, that might be markers of reward system activation. A low aesthetic appreciation was characterized by 9-27 Hz EEG desynchronization, starting 60 ms before the response and lasting up to 440 ms after it - in posterior and parietal regions, as supposed connected with the lasting of visual expert analysis in artists versus non-artists. These data demonstrated crucial differences in the perception art for groups with different levels of art expertise.

Signatures of Ballet and Contemporary Dance Observation: The Role of Acquired Expertise

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Observing an action involves the transduction of sensory information (e.g., visual stimuli) into self sensory-motor representations, a process underpinned by the Mirror Neuron system (MNs) through the Action Observation Network (AON). These sensory-motor representations involve not only the action itself, but also the resulting emotion. Previous studies adopted performing arts as a medium and revealed that the mere observation of dance movements activates classical mirror areas, proportionally with a motor, and not perceptual, degree of expertise. Since different types of dance involve varying movements and expressivity, we postulate they could elicit distinct activations: Ballet is a structured form of dance characterized by a codified vocabulary of movements, where each step is clearly defined and recognizable by a trained professional. In contrast, contemporary dance embraces a more fluid and organic approach, often prioritizing personal expression. This study investigates sensorimotor signatures to different dance techniques based on the observers' expertise. Twenty experienced dancers and twenty non-dancers underwent functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) and observed videos of ballet, contemporary dance, and everyday movements and evaluated their subjective reproducibility. Results show distinct brain activation patterns between dancers and non-dancers, with differences in areas related to the AON and the Default Mode Network (DMN), a proxy of cognitive load and task engagement. Particularly, dancers showed heightened activity in the Inferior Frontal Gyrus (IFG), a key region within MNs, during ballet observation, and showed greater insula activation during contemporary dance observation, suggesting that sensorimotor representation may be enriched by a visceral and emotional input. This study contributes to the literature on the AON both in general and specifically within the performing arts, providing additional insights from a phenomenological perspective on dance.

Beautifully Said: Philosophical, Psychological and Neuroscientific Perspectives on What Makes Language Aesthetically Effective

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There are certain verbal expressions (of the kind that abound in great pieces of literary prose) that are perceived as particularly effective, informative or insightful. They might give the impression of conveying with great aptness a certain feeling or situation, or they might prompt some thought that we judge worth having. When we encounter them, we tend to think that something has been “beautifully said”, or “well expressed”. This talk aims to shed light on what makes an expression aesthetically effective in such a way. The task, I will argue, is an eminently interdisciplinary one, and demands that we put the long tradition of philosophical reflection on the topic in contact with the acquisitions of present-day psychological, neuroscientific and computational research on language processing. To do so, I will start by isolating a set of features that are recurrently attributed to aesthetically effective linguistic expressions: ambiguity, deviation, exactness, density, reflexiveness. I will then propose a framework for understanding aesthetic effectiveness in language based on classic findings in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics, as well as the recent computational work on language processing. This framework, I will argue, allows us to make sense of the above features and connects the debate on the aesthetic appeal of language with recent general psychological accounts of aesthetic appreciation.

Exposure to Biophilic Design: Understanding the Psychological, Cognitive, and Physiological Benefits

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Biophilic design, which integrates natural elements into built environments, is increasingly recognized for its potential to enhance human well-being. This approach hypothesizes that exposure to nature, even within artificial settings, can improve psychological, cognitive, and physiological health.

We present a series of experimental studies examining the influence of nature-inspired design on well-being across various settings. The first two studies investigate the effects of a plant wall, comparing its impact in a real university office and a virtually replicated environment. These studies are grounded in Stress Recovery Theory (SRT) (Ulrich, 1991) and Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan et al., 1995). SRT posits that non-threatening natural elements reduce psychological and physiological stress, while ART proposes that exposure to nature restores attentional reserve. To test these hypotheses, we collected psychological data to assess mood shifts, physiological data to measure stress reduction, and cognitive performance data to evaluate attention restoration.

Two additional ongoing experiments focus exclusively on Stress Recovery Theory to explore the stress-relieving potential of biophilic elements. In one study, a group of participants who watch videos of natural environments after completing a stress-inducing task is compared to a control group that sits alone without exposure to any natural elements. In the second study, a different group of participants is exposed to a biophilic indoor virtual room following the same stress-inducing task, while a control group experiences a virtual non-biophilic room. In both studies, psychological and physiological data are being collected to assess the impact of these interventions.

The results of these studies will be discussed in terms of the potential of biophilic design to improve well-being and reduce stress. This research will provide scientific evidence for the application of biophilic-based interventions across various settings.

The Role of Surprise in the Creative Production of Musical Rhythm

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The aesthetic experience of perceiving music is shaped by a continuous ebb and flow of surprise (Huron, 2006). But which role does surprise play in the creative process of making music? Our study seeks to address this question by focusing on the production of musical rhythm.

A total of 102 participants ($M = 33.51$, $SD = 11.37$) took part in a two-trial online experiment using a virtual drum-sequencer interface. This interface enabled them to create rhythmic patterns and tracked every step of the participants' compositional process. A panel of 14 expert musicians ($M = 28.64$, $SD = 9.80$) rated the creativity of these rhythmic compositions.

For each step in which participants adapted the rhythmic pattern, we quantified the rhythm's surprise using a probabilistic model of rhythm perception based on a variable-order Markov chains (Damsma et al., in prep.).

We computed linear mixed models to assess the association between the dynamics of surprise produced by the participant and the creativity ratings of the panel members. For the second trial of our experiment, we found a significant negative correlation between creativity and the number of steps in which surprise decreased ($b = -0.17$, 95% CI[-0.23, -0.12]). Moreover, the ratio of the number of steps in which surprise decreases to the number of steps in which it increases is negatively correlated with creativity ($b = -0.14$, 95% CI[-0.20, -0.09]).

These findings highlight how a focus on decreasing surprise is detrimental to creative performance and how creativity depends on a balance of increasing and decreasing surprise. Our study lends further support to the broader idea that creativity within aesthetic and artistic processes requires engagement with uncertainty rather than its minimisation (Schiavio & Benedek, 2020).

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Art & Environment: The Evaluation of Beauty and Meaning Between Art and Nature, and Their Effects on Environmental Intentions and Behavior

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Environmental issues represent one of the most important topics on the world's political agendas today. Specific features of art, such as its ability to evoke emotions or the space for reflection offered to the spectator, are said to differentiate this form of communication from standard climate change information strategies (Klößner, 2015), functioning as a powerful tool to induce emotional engagement and encourage sustainable behavior (Roosen et al., 2017). However, little empirical evidence exists that directly addresses the impact of art on environmental behavior.

In the present work, we searched for effects of art in addressing environmental issues. Specifically, we aimed to investigate the role of visual environmental art in enhancing people's pro-environmental intentions and behavior, comparing environmental artworks with non-artistic pictures of nature. The environmental artworks concerned plastic waste installations, while the pictures of nature reproduced the same scenario without the artistic component. Participants were asked to evaluate beauty and meaning for each image. Before the lab session, individual differences for participants' environmental attitude were assessed. To measure intentions for pro-environmental behavior, pre-and-post exposure questionnaires were collected. Finally, participants received a one-hundred euros lottery ticket, and they could decide to keep it or to donate it to an environmental association.

Notably, beauty of nature can be a trigger for positive emotions (Velarde et al., 2007) and it can prompt positive behavioral effect (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2009). Art may serve as an inspiring component in society's response to global change, though, environmental issues visual imagery can be double-edged, and its effects on behavior are still much debated. Exploring the difference between the two conditions, we investigated the role that beauty and meaningfulness can play within this mechanism, expecting the responses to be also affected by individual differences such as environmental and recycling attitude, subjective norm, perceived control, and art interest.

