

**Book Forum on *Estetica e natura umana*:  
Questions by Simona Chiodo, Roberta Dreon, Shaun  
Gallagher, Tonino Griffero, Jerrold Levinson,  
Claudio Paolucci, Richard Shusterman: Replies by  
Giovanni Matteucci**

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Giovanni Matteucci, *Estetica e natura umana. La mente estesa tra percezione, emozione ed espressione* (Carocci editore, Roma 2019, 272 pages).

**Keywords:** aesthetics, human nature, experience, mind, pragmatism, phenomenology, cognitivism

### **Introduction**

From a certain point of view, the relation between the study of the human mind and the philosophical field that, ever since Baumgarten's "baptism" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we have been used to call "aesthetics" is as old as philosophy itself. For example, it may perhaps sound thought-provoking, but at the same time it is true, that it is possible to find Aristotle's "aesthetics" – in the original meaning of a theory of perception, referred to the etymology of the word deriving from the Greek *aisthesis* – more in his work *Peri Psychēs* (*De Anima*) than in his work *Peri poietikēs* (*De Poetica*). And it is also uncontroversial that, for example, Kant's aesthetics – or, more precisely, his transcendental foundation of a critique of the aesthetic power of judgment – rests, as far as its general significance is concerned, on his broader analysis of all the faculties of the human mind (faculty of cognition; feeling of pleasure and displeasure; faculty of desire) as connected to

the specific faculties of cognition (understanding; power of judgment; reason), and must be properly contextualized in such an analysis of the human mind, as nicely explained in § IX of the Introduction to his third *Critique*.

At the same time, however, it is also certainly true that the growing and seemingly unceasing “compartmentalization” and “specialization” of human knowledge, especially in the last two centuries, has progressively led aesthetics and the philosophy of mind (like all other philosophical sub-disciplines, of course) to somehow establish themselves as autonomous and, in a sense, separate fields of inquiry, with little or no communication between them: a process, the latter, that probably has also been favored by the primacy, in the last centuries, of a quite narrow conception of aesthetics that only defined it as the philosophy of the Fine Arts and thus confined “the aesthetic” in the realm of “the artistic”. Anyway, although this process has probably been characteristic of the main part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, over the past few years it has been possible to observe how aesthetics and some new theories of the mind have been not only crossing paths again but also increasingly benefitting from each other in terms of an expansion of their *foci* and scope. Yet, just like in any newly established (or, say, newly re-established) relationship, misunderstandings and shortcomings are always possible, and it is not an easy task to “make things work”, when certain “old habits” still prevail – like that, as we said, of limiting aesthetics only to the philosophical interpretation of works of so-called High Art, and of considering aesthetics and the philosophy of mind as autonomous, separate and non-communicating fields of investigation.

In this context, we consider it intriguing and stimulating to observe how Giovanni Matteucci’s recent book *Estetica e natura umana. La mente estesa tra percezione, emozione ed espressione* (Carocci editore, Roma 2019) ambitiously aims to bring together on the same ground – namely, a study on human nature – the tenets of the two

fields of research mentioned above, and to show that things are actually easier than they seem, so to speak. This “easiness”, though, comes about only after having built a very complex and articulated path addressing both consolidated and recent, more original conceptions, both traditional and unconventional, challenging views. The path outlined in the book *Estetica e natura umana* and some recent articles by Matteucci is aimed at re-establishing the continuity that exists between various aspects and modalities connoting human experience: a continuity, the latter, that according to Matteucci has been undermined by a centuries-long dualistic philosophical attitude towards human nature as such.

On this basis, we thought it stimulating for scholars of philosophy, for readers of “Meta” and for the author himself, to put his original philosophical conception to the test, so to speak, by planning and organizing a book forum with some questions asked by distinguished philosophers of our time working on both aesthetics and the philosophy of mind, and with the detailed replies provided by Matteucci. The complexity underlying Matteucci’s recent philosophical research is thus attested, beside his writings, by the wide-ranging questions raised by the discussants involved in this Forum: Simona Chiodo, Roberta Dreon, Shaun Gallagher, Tonino Griffero, Jerrold Levinson, Claudio Paolucci, Richard Shusterman. The topics and problems called into question by each of them, according to their specific competence, span from the relation to the traditions of pragmatism and phenomenology to enactivism, from the question of aesthetic properties to the role of the body in aesthetic experience, from the relation between perception and language to technology, just to mention a few of them. In our view, as editors of this book forum, the discussants’ questions and the replies provided by the author ultimately prove how flourishing, rich and full of potential, also for further discussion, this field of research currently is.