Aesthetic Appreciation Moves Us from Anxiety to Curiosity: An Electrophysiological Investigation of the “Aesthetic Valve” Hypothesis

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In a previous study, we showed that aesthetic appreciation elicited by music can make the perceiver less anxious and more inclined to curiosity-driven behaviour (Barbieri et al., 2024). In light of this result, we designed a follow-up electrophysiological (EEG) study to investigate the neural correlates of this aesthetically-induced modulation of the experiential spectrum between anxiety and curiosity. To this end, we asked participants to listen to six musical pieces, rate them for aesthetic appreciation, then fill in a well-validated anxiety state inventory (STAI) and finally perform a Mismatch Negativity task while their electrophysiological activity was recorded. We then computed the Mismatch Negativity (a well-validated index of perceptual learning) after the preferred and the more anxiety-inducing musical pieces to compare the perceptual learning performance of the participants. The mixed model analysis on the behavioural data further confirmed our previous finding, showing an inverse relation between aesthetic appreciation and anxiety. The EEG analysis revealed that participants showed a greater Mismatch Negativity after the preferred rather than the more anxiety-inducing musical pieces and that the results is significant and consistent over a broad cluster of fronto-central electrodes. Overall, the experiment suggest that aesthetic appreciation enhances perceptual learning and is negatively associated with anxiety. These results are consistent with the idea that aesthetic pleasure could act as a “valve”, prompting the individual to seek new information in the environment (i.e., to consider novelty as a valuable opportunity to acquire new knowledge) rather anxiety (i.e., to consider novelty as a risk to be avoided).

Infinity Pool: Enacting Anxiety

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Anxiety is a major public health issue and social concern throughout the EU. More than 85 million European citizens, or one in six, suffered from mental health problems before the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Since the pandemic crisis, especially among young people and people with pre-existing mental health conditions, there has been a dramatic increase in anxiety disorders and depression.

Mental health has traditionally focused on biomedical interventions without addressing the social determinants of an individual's health outcomes. The need for a more ambitious and holistic transdisciplinary approach to health and well-being that complements the biomedical model has been argued from many fronts. Art practices, in addition to evidence of their effectiveness on the mental well-being of individuals and communities, provide cost-effective interventions for complex health challenges that may not have current health solutions, while relieving pressure on limited health resources. Especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, many artists have engaged in developing practices aimed at facilitating the grieving process made difficult by restrictive regulations adopted to limit contagion.



Fig.1. Sarno River and mirror mask realized for *Infinity Pool* i.c.w. XXX, photograph by XXX

Starting from an ecological-enactive approach to human cognition (Rietveld, Kiverstein 2014; Chemero 2009; Gibson 1979) and using an unorthodox way of doing philosophy (Rietveld 2022; Feiten et al. 2022), that is, a philosophy that uses means other than just words, my proposal revolves around the presentation of an artwork, *Infinity Pool* created in collaboration with Dutch landscape architect XXX and with the support of international artists XXX. *Infinity Pool*, aims to put on display anxieties related to the climate crisis through the exploration of the Sarno River the most polluted in Europe.

Infinity Pool is centered on the creation of a mirror mask worn in three walk-performances in three different parts of a river – where it originates, flows through a city, and flows into the sea– and a video installation. With a video camera positioned above the mask and facing it, we recorded its reflections. In a second phase, these reflections, moving selfies of landscape in flux, are projected in a museum space. The projection is accompanied by words spoken by the individual masks. These words refer to the objects and the chemical components related to the water samples collected by the participants in the live performance. The materials – herbicides, toxic waste or dead fish– present in the specific locations define the faces of the environments. *Infinity Pool*, by giving a face to a collective anxiety, invites the participation of embodied minds that experience a possible hold on concrete aspects of an elusive and frightening world.

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Aesthetic Appreciation During a Visuospatial Working Memory Task: An Eye-Tracking Study

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A recent strand of research in empirical aesthetics has pointed out that aesthetic appreciation can be viewed as feedback of an effective learning process. At the same time, a vast literature suggests that there is a link between visual exploration behavior and their learning and memorisation dynamics. This opens up the possibility of unveiling the relationship between aesthetic appreciation and learning using eye-tracking technology in visual tasks.

The present study takes on this challenge. It aims to investigate the link between aesthetic appreciation, dynamics of visual exploration and cognitive performance using a visuospatial working memory task. The task in question requires the participant to memorize a synthetic image composed of geometric figures, judge it aesthetically and then decide whether a second image is the same or different from the first. During the performance of the task, the participant's eye movements are recorded. The relationship between performance on the task and aesthetic appreciation is investigated, as well as the dynamic of visual exploration in different time intervals during the exploration of the first image. The behavioral results show that better performance in the task is accompanied by greater aesthetic appreciation, in line with the hypothesis that sees aesthetic appreciation as a feedback on effective learning. We also observe greater appreciation for images characterized by greater predictability of the spatial position of the elements. The analysis in the different time intervals shows that visual exploration behaviour in the first 500 ms is predictive of aesthetic appreciation, while in the subsequent time window visual exploration behavior is predictive of cognitive performance.

Overall, these results extend our understanding of the connection between aesthetic appreciation of visual stimuli and learning and points to new ways to use visual exploration tasks to study our aesthetic experiences.

A Neatness-As-Aesthetics Approach to Operationalising Aesthetics in Studying Human-Object Interactions

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One key question in studying human-object interactions concerns their dependence on objects' aesthetic properties and the underlying cognitive mechanisms. A significant challenge for such studies is the lack of objective techniques for reliably manipulating stimulus' attractiveness. Traditional approaches often involve subjective judgments or modifications, leading to various biases and confounds. To avoid such confounds, any experimental modifications of aesthetics must (1) predictable affect perceived attractiveness, and (2) have no or minimal influence on other object properties (e.g., shape, familiarity). In addition, (3) they should be easily implemented to enable diverse experimental designs. We argue that, based on existing evidence, the optimal parameter that meets these requirements is surface neatness. The present study empirically investigates the possibility of predictable alteration of object's attractiveness through manipulation of its surface neatness.

Participants (n=52) rated attractiveness of 126 images of five categories of everyday objects on a seven-point Likert scale. Each object was presented with clean, neutral, or dirty surfaces, with other properties being maximally matched. A rmANOVA revealed a significant effect of surface neatness ($p < 0.001$), with untidy objects being rated the least attractive and clean objects – the most, confirming our hypothesis that neatness plays a role in shaping object's appeal. Moreover, whereas neatness's positive effect was moderate, untidiness produced more expressed modulations, likely due to activating disgust. Additionally, a moderate effect of object category was observed ($p < 0.05$), with stationery consistently rated the most attractive, suggesting inherent differences in attractiveness of different everyday objects, which may potentially be explained by their familiarity. This research introduces and validates the Neatness-as-Aesthetics approach and suggests a robust method for manipulating aesthetics without violating other object properties, thus opening up new avenues for studies of aesthetic perception. These findings highlight the importance of surface properties in aesthetic evaluation and may have potential applications in design and marketing.