## **Précis of the research: Aesthetics and Human Nature: Extended Mind and “Experience-with”**

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This book forum revolves around a volume published in Italian (Matteucci 2019a) and other related essays in English (Matteucci 2018, 2019b, forthcoming) whose main concern is to describe aesthetic experience in its characterizing aspects. This topic is approached in the light of some positions that have emerged recently in various fields, primarily concerning theories of the mind and evolutionary studies. These are stances that are strongly incompatible with the traditional schemes through which human experience in general has been described for a long time (and still often is described). Such recent approaches seek to overcome an underlying dualist approach that has been consolidated since Cartesian modernity. In this regard, the thesis I advocate is that the aesthetic is a privileged test bed for this overcoming, given the peculiar relational character that is nested in it and that too often is instead neglected.

The implications of this neglect are manifold. On the one hand, the lack of an in-depth study of the interactional nature of the aesthetic leads those who carry out empirical investigations on this experiential modality to reductively equate its scope with a culturally compromised artisticity, precisely in an era like ours in which the very notion of art itself seems to have entered a crisis to the point of almost losing a great part of its exemplary function. Today the aesthetic is experienced largely and meaningfully far beyond that secluded cultural sphere which for two centuries has been seen as its ideal territory. Hence the impression of asphyxiated circularity that derives from neuroscientific researches that aim at defining the specificity of aesthetic experience through lab investigations in which subjects are exposed to objects that are presumed to have a univocal and unquestionable artistic status, while it is actually hardly more than conventional. On the other hand, the persistence of a certain faithfulness to schemes drawn from the modern

gnoseological dualism seems to be a decisive obstacle preventing aesthetics from actually accepting in its agenda issues deriving from new conceptions of the mind and human nature that are implied by the most recent studies in cognitive sciences and evolutionary studies. They are in fact schemes that at most try to restore only downstream the relational tenor of the aesthetic, *de facto* sterilizing its operative efficiency.

Against this neglect, I try to discuss some elements that, in my view, can contribute to overcome the traditional paradigm according to which the human experience must be traced back to a contrasting relationship between the horizon of subjectivity and the horizon of objectivity. I refer to this traditional paradigm with the formula “experience-of”, since it equates every experiential interaction, even the aesthetic one, with a cognitive relation in the strict sense of an agent, i.e. the bearer of experience, to a content that is external and extraneous to her/him. Among the many corollaries of this paradigm are the subordination of the description of aesthetic experience to the description of cognitive experience, and therefore the focus on issues related to judgment, representation, evaluation, etc., i.e. all forms in which we could say that the experience *of* an object by a subject takes place. Relevant implications of this paradigm are views of perception, emotion and expression that are projected onto the aesthetic on the basis of their conformity to cognitive needs, at most measuring the gaps between them and these standard needs. The result is, however, the concealment of the peculiarities of the aesthetic, as if its purpose was to serve knowledge and conceptual thought, perhaps in order to disclose some new or unprecedented horizons.

I therefore contrast the paradigm just mentioned with a very different one, which I refer to with the formula “experience-with”. According to this conception, experience is first of all a situated interaction, involving an organism and its surroundings, endowed with its own structures and modes of meaningfulness already for how it develops in sensible textures. Aesthetic processes are accordingly understood as immersive practices that do not primarily serve to define or categorize but rather to perceive and feel, not to formulate theories about the world but rather to carry out the environmental interaction.

This is how I try to describe the complex articulating of the practices of perceiving, (emotional) feeling, and expressing as a development of that organism's condition of intimate involvement in the material processes in which the surrounding environment unfolds. I refer to this "material engagement" (see also Berleant 2000 and Malafouris 2013) with the notion of "collusion", aiming to indicate that one is implicated in an experiential arc as a vector of a field, according to the metaphor of the game or *ludus* from which also the "allusion" (the character of invitation to the game that the field has with its connotations) and the "illusion" (the constrained moving about within the field, the playing along with the latter) derive.