Optimal Distinctiveness in Cyberspace: Understanding Preferences for Local and Global Internet Memes on Facebook

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For centuries before unification, Italy was a collection of independent states with its own cultures, customs, and dialects. Because of this, Italians today maintain a strong sense of regional identity. The maintenance of this regional identity is evidenced by the growing popularity of social media channels dedicated to *local* memes. Local memes are internet memes with references to local knowledge. Unlike typical *global* memes, local memes demarcate group members using regional history, sayings, stereotypes, or other insider information. The difference between global and local memes begs the question of whether Italians prefer internet memes with a generalized or localized appeal. Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT) offers a compelling framework for examining the role of social identity in shaping these preferences. According to ODT, Italians should prefer local memes because they offer a greater sense of *shared distinctiveness*. We test this hypothesis by tracking interactions on Facebook pages that post memes in Italian. Using CrowdTangle, we extracted interaction data from 24 Facebook pages from January 2019 to February 2024. Half of the Facebook pages posted memes about a region in Italy, while the other half posted general memes in Italian. To test the differences between the global and local meme pages, we used independent t-tests. Globalized meme pages had a significantly greater number of likes/followers ($t(62) = 123.46, p < 0.001$), posted more often ($t(62) = 18.32, p < 0.001$), and had a significantly greater total number of interactions. However, when controlling for the frequency of posts and the number of followers, we found that the rate of interaction on local memes was significantly higher compared to global memes. ($t(62) = 10.05, p < 0.001$). These findings align with the predictions of ODT, which suggests that individuals are drawn to groups where they can maintain a sense of shared distinctiveness.

Day 3: Applications

The Mind Meets the Museum: A Psychology-Based Design Framework for Enhancing Museum Experiences

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Museums represent one of the primary cultural attractions globally. In the last decade, they have undergone a significant transformation in their societal role. This transformation has been driven by the growing awareness of museums' potential to promote individuals' psycho-physiological well-being, as demonstrated by an increasing body of scientific evidence. This new conception of the museum as a living, interactive space can significantly benefit from research in psychology and neuroscience. By applying psychological principles and methods, museums have the opportunity to design experiences that not only capture the visitor's visual and sensory attention—a bottom-up approach based on direct stimulus perception—but also stimulate more complex cognitive processes, known as top-down dynamics. This contribution aims to i) systematize current interdisciplinary literature on the psychological processes that modulate the museum experience, through which ii) a psychology-based framework for enhancing the museum experience across four main psychological dimensions - *sensory-perceptual, emotional, cognitive and motivational* - will be proposed; and, ultimately iii) advance design strategies for creating inclusive and supportive museum experiences and environments.

How Might Creative Enquiry Enable Transformative Aesthetic Experiencing in Medical Education?

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John Dewey, American philosopher and educational reformer, described aesthetic experience as related to the richest, most complete experiencing possible, tying together the sensory with the practical, emotional, and intellectual into a single whole (1). He argues that aesthetic experiencing is necessary for our well-being, growth, and transformation, enabling new ways of seeing and interacting with the world (Dewey, 1934).

For twenty years as a clinical academic I have been engaging medical students in aesthetic experiencing through 'creative enquiry'. Creative enquiry is multilingual processing of lived experience through creative expression drawing on any of the arts from poetry to painting, music to mime, coupled with written reflection (Younie 2020).

Inviting understanding of lived experience through creative expression allows students to re-invoke their imagination, enable sensory, emotional, and embodied exploration and slow down perception, potentially making the familiar strange. This may bring disruption to the biomedical objectification of patients in clinical practice (Younie, 2014; Younie, 2023).

My aim is to awaken and inspire students to see with their own eyes, to notice what they witness and hear, to respect their own questions affirming what is tacit, affective and perhaps pre-verbal in their search for knowledge and understanding of practice.

In this presentation I will share student creative enquiry texts illustrating how the ineffable dimensions of our lived experience can be approached through colours, movements, sounds, and shapes and pedagogically explain how creative enquiry offers a short cut or lightning wire straight into our practices, stories, interpretations, and sense-making.

Drawing on student feedback I will show how shared creative expression rehumanises the student as well as their patients, develops student self-awareness and reflexivity as they hear themselves think and see from other student perspectives thereby enabling transformative professional identity formation and human flourishing (Younie, 2021a; Younie 2021b).

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Artistic Interventions: Investigating the Impact of Digital Art on Creative Thinking and Mind-Wandering

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My conference submission is for a talk on integrating the arts into methods for empirically exploring cognitive and emotional processes in psychology. I will present two interrelated case studies: first, a pioneering interdisciplinary seminar I designed leveraging my expertise in mind-wandering research to benefit artistic practices; and second, my current Marie Curie funded intervention study inspired by this seminar. The seminar “Boredom, Mind-Wandering and the Arts,” taught at institutions such as the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), California Institute of Art (CalArts) and Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), functioned as an intervention study for artists and designers. During the seminar I devised and conducted empirical studies with artists and architects to reveal how to generate creative ideas through active engagement with their mind wanders and implement these ideas into their creative practices to produce artworks and designs.

Building on this seminar, my current Marie Curie postdoctoral research project is an artistic intervention I devised to investigate the hypotheses that regular engagement with digital artworks can train our ability to encourage creative thinking and has the possibility to alter the content of our mind wanders to be more similar to *mind-wonders*. Grounded in the philosopher Alva Noë’s (2023) notion that aesthetic experience is an active process akin to curious exploration, I argue that creative thinking is a similar type of process which can be stimulated through engaging with the ambiguity found within artworks. This process involves shifting from the response of “I do not understand this” to taking the time to actively interpret the artwork’s meaning for oneself. This meaning-making process is the type of creative thinking which is trained through my intervention study. I look forward to discussing these insights and their implications for human flourishing at the conference.

Interrogating the Philosophical Grounds for Advancing Equity-Oriented Arts-based Spiritual Support in Health and Social Services

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From images and music to poetry and storytelling, art provides a multisensory language for expressing, connecting, and transcending, and has long been associated with the sacred. The growing plurality of (non)religious, spiritual, and ethnic backgrounds in Canada, coupled with the profound importance of spirituality for many, has sparked renewed interest in innovative spiritual pathways, such as the arts, for human flourishing. This interest persists even though connections to the spiritual are often sidelined in health and social services, despite people experiencing heightened existential distress during illness or crisis. Further, Canada has a troubling history of colonization involving religious institutions and privileging non-Indigenous artforms. Given the wide range of spiritual beliefs, amplified spiritual distress, and calls to decolonization, culturally relevant approaches are needed. One promising avenue is the incorporation of equity-oriented arts practices.

To address this need and avoid causing further harm in our [multi-site project](#), we examined and critiqued the assumptions shaping our empirical work. Our aim was to undertake a critical philosophical analysis at the juncture of art, spirituality, health, and equity to see how arts-based spiritual practices can promote or hamper inequities and positive social change. We first explored the philosophical grounds for integrating art and spirituality for health and well-being in an equitable way. Engaging this philosophical lens, we examined how the relationship between art and spirituality has been theorized. We interrogated various theoretical approaches to see how robust they are for providing insights into equitable arts-based spiritual practices in health and social services. Finally, we explored the interplay between race, religion, class, gender, and dis/ability and art and spirituality. Our findings will result in a framework to inform the creation and evaluation of more equitable arts-based spiritual practices at five sites in health and social services, to support Canadians in all their diversity.

Mind Wandering During Lectures

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When we talk about aesthetic experiences, we usually think about art exhibitions, concerts, theatre and dance performances. But, in a similar way, we could study aesthetic aspects of other cultural genres, such as academic lectures, panel discussions, and conferences.

These are also formats for collective listening and, to some extent, looking, but they often include characteristics that make perception difficult: showing slides with long texts, speaking quickly in order to squeeze as much material as possible, reading aloud texts that are too complicated for listening, sitting for a long time without moving. When an image gets shown, it is rarely trusted on itself and a layer of verbal explanation is added. Silence is considered awkward—in art history terms, there's a kind of horror vacui of silence—so there is usually little time to think about what has been said. In panel discussions, participants prepare their questions, answers, or comments while the other person is still speaking, risking that what they will ask has already been answered.