In order to emphasize in the most powerful way the peculiarities of this paradigm, especially in comparison with the traditional one, my argument often accentuates the reasons for their contrast. However, the traits which on the theoretical level thus contrast two different paradigms, on the experiential level must be considered as pairs of terms between which a relationship of mutual indeterminacy must be established. They are poles of dynamic distinctions (starting from couples such as thematic-operative, predicative-antepredicative, judgment-perception, propositional-expressive, etc.). Indeed, nothing excludes that all these cases are about mutually irreducible elements that nevertheless persist over the same domain and that therefore complement and sustain each other in the concreteness of the phenomena.

The emphasis on the specific aspects connoting this paradigm is aimed at clarifying a fact that I consider essential. It seems to me that precisely in these praxes of *aisthesis* and in these practices of the aesthetic, in fact, the coupling between organism and environment that qualifies the human mind as enactive (rather than contemplative), embodied (rather than spiritualized), embedded (rather than abstract) and therefore extended (rather than intracranial), surfaces in a "primitive" way (in the sense of something which is underivable from something else). In the aesthetic device *Homo sapiens* finds – so to speak – a prototypical dialogical partner that makes it that cooperative and "collusive" being that also supports its ability to design a knowledge and experience of the world, but that first

of all makes it co-evolving with its own ecological niche and unavoidably jointed with the latter.

The aesthetic is therefore understood here as that particular dimension in which the human being is trained to have an experience “with” the world before an experience “of” it. Insofar as they are aesthetic, this is what so-called works of art disclose. What happens when, while reading a novel, we intensely savor the emotions of the narrated scenes yet without personally feeling them, or when, while listening to a piece of music, we follow a meaningful enveloping texture that cannot be formulated with clarity and distinction in propositional terms? In such cases we find ourselves immersed in a dynamic field of *expressive correspondences* which is populated by vectors that overwhelm us the more we feel them as “our own”. In such situated interaction, that is, we take part expressively, without however being able to claim that we are the ones who cognitively govern what happens despite the fact that we are clearly actively engaged in it. The contents of the environment operate as an integral part of that same mind which we also feel we belong to. It is an extended mind, which we carry out by enacting its expressive potential.

If understood in this experiential sense, the paradigm of the extended mind thus finds in the aesthetic the evidence it needs to lose the character of a metaphysical assumption that many of the critiques raised against it have been based upon. The aesthetic turns out to be a primitive occurrence of that “parity principle” that is the kernel of the extended mind, since this principle is felt and directly practiced in it. It almost plays a role of a “sensible” guarantor of the inseparability of mind and world claimed by the cognitive paradigm of the extended mind: as an experience “in the flesh” of a primary coupling, the aesthetic can offer that felt evidence without which the extended mind is reduced to either a metaphysical ambition or an exhausted metaphor. Yet, this applies as long as we conceive of the aesthetic not as a property or a state, but as a relational modality, i.e. in its “adverbial nature”, which makes it elusive every time one attempts to determine its specific function, especially from a cognitive point of view.

This approach is tantamount to amending the model of the extended mind from its canonical functionalist connotation and takes on a distinctive enactivist characterization, which is articulated in structures that possess “performative and operative nature”. In other words,

the mind is extended when it is aesthetic. Irreducible to mere functionality, the aesthetic primitively expresses the experiential (and not the ontological) cell of our mind, of which it is hence a factor of extension, an “extensional functor” between organism and environment: it appears when the organism feels itself both active and passive by participating in an environment which it feels as equally active and passive in a unitary, at least possible, horizon of sense. In musical terms, it is a cadenza shared between soloist and orchestra in which, in every single moment we cannot but sense how boundaries, established roles are porous and evanescent. Something creative, apparently: as an extended mind *Homo sapiens* dwells on this aesthetic threshold, forced by its own nature to creativity (Matteucci 2019b, 179-180; cf. 2019a, 57-58).