In this drawing-based talk, I will look into what impact do current presentation conventions have on attention and well-being of audiences. In particular, I will outline how the attention of the members of an audience diverges and converges with that of the lecturer. I will distinguish two kinds of mind wandering—one that is inspired by a lecture and one that is caused by a lecture being too simple or too complex for a person to pay attention to. I will also include a couple of examples on how scientists and artists use performative elements in their lectures to share some aspects of their research in an implicit way.

Why Is It Important to Design Inclusively?

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In a globalized and evolving society, it is crucial to aim towards sustainability for our planet and the people living in it. A socially sustainable society promotes inclusivity, using diversity as a resource and not as an obstacle, allowing to foster wellbeing and health in societies. Since inclusivity does not represent a merely social and humanitarian factor, the built-environmental professionals should engage into more responsible choices, focusing not only on physical accessibility but also promoting positive experiences to improve people's mental and physical wellness. Since the 1950s, the necessity to create more accessible spaces for people with permanent or temporary reduced mobility has spread, leading to a wider necessity of designing universally inclusive environments, to accommodate as many people as possible, regardless of their age, ability, etc. Many experts (e.g., architects, designers, etc.) are still skeptical because of their negative expectations regarding inclusive approaches (e.g., aesthetic results, costs, etc.), which may be influenced by negative personal experiences, lack of knowledge or misconceptions. Therefore, it is pivotal to promote research, re-educate professionals and raise awareness on Design For All (DFA), for a healthier and happier society, without abandoning quality, pleasantness and aesthetics in design artifacts (in all of its guises: architectural, product, graphic, UX/UI etc.) Here, we aim to explore the history of DFA and the related design approaches, the 7 principles of DFA and its positive impact on our society.

Posters

Seeing is Feeling: How Aphantasia Alters Emotional Engagement with Stories

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Recent evidence suggests that visualization acts as an ‘emotional amplifier,’ with potential real-life benefits like improved PTSD treatment (by reducing vivid intrusive imagery) and better decision making (by enhancing the imagery of delayed rewards). To explore the importance of visualization for emotional engagement, we conducted an experiment measuring emotional engagement with audio and visual narratives. Our stimuli included six emotionally charged excerpts from novels (as audiobooks) and six equivalent scenes from their screen adaptations. Each participant experienced an audio block and a visual block, each containing three randomly ordered snippets, with block order counterbalanced. We assessed emotional engagement using the Narrative Engagement Questionnaire (Busselle and Bilandzic, 2009), evaluating narrative understanding, attentional focus, narrative presence, and character engagement. Participants included 25 individuals with aphantasia (inability to generate mental images) and 25 controls. We also measured Electrodermal Activity (EDA) and heart rate.

Using Linear Mixed Models, we found a significant main effect of modality, with video scoring higher across all four subscales for both groups ($p < 0.001$). Interestingly, there was a significant group effect on narrative presence ($p < 0.01$) and character engagement ($p < 0.001$), where aphantasics experienced less presence and engagement with characters than controls across both modalities. No significant group effects or interactions were found for the cognitive dimensions of engagement: attentional focus and understanding. EDA data showed no significant differences or interactions based on modality or group. However, heart rate data revealed a significant interaction ($p < 0.01$). Post hoc tests indicated that controls experienced higher heart rates during audio narratives ($p < 0.05$), possibly suggesting greater co-creation and visual imaginative mental effort, while aphantasics had similar heart rates across both modalities. These results suggest that the ability to generate visual mental imagery may play a role in enhancing our capacity to emotionally (but not cognitively) engage with stories.

Art Experience Between Original and Digital Surrogates (Original, Digital, Virtual)

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The digital image has become an essential part of contemporary contexts of art experience. In our media accessible society, the art experience is no longer limited to the original artwork hanging on the wall but also includes digital, augmented reality, and virtual reality. The aim of the project [OrDiV \(Original, Digital, Virtual\)](#) is to answer whether engagement with a work of art differs depending on the reproduction medium in which it is presented. To answer this question our project has enlisted partners composed of transdisciplinary teams from the University of Continuing Education in Krems, The Belvedere Research Center, St.Pölten University of Applied Sciences, the Empirical Visual Aesthetics Labs and ARTIS Lab of the University of Vienna.

Our study that will take place at the Belvedere Museum in Vienna from September 2024 until December of 2025 is a four condition between subject design study that is looking at the complex relationship between engagement and image modality within a museum exhibition room consisting of seven paintings. Our participants' engagement will be recorded as a measure of viewing time and their experience will be measured through an audio interview, self-report surveys, and a post-hoc questionnaire. Furthermore, we hope to leverage data about participant experience types and artwork specific interactions. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura, an artwork's presence in time and space, we have created a study that will unveil how museum visitors interact with a work of art across original, digital, AR, and VR contexts. This poster presentation will detail our study design and theoretical background as well as early participant information.

The Function of Aesthetics in Everyday Life: A Mobile Eye-Tracking Approach

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Urban environments offer plenty of beauty if only we look for it. From trees to (street-) art, buildings, and people, there is plenty of beauty in our daily environment. Preferences for natural over manmade objects/scenes is well documented, outside of and within urban environments (Batool et al., 2021; Li et al., 2020). Nonetheless, manmade aesthetic objects can still lead to significant aesthetic experiences outside of a museum and can be elicited by architecture or street-art (Isaacs, 2000; Mitschke et al., 2017).

I will present a series of studies where we specifically look at the differences between nature and art in various contexts in relation to the aesthetic experiences which they elicit, investigating the extent to which everyday aesthetic experiences can influence our lives. We conducted three studies: in the city, in a museum, and in an indoor botanical garden, comparing how individuals perceive nature and art in an everyday environment and prototypical aesthetic environments. We make an argument for the importance of studying aesthetic experiences using a multi-method design in real world environments.

We employed mobile eye-tracking to measure differences in gaze behaviour between the two object categories, nature and manmade. Participants heart rate variability (HRV) and subjective beauty ratings were measured to study the interplay between subjective aesthetic evaluations and physiological changes. Participants mood was assessed pre- and post- walk/visit using the PANAS. In a lab follow-up one week later, we showed participants footage from their walk/visit, while measuring gaze behaviour, HRV, subjective beauty ratings and mood. We used questionnaires to assess how individual differences of art interest (VAIAK) and nature relatedness (NRS) can influence the aesthetic experience. By comparing our results from the field with the lab, with the same visual stimuli, we can better understand the effectiveness of laboratory experiments for studying aesthetic experiences.

Embodied Experience and Arts Engagement Influence Our Aesthetic Perceptions of Dynamic Body Movements

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The dynamic body movements involved in dance offer insights into human socialisation and communication. Appreciation for dance is known to be shaped by prior physical experiences (embodied expertise), as well as individuals' social and cultural experiences more broadly. This preregistered brain imaging and behavioural study addressed two aims: 1) to replicate findings that embodied experience enhances aesthetic ratings and brain activation in the Action Observation Network (AON) when viewing dynamic movements, and 2) to examine how individuals' previous arts engagement influences aesthetic judgements of dynamic movements (i.e., dance).

Participants (n=141) first reported their past engagement with the visual, musical, and dramatic arts, and sports. Next, they viewed and rated videos of dance movements for aesthetic qualities (liking, familiarity, reproducibility), and a subset of 41 participants made these ratings both before and after learning a short dance choreography. For these participants, half the videos showed movements learned during the short dance training intervention, and their cortical activity over bilateral inferior frontal gyri (IFG), middle temporal gyri (MTG), and inferior parietal lobules (IPL) was recorded during post-training aesthetics ratings using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS).