On the other hand, the undeniably at least intersubjective status of the aesthetic suggests that the latter cannot be reduced to mere subjective contingency. Therefore, it's either one thing or the other. It could be per se a cognitive content that can be determined thematically, but then we should show how this cognitive determination could take place, while modern aesthetics has actually failed in doing this, both *a parte subiecti* and *a parte obiecti*. Otherwise, it should be understood as a potentially transversal factor with respect to human experience, which in some cultural contexts is elevated to a content that can also be cognitively determined, for example as artistic. The adoption of the model of the extended mind in an enactivist sense through the paradigm of the experience-with seems to me a way to take the second path. The first step is to recognize how – experientially – the root of the extension of the mind has (at least: also) a *primitive* aesthetic character, that is, not derivable from the cognitive dimension but not necessarily foundational with respect to it.

In this analysis aesthetic experience proves to be “perceptualization” rather than “conceptualization”: a way to make perceive and sensible, an acting through explorative orientation, rather than a way to categorize and judge. This has led me to take an analytical-material approach, investigating

processes that immanently constitute the praxis of *aisthesis* so to speak horizontally, without assuming layers or levels hierarchically arranged on a vertical axis, both top-down and bottom-up. One way in which I characterize this approach is by saying that it tends to be phenomenological, and thus alternative to the various and more or less explicit forms of transcendental criticism and of empiricism that are often prevailing today and that, in my opinion, fail in grasping the primitive collusiveness of the extended mind as experience-with.

My research therefore moves within apparent boundaries and may even appear incomplete and lacking compared with what is normally expected from an aesthetic theory. It is not primarily concerned with evaluation, pleasure, representation, definition of art, etc., that is, with a great part of the content of the current agenda of aesthetics. The reason for this absence is that I believe that those issues become preconditions for the aesthetic discourse only on the basis of the option, which I counter, of the unilateral adoption of the experience-of paradigm. If anything, I rather think that we should address these issues starting from the aesthetic practices that I have tried to describe.

Recurrent topic of the research, then, is the comparison between the prevailing antepredicative and non-judicative, or sub-judicative, mode of experience in *aisthesis* and the one that prevails in the field of knowledge and conceptual determination, that is, judicative propositionality. Also in this case, the distinction should be understood as a dynamic polarization, and not as a relationship between straightforwardly alternative planes. The difference is between the dense, thick texture and the discrete, thin configurations of the same experiential interaction. It is possible to observe all this as reflected in the analysis of aesthetic utterances, in which linguistic, predicative and propositional forms are used outside their canonical function to express the “overall” (non-atomic, “internal” or nuclear) content of the sensible interaction between the organism and the environment. Such a phenomenon somehow summarizes the main features of the experience-with specifically differing from those of the experience-of, showing

how the aesthetic constitutes a field of tension through which nature becomes human for *Homo sapiens*.

The expression “human nature” takes on a special meaning here. It does not denote the essence, or essential endowment, of a particular entity, but rather the way in which *Homo sapiens* shapes itself in the exploratory relationship with its own world, so as to translate the environmental setting it interacts with into something extensively “own”, contributing to the co-evolution of its ecological niche. Human is that nature that integrates itself into the extended mind because the organism and the surrounding environment that immanently emerge from their correlation equally belong to it. In other words, human is that nature potentially enacted thanks to aesthetic-expressive devices that are established within the “material collusion”. The model of the extended mind, then, leads to an extended conception of human nature itself.

I am extremely grateful to the various colleagues who have paid attention to my work by participating in this book forum. Their questions encouraged me to go deeper into aspects that are useful to critically test the perspective that I have tried to outline. The questions raised are often intertwined, and I apologize in advance, should some of my replies be repetitive. Moreover, some elements of my colleagues’ rich questions could not be addressed in my replies. Going into further details and considering a number of further implications would have required the formulation of theses and arguments far exceeding what was suitable for this context.

I asked the editors of this book forum to arrange the questions and my replies by following the alphabetical order of the discussants’ names, but with one exception. The question that will be considered at the end, in fact, requires an open perspective, as it were, that is particularly useful for a non-definitive conclusion and therefore for a sort of re-opening of the discourse that I was able to develop in the texts considered here.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank the journal “Meta” and its editors for welcoming the idea of this book forum, and, with particular fondness, I would like to thank Gioia Laura Iannilli and Stefano Marino for having organized and edited it.