We found that participants rated learned movements as more enjoyable to watch, familiar, and reproducible than unlearned movements, replicating previous evidence for the relevance of embodied experiences in aesthetic perceptions. Previous arts and sports engagement was associated with familiarity and reproducibility ratings. Cortical activation did not differ when viewing learned versus unlearned movements, though we observed deactivation of IFG and right MTG while viewing videos and increased activation in IPL while making explicit aesthetic judgements. These findings highlight how embodied and sociocultural experiences shape aesthetic evaluations of dynamic body movements and lay the groundwork for deeper investigations into individual differences in aesthetic perceptions of the performing arts.

Creativity as a Non-Pharmacological Intervention: Enhancing Cognitive Function in Mild Cognitive Impairment Patients Through a Divergent Thinking Training

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Introduction: With the rise in life expectancy and the growing prevalence of age-related neurodegenerative diseases, non-pharmacological interventions are crucial for preventing and slowing cognitive decline in the early stages of conditions like dementia. Creative thinking training has emerged as a promising approach. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of a creativity-based training program on cognitive and psychological outcomes in patients with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI).

Methods: A 10-session individual training program called CREC (CREativity in Everyday life Challenges), which focuses on exercises designed to stimulate divergent thinking, was provided to a group of 30 MCI patients (9 men; mean age: 77.57 ± 3.51 ; mean education: 7.07 ± 2.70 years). An additional 16 MCI patients (3 men; mean age: 79.38 ± 8.03 ; mean education: 5.75 ± 1.34 years) were assigned to an active control group. Cognitive functions, divergent thinking skills and psychological well-being were evaluated in both groups before and after the training sessions.

Results: Although the study is ongoing, preliminary results show a significant improvement in semantic fluency for the experimental group compared to the control group. Both groups showed improvements in praxis-constructive abilities and general well-being. The experimental group also exhibited a significant reduction in Stroop test execution time and a qualitative decrease in errors, suggesting better inhibition of automatic responses.

Conclusion: CREC appears to effectively improve cognitive skills, particularly semantic abilities. These results suggest that creative thinking may be a useful approach for mitigating cognitive decline in patients with MCI, potentially helping to slow or postpone the progression of symptoms.

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The Relationship Between Divergent Thinking, Risk-Taking, and Decision-Making Styles: A Study Among Italian and American Young Adults

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Introduction: Risk is a significant factor in decision-making, overshadowing the idea of perfectly rational decision-making. Variables like avoidance, uncertainty tolerance, and creativity (specifically divergent thinking, DT) play a role in choices, although the data is still debated. The influence of cultural differences on these variables is also often overlooked. Based on these premises, this study presents cultural differences between Italians and Americans in risk-taking and DT.

Methods: The study involved 55 Italians (39 females; mean age: 22.38; SD 2.69) and 57 Americans (32 females; mean age 19.93; SD 1.48). The participants completed questionnaires on risk (DOSPERT), decision-making styles (GDMS), and divergent thinking (AUT).

Results: While the data analysis is ongoing, preliminary results indicate significant differences between the Italian and American groups regarding risk-taking and divergent thinking (i.e. ethical risk-taking (ITA>US, $t= 2.63$; $p= 0.010$) and substantial differences in the DT task in fluency (US >ITA, $t=-7.28$; $p<.001$) and originality (US>ITA, $t= -2.47$; $p= 0.015$)). The correlations between the divergent thinking domains (originality and fluency) and the subscales of risk-taking and decision-making styles also differ between the two groups.

Conclusions: Successful decision-making involves efficient and functional actions, choosing the most beneficial alternative at the given moment. The study results suggest that differences in risk-taking and divergent thinking among young Italian and American adults are integral to decision-making. Understanding the influence of these variables in diverse cultures can inspire new strategies and interventions to support the decision-making process.

The Relationship Between Creative Thinking and Heart Rate Variability: An Experimental Study

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Introduction: The Neurovisceral Integration Model postulates that brain regions involved in self regulation are also implicated in cardiac autonomic activity thanks to the vagus nerve. According to previous literature in the field, an association between parasympathetic activity at rest and cognitive functioning has emerged, showing better cognitive performances on subjects with higher parasympathetic activity. Its association with creative thinking, in particular with those processes involved in divergent thinking abilities, is still under-investigated. Moreover, since cognitive control mechanisms and creative thinking seem to be modulated by specific psychological traits, the aim of this experimental study is to explore the relationship between creative thinking and Heart Rate Variability (HRV) at rest, considering specific psychological traits.

Methods: A preliminary sample considering a total of 44 participants (Mage=25.24, SD=3.74; Medu=16.02, SD=2.04) was analyzed. Subjects filled out an online survey first, aimed at investigating some psychological dimensions; then they underwent an experimental in-person procedure that included a baseline, two tasks assessing figural and verbal divergent thinking abilities and a recovery condition after each task. An electrocardiogram (ECG) was recorded during the procedure, computing HRV indices of parasympathetic activity (i.e., MeanHR and RMSSD). Non- parametric correlations were performed considering HRV indices at rest, figural and verbal creative thinking scores and psychological traits.

Results: We found a significant positive correlation between parasympathetic activity and the verbal divergent thinking task. In particular, a positive relation with verbal flexibility emerged, underlying an association with executive functioning. Conversely, we found a significant negative correlation between parasympathetic activity and perfectionistic traits.

Conclusion: In line with our hypothesis, preliminary results confirmed a relation between HRV at rest and cognitive performances during a creative thinking task. In particular, an executive component of verbal divergent thinking was associated with vagal activity. In addition, perfectionistic tendencies were associated with a vagal withdrawal at rest, suggesting a possible greater effort expenditure in cognitive control mechanisms in those individuals

The Effectiveness of Combining Mindfulness and Artmaking on Depression, Anxiety and Shame in Sexual Assault Survivors: A Pilot Study

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This article describes an 8-week intervention program for 16 female sexual assault survivors in Iran aged 20–49. Sexual assault causes negative psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety and shame in the survivors. Although evidence-based treatments are effective in trauma treatment, they sometimes cannot cover the therapeutic needs of all patients, and they have high dropout rates. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of combining mindfulness and artmaking on depression, anxiety and shame in female Iranian sexual assault survivors who were randomly assigned to control or experimental groups in this study.

Data were collected using the following questionnaires: *Impact of Event Scale - Revised*, *Beck's Depression Inventory-2*, *Beck's Anxiety Inventory*, and *The Personal Feelings Questionnaire-2*, to assess the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom severity and the changes in depression, anxiety and shame symptoms during the program.

After conducting a one-way analysis of covariance, the findings indicated statistically significant effects of combining mindfulness and artmaking on reducing depression, anxiety and shame symptoms in post-test and follow-up stages compared to no treatment controls. This article suggests that this program could facilitate the process of treatment for female sexually assaulted survivors, as an independent therapy or as a supplementary treatment accompanied by evidence-based methods.

Enhancing the Perception of Beauty Among Adolescents: Disordered Eating and Potential for Prevention and Improved Treatment Outcomes

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The perception of beauty among adolescents is influenced significantly by societal norms, media portrayals, and personal experiences, which also contribute to eating disorders (Pullmer et al., 2019). This abstract synthesizes findings from seven qualitative meta-analytical studies to assess strategies for preventing disordered eating and improving treatment outcomes.

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping beauty ideals, promoting unrealistic standards, and fostering comparison, leading to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Mantilla et al., 2014). Enhancing media literacy and promoting positive online behavior are essential interventions. Parental influence is also critical in countering societal pressures. Effective parental communication and modeling healthy behaviors support adolescents against idealized beauty standards (Muris & Otgaar, 2023). Strategies that encourage supportive family dynamics and open dialogue about body image are integral.

Psychological factors, including genetic predispositions and environmental stressors, contribute to disordered eating behaviors (Marshall et al., 2015). Understanding these mechanisms informs targeted interventions to address individual vulnerabilities. Early identification and intervention are vital for mitigating long-term impacts on adolescent health. Educational initiatives in schools, as explored by Kelly and Tasca (2016), promote positive body image and critical thinking. Comprehensive school-based programs that include body positivity education and media literacy reduce disordered eating risk behaviors by fostering healthier body image perceptions and acceptance of diverse beauty ideals.

Cultural perspectives highlight variations in body image perceptions and treatment outcomes across different contexts (Braun et al., 2016). Tailoring interventions to respect cultural norms and values is crucial for addressing eating disorders among diverse adolescent populations. Cultural competence among healthcare providers fosters trust and equitable care. In clinical settings, evidence-based treatments such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, family-based interventions, and nutritional counseling are essential (Turk & Waller, 2020). Challenges like treatment accessibility and stigma necessitate integrated healthcare systems prioritizing early intervention and ongoing support.

Addressing adolescent beauty perceptions requires a multifaceted approach considering social, psychological, educational, clinical, and cultural dimensions. Evidence-based interventions that empower adolescents, promote positive body image, and cultivate inclusive environments are advocated. Continued research and advocacy are essential to advance prevention strategies and improve treatment outcomes for adolescents with disordered eating behaviors.

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Attitude Toward Ambiguity Can Be Changed Through Appreciation and Creation of Haiku Poetry

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Ambiguity tolerance is an individual trait indicating low aversion to ambiguity that is closely related to creativity. Appreciation and discussion of art are known to improve ambiguity tolerance (Bentwich & Gilbey, 2017), but the effects of appreciation and discussion have not been studied independently. In this study, we used haiku poetry, the world's shortest poetry with the characteristic of ambiguity (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2022) to confirm the effect of appreciation by separating it from the discussion. Additionally, we examined the effect of creation of haiku. To this end, 137 participants answered the ambiguity tolerance scale at five time points: before and after haiku appreciation and creation, and 1 week later. In the viewing task, participants viewed 20 haiku and 20 ink paintings (for another research) each, and in the creation task, they were divided into 20-minutes creation and non-creation groups. We also used the Multidimensional Attitude toward Ambiguity Scale (Lauriola et al., 2016), which organizes ambiguity tolerance into three subfactors. These subfactors are discomfort with ambiguity, absolutism, and the need for complexity and novelty, which correspond to the affective, cognitive, and epistemic aspects of ambiguity attitudes, respectively. The results showed that absolutism, which is the cognitive aspect of ambiguity tolerance, decreased after the appreciation and creation of haiku, and this effect persisted after 1 week. This result indicates that cognitive changes such as the acceptance of ambiguity can occur through the appreciation and creation, which require various interpretations and choices. Especially in haiku, descriptive expressions are avoided, and expressing everything in 17 syllables is not possible. Hence, ambiguous expressions are worth to be accepted, and through this experience, the cognition of ambiguity might be transformed. Increased ambiguity tolerance through art appreciation and creation will become more important for living with higher well-being in the age of VUCA.

Art for Prosociality: The Impact of Art-Induced Perspective Shifts on Behavior and Neural Mechanisms

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Promoting prosocial behavior is vital for the effective operation of our societies and has benefits at the individual, interpersonal, and communal level. Art can expose individuals to a range of novel experiences and is intricately woven into the fabric of our societies. In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the practice of social and cultural prescribing across various countries. While scientific research has highlighted the positive impact of art on health and well-being, the connection between art, prosocial behavior, and the underlying neural mechanisms has received less attention.

Many examples in history show that when people obey the orders from an authority, they are able to perform highly immoral acts towards others. Here, we test the hypothesis that when participants are able to realize that their own perspective can be biased they will be more critical towards the orders of an authority and disobey more, empathizing more with a victim in pain and acting more prosocially. Central to all studies is a Disobedience task that allows measuring the level of prosocial disobedience to authoritarian immoral orders. Through different studies, we test the hypothesis that art experiencing can enhance prosociality employing behavioral (prosocial disobedience, agency and responsibility levels) and EEG methodologies (ERP, Gamma and Theta waves analysis). As perspective shift manipulations we use 3d illusion digital artworks, perspective shift 3d illusion art objects and a body swap VR artwork allowing participants to somatically take the perspective of another.

This research aims to advance scientific understanding and yield societal benefits by informing policymaking, shaping art-based social programs, and guiding art curation practices. Ultimately it can contribute to the development of art interventions that foster more critical, responsible, and prosocial citizens.

An Exploration of Everyday Beauty: Using Object Detection to Identify Aesthetically Relevant Objects in Everyday Life

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In a series of Experience Sampling (ESM) studies, investigating everyday encounters of beauty, participants took photos of their surroundings and subsequently completed in a brief questionnaire concerning what they photographed, each time they received an ESM notification on their smartphone. The questionnaire consisted of 1) Categorising what they photographed into human-made or natural, 2) Rating the beauty of what they photographed, 3) Rating their current valence and arousal. Two of these ESM studies were analysed looking at how category (human-made vs natural) relates to beauty and how beauty relates to participants' emotional state. This confirmed what we likely already feel intuitively: beauty surrounds us on a daily basis, it makes us feel good, and we find it nature in particular. However, the questionnaire data alone may not tell the whole story and with around 20.000 photos (from the two ESM studies above plus another two ongoing ESM studies) our data holds a much larger potential to the investigation of beauty in everyday life. As it would be very time-consuming to analyse all photos manually, we aim to use object detection algorithms to (1) better understand what determines participants categorisations, (2) identify whether there are any commonly occurring objects that are rated highly in terms of beauty. While it would be ideal to be able to just apply pre-trained algorithms, this may not be feasible as the data they have been trained on may not be similar enough to our data or may be unsuitable for other reasons. Therefore, the first step here will be to figure out how well such algorithms can be applied to our dataset and how much manual coding and training is necessary.

How Seeing Things ‘As They Truly Are’ (Yathābhūtam) Enables In-Depth Transformation: A Buddhist Phenomenological and Psychosomic Aesthetics of Spiritual Flourishing

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Before tapping into the insights of Buddhism in intercultural-philosophical terms, the Aristotelian notion of αἴσθησις (*aisthēsis*) – Aristotle aims at a genuine explication of the sensual and hence at “a proper ‘aesthetics’” (Welsch 1987) – may help us to clarify the possibilities of aesthetics both as a philosophical discipline (cf. Scheer 1997; Grassi 1962) and as a practical field for fostering psychological wellbeing and spiritual flourishing. A comparative look at *art, beauty and creativity* in Indian and Western aesthetics (Gupta 1999) already shows us the deep connection between the related quests for philosophical truth, artistic perfection and the enactment of spiritual values in practices of religious worship. However, the aim of the present paper is not to consider whether such a thing as a Buddhist aesthetics (cf. Gombrich 2013) actually exists or can be extrapolated from how the (living) tradition deals with theories of art, creativity and the appreciation of beauty.

Rather, setting out to explore how the habitual projection of desires leads to a cognitive and affective appropriation of phenomenal experience through the construction of subjectivity and objectivity (Waldron 2003), the phenomenological and “psychosomic” (Lusthaus 2002) “aesthetics” (my term) of Yogācāra Buddhist analysis can help us to uncover how the psycho-physiological structures (*saṃskāra*) of living embodiment create an unconscious structuring of experience (Waldron 2002). Just as the positive feedback of “learning” modifies both the environment and the internal structure of the system (Macy 1991), a thoroughgoing “transformation of the basis” (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) (Hattori 1985; Odagawa 1997) can be achieved by (un-)learning former experiences and projections in order to see things “as they [truly] are” (*yathābhūtam*), i.e. without the distortions of “embodied conditioning” (*saṃskāra*). According to an aesthetic sensitivity of embracing “radical variability” (Lusthaus), the balanced “middle-wayedness” (*madhyamā-pratipad*) of Buddhism encourages the “aesthetic enjoyment of what is as it is” (Bahm 1957).

An Eye-Tracking Study on Symmetry and Golden Ratio in Abstract Art

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Artists often employ geometric features, such as symmetry and the golden ratio, to evoke a sense of visual harmony. Symmetry involves dividing a visual stimulus into two equal halves, while the golden ratio involves dividing an object into a major and a minor part, where the ratio of the two is proportional to the ratio of the whole to its major part. This study explored the relationship between visual scanning behaviour and explicit preferences for symmetry and golden ratio in abstract art. Using four Mark Rothko paintings with different proportional divisions—symmetry (50–50%), golden ratio (38–62%), an intermediate ratio (46–54%), and an exaggerated ratio (32–68%)—we assessed the eye movement patterns and subjective ratings of 36 participants (mean age 24.75 ± 3.71 years). Participants completed three tasks: observation, pleasantness assessment, and harmony assessments. While explicit ratings for pleasantness and harmony were similar, they did not significantly correlate with eye-tracking data. Dwell time was influenced mainly by stimulus orientation ($p < 0.001$), and, for the harmony task, by both ratio and their interaction. Overall, visual scanning behaviour was primarily dictated by component orientation, whereas proportion played a more significant role in explicit judgments of harmony and pleasantness.

How the Other Person's Opinion Affects the Neurophysiological Activity of the Brain When You Perceive a Painting

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The study aimed to explore influence of person's opinion, emotional description of a painting on aesthetic judgments and changes in brain bioelectrical activity (EEG) during viewing the canvas by acquainted and not-acquainted responders. The EEG spectral power in 30 participants (18-60 y.o.) discussing paintings during museum visit were analyzed. EEGs were recorded by mobile amplifier (SmartBCI, LTD Mitsar, St.-Petersburg) from 19 sites (10/20 system). One exposure visit involved 2-4 people (1-2 pairs of participants). Each participant assessed the aesthetic appeal of paintings during an exhibition visit and have chosen one painting that he/she would like to show to a partner (about half of the pairs were familiar with each other, about half were unfamiliar with each other). Both participants standing in front of the canvas silently (though a self-report) rated the aesthetic appeal of the painting and its art features. The participant who had chosen the painting had to describe the reasons of the choice and associations he/she had had with the painting. Vis-a-vi of the speaker gave his/her feedback on the attitude towards the proposed painting. Then participants switched the roles. EEG synchronized video recording during the dialogs, as well as during the entire visit to the museum, gave an opportunity to mark up the EEG files into fragments. The EEG spectral power of the listeners' was estimated in the theta (4-8 Hz), lower alpha (8-10 Hz), upper alpha (10-13 Hz), and beta (13-30 Hz) bands in relation to the condition of viewing the painting without feedback. According to participants' self-reports - discussing the paintings, both as a presenter (describing one's attitude to the painting) and as a listener (perceiving others' opinions) - significantly increased interest and engagement in the aesthetic experience.

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The Brain Processing in Naïve/Primitive, Abstract and Realistic Paintings Perception

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The study aimed to explore EEG spectral power and synchronization/desynchronization reactions during perception, analysis and aesthetics evaluation of different art styles - naive/primitive, abstract, realistic paintings performed by modern painters. Spectral data analysis was conducted for subjects' EEG recordings for separate frequencies in 5-15 Hz (with 1 Hz step) during watching the oil canvases in naturalistic conditions of art exhibition (Culture centre #19, Novosibirsk). ERS/ERD data analysis was applied for pre- and post-aesthetics' evaluation periods comparing positive and negative (less positive) evaluations of the paintings in spite of styles. Thirty-two subjects (9 m, 23 f; 19-63 y.o.) in mobile gel 24 sites EEG devices attended the exhibition (40-60 minutes). The subject stood in front of the painting and firstly indicated the beginning of a canvas watching (by a single press of the button), after 30 s to 3 minutes he/she evaluated its subjective aesthetic "attractiveness" with a series of button clicks (where 1 – was the minimal attractiveness, 10 – is the maximum). Naive and realistic paintings differed by higher EEG spectral power at 5-6Hz, 6-7Hz, 7-8Hz in parietal and occipital areas in comparison with abstract style. Naive paintings perception was characterized by more widespread theta synchronization versus abstract than perception of realistic paintings in the similar comparison. The realistic style perception was characterized by higher 8-9 Hz spectral power in parietal areas in comparison with abstract. High aesthetic appreciation of the canvases compared to low appreciation was preceded by an increase in EEG synchronization (i) in a wide frequency range (5-15Hz) started at 1400 ms before the response with a low-frequency locus (5-10Hz) in the frontal cortex areas and (ii) 640 ms before the response - with a locus in the parietal cortex with predominance of right hemisphere.

Spirituality and Aesthetics: Two Complementary or Separable Paths to Human Flourishing?

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To speak of human flourishing implies going beyond, or rather above, the existing human condition and the associated experience of human development and fruitfulness, not to say fulfilment. This transcendent opening of anthropology is necessarily akin to art being an experience of human creativity transcending matter. Spirituality, which is also the opening of the human being to transcendence, joins this binomial as a matter of course. It is significant that in its various institutional, personal or practical forms (as religion, faith, belief), it has always, and in every culture, been closely linked to art. At a time of interdisciplinary possibilities for exploring the complexity of the multifaceted human experience which, with increasing secularisation, is nevertheless a time of intense religious exploration, it is worth reflecting on the present-day significance of both realities for the human being and his flourishing, to what extent these are complementary, and to what extent they are independent or even perhaps mutually exclusive.

Given the breadth but also the relevance of the topic, this paper will sketch the main lines of the relationship of art and spirituality to human flourishing. Starting from the theoretical understanding and practical experience of both art and spirituality, the areas in which they help human development, fruitfulness and fulfilment will be outlined: expression, creativity, performance, delight, transformation, sublimation. Referring to studies from the borderline between the two fields, on the one hand the complementary presence of these areas in both art and spirituality will be shown, and on the other hand the differences in their understanding and application in both fields. A brief look at the history of art as well as its current message will bring an answer to the question posed in the title.

The Role of Consciousness in Aesthetic Perception: Effects of Threatening Stimuli on Art Evaluation

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Aesthetic perception begins with sensation and progresses through interpretation, evaluation, and pleasure. Neuroscience perspective helps us to understand how our brain processes art and beauty. This study aimed to investigate how conscious and preconscious threatening stimulus presentation influence aesthetic preferences.

Previous research has shown that explicit exposure to emotional stimuli induces greater amygdala activity than implicit exposure (Fusar-Poli et al., 2009). Other studies show that stimuli that are not perceived as aesthetic activate the amygdala (Ishizu & Zeki, 2011). We hypothesized that presenting threatening stimuli that previously found to correlate with amygdala activity (Aldhafeeri et al., 2012) would reduce aesthetic pleasure, and that this would only occur through conscious processing due to higher amygdala engagement.

In pretest, participants rated their aesthetic preferences for landscape, portrait, and abstract images produced by the DALL-E AI on a 7-point Likert scale. They were then divided into two groups: preconscious (n=30) and conscious (n=24) randomly. Participants were presented with threatening and neutral pictures either pre-consciously (40ms) or consciously (1000ms), and then re-evaluated images 28 days later. The difference between the pre- and post-evaluations were analyzed with a 2(preconscious/conscious) x 2(neutral/threatening) x 3(portrait/abstract/landscape) ANOVA design.

Viewing threatening pictures produced a significant decrease in aesthetic evaluations compared to neutral stimuli ($F(1,52)=7.83$, $p=0.007$). This change was observed only in the conscious group ($t(23)=3.25$, $p<0.004$) but not in the preconscious group. Overall, abstract paintings received significantly lower aesthetic evaluations compared to other types ($F(2,104)=9.64$, $p<0.001$; all pairwise comparisons; $p<0.002$). The reduced aesthetic pleasure in participants who consciously viewed unpleasant stimuli align with previous findings in affective neuroscience. The lack of effect of preconscious threatening stimuli suggests that consciousness plays a critical role in aesthetic judgments.

The Ecological Validity of the Aesthetic Experience in Virtual Immersive Environments

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Art contemplation usually occurs in museums or art galleries. However, aesthetic experience has tendentially been investigated in laboratory settings, producing findings that are not fully generalizable to real-world circumstances (Brieber et al. 2014; Specker et al. 2017; Szubielska & Imbir 2021). In this regard, virtual reality (VR) could be employed to simulate immersive and realistic experiences and investigate the aesthetic experience from a more ecological perspective. In recent years, many museums have been enabling visitors to take virtual tours of their spaces, making their collections more accessible to the public. However, the extent to which the aesthetic experience in virtual immersive environments compares to that of physical exhibitions remains to be tested.

To address this issue, twenty-three art naïve participants visited both the real "Domani" photographic exhibition and its virtual counterpart (counterbalanced order), created using the Unity graphics engine and made compatible for Oculus Quest 2. In both contexts, we measured the aesthetic experience using both explicit (liking, curiosity, and emotional involvement) and implicit (fixation time) parameters. During the real tour, participants gave their evaluations through a tablet, and time spent observing each photograph was recorded by a GoPro camera positioned on the subjects' heads using suitable harnesses. During the virtual tour, participants gave their evaluations through user interfaces, and could move pseudo-naturalistically thanks to teleport navigation.

The results showed that, despite slightly higher curiosity levels in the real context, there were no significant differences between the two settings in terms of liking, emotional involvement, and fixation times. Furthermore, all the explicit judgments provided in the real context correlated with those in the virtual context, as did the fixation times. We could conclude that VR could serve as a good proxy for the real one, allowing a more ecological investigation of the processes involved during the aesthetic experience. Moreover, these results have clear implications for educational purposes.

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Refiguration of the Self Through the Poetic World: Towards a Configuration of Identity Thanks to Narratives

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This proposal aims to analyse how poetry and the world of fiction give human the opportunity to improve morally through the achievement of catharsis, which allows him to become an “I” in his dialogue and interrelation with others to thus undertake a process of introspection aimed at understanding oneself.

Paul Ricoeur will be the philosopher with whom this research will dialogue, an author who, thanks to the multiplicity of themes contained in the corpus of his works, will be able to provide the study with a multidimensionality of aspects. The notion of “narrative identity” will be the theoretical framework of this dialogue that we believe will allow us to analyse such works from a philosophical point of view. We also propose the possibility of investigating how the concept of “narrative identity” can enter into dialogue with currents of thought and philosophers who, on the contrary, profess a deconstructive thought of the identity of the subject. In relation to that, it is our intention to engage in a fruitful dialogue with the philosophy of deconstruction, embodied mainly by Jacques Derrida, an author who we believe represents that French deconstructive current which is the spokesperson for a philosophy of a “fragmented subject.” The dialogue, however, with a deconstructive philosophy will allow us to enrich the question of “narrative identity” to the extent that, although the two lines of thought are opposite, they will be able to find continuity in the will of a subject who faces himself. We will question Ricoeur's “narrative identity” through the thought of deconstruction to open our research perspective and return to the beginning of the question of the search for self in order to understand how Ricoeur arrived at the formulation of an idea of “narrative identity” in the face of the multiple reflections on the fragmentation of the self.

Bad Beauty: Aesthetic Judgments are Influenced by the Salience of Morally Contentious Content in Photographs

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This investigation explores the influence of moral salience on subjective evaluations of beauty in aesthetic objects. Theoretical frameworks in empirical aesthetics propose that affective responses significantly shape evaluative judgments. In alignment with this perspective, we posited that the aesthetic valuation of visual stimuli is contingent upon the modulation of affective reactions elicited by these stimuli. To empirically test this hypothesis, we employed an online experimental paradigm involving 460 participants. Participants were tasked with assigning beauty ratings to a set of 25 photographic images depicting environmental degradation. These images were accompanied by text descriptors in two affective tones: Neutral and Negative. Neutral descriptors provided basic factual information, whereas Negative descriptors emphasized the adverse impacts of environmental pollution.

Our analytical focus encompassed the mediation effects of affective shifts induced by the textual descriptions and the influence of participants' biospheric values on their aesthetic judgments. The findings revealed a diminution in perceived beauty for images associated with Negative descriptors, an effect partially mediated by increased negative affective responses. Additionally, individuals with strong environmental convictions were more inclined to assign lower beauty ratings in the Negative condition. These outcomes corroborate the hypothesis that aesthetic judgments are not solely determined by the intrinsic features of a physical stimulus but are significantly modulated by both affective reactions and personal values.

The implications of these findings affirm the role of affect in aesthetic appreciation as posited by contemporary theoretical models, yet previously unverified empirically. The study acknowledges inherent limitations and delineates potential directions for subsequent research in this domain.

Imaginal Aesthetics in Abbas Kiarostami's Cinema: Re-reading 'The Wind Will Carry Us'

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Abbas Kiarostami's "The Wind Will Carry Us" is a cinematic exploration of the imaginal, a concept that transcends the individual imagination and the collective imaginary. The film engages viewers through a relational aesthetic that prompts them to construct the narrative actively, drawing on both their faculties of imagination and contextual social representations.

The narrative intertwines personal experiences with broader societal constraints, enriched by references to Forough Farrokhzad's poetry. The analysis utilizes specifically the aesthetic tool of blocking, to examine how the film's formalization engages the spectator's imagination. Additionally, the theories of social representations and the imaginary are employed to demonstrate thematic and emotional anchoring within the film's narrative. Kiarostami's use of blocking and omission, particularly in scenes where characters are obscured or concealed, not only piques curiosity but also reflects the cultural and emotional barriers within Iranian society.

The relational imaginal proposed by the film suggests an aesthetics of becoming, where imagining is a process of exploring relations without predetermining the individuality or sociality of it. The film thus becomes a case study for a new dimension of imagining that exceeds mere imagination or imaginary, constructing a 'relational' imaginal that considers imagining as a process of constant discovery and relation. "The Wind Will Carry Us" advocates for a nuanced understanding of cinematic aesthetics, emphasizing the significance of investigating a variety of imaginal relations. It encourages an open-ended interpretation that resists reduction to a single, definitive meaning, highlighting the importance of the relational imaginal in the context of Iranian cinema and culture.