## Questions to Giovanni Matteucci

Roberta Dreon (Cà Foscari University of Venice)  
Shaun Gallagher (University of Memphis)  
Tonino Griffero (University of Rome “Tor Vergata”)  
Jerrold Levinson (University of Maryland)  
Claudio Paolucci (University of Bologna)  
Richard Shusterman (Florida Atlantic University)  
Simona Chiodo (Polytechnic University of Milan)

### 1. Roberta Dreon to Giovanni Matteucci

Giovanni Matteucci’s book *Estetica e natura umana* (2019a) presents a rich theory of the aesthetic in human experience, connecting at least three major strands of inquiry: the legacy of John Dewey’s pragmatist aesthetics, phenomenological theories about perception and the relation between experience and judgment, and recent debates in post-cognitive science, eventually supporting a radical view of the mind as embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended.

Influenced by Dewey, Matteucci’s basically favors an anti-subjectivist and anti-dualist idea of experience that he labels “experience-with” and contrasts with the more traditional view that he calls “experience-of”. Very roughly, the latter conception is based on the opposition between two kinds of entities, a subject and an object, and considers cognition as the pivotal relation in order to connect the two poles; by contrast, the former conception gravitates around an organism’s embedment within an environment, which the organism itself belongs to and interacts with rather than simply standing before reality and its objects. By adopting a reframed conception of experience of this kind, Matteucci conceives of the aesthetic as a mode of experience where the “material engagement” and the profound “collusion” of the perceiver within a perceptive field is intensified and becomes manifest (or expresses itself) by exhibiting its usually functional structures (Matteucci 2019a, 48). Consequently,

artistic practices and experiences – such as, for example, reading a novel or carefully listening to a musical piece, almost being absorbed by it – represent cases of stronger and self-manifesting entanglement and “collusion”, rather than the sole and exhaustive objects of aesthetic theory. A third pivotal claim of the book is that aesthetic perception and aesthetic feeling are the two practices by which the holistic structures of an experience become explicit without being objectified – at least, this is how I understand the author’s words.

Given this general theoretical framework, I find Matteucci’s proposal stimulating on many levels.

First of all, if the peculiarity of the aesthetic features in experience do not properly consist in embedment, “collusion” or material engagement, but are constituted through the coming into appearance of this very structure of experience, one cannot state that experience is pervasively aesthetic (Matteucci 2019a, 48). In the case of more cognitively oriented interactions, such as formulating a judgment, they do not primarily focus on an experience as a whole; rather, they require an analytical working out and breaking up into discrete units of the whole of “experience-with”, although they derive from the latter. This is even the case with habitual actions and behaviors, where everything works as usual and no obstacle interrupts the interaction: for example, when I am riding a bicycle, my practical collusion with the bike and with the street that I am crossing does not come in the foreground. Of course, when I enjoy riding my bike with my family on a Sunday morning, I focus on the specific integration of my experience, but this case is different from that of using my bike to reach the train station and go to work.

One further point deserving attention concerns the practical or enactive meaning of “aesthetic perception”, considering that it is conceived as a mode of perception that consists of making the aspects of an “experience-with” manifest without translating them into a predicative form.

One related question regards a clarification of the intertwined relation between aesthetic perception and feeling in “experience-with”. How are they connected? Are they mutually conditioning aspects of an “experience-with”, or are they

abstracted elements of a primarily affective perception that one can only differentiate later and for the sake of theory?

Beyond these specific questions, my main interest lies in the following issue: is there any space and role left for cultural naturalism in Matteucci's theory of the aesthetic in experience, that is, a form of non-reductive naturalism characterizing both Pragmatism and Enactivism, as well as Phenomenology (at least in Merleau-Ponty's approach)? Although the author mentions organic-environmental interactions as the core of "experience-with" at the beginning of the book, later the Husserlian notions of perceiver and field of perception seems to prevail, and it remains unclear how the author's conception of the aesthetic is related to life within an environment.

In other words, how should we understand the aesthetic as a manifestation of the basic "collusion" characterizing human experience connected with struggling, moving, and acting in the natural and naturally cultural space that is the peculiarly human world? And where is the place of language to be found, given that the human niche has developed not only aesthetically but also through language? Can propositional judgments be assumed as the standard for linguistic practices and, consequently, still be opposed to aesthetic perception and feeling? I wonder whether a number of linguistic interactions, in turn, could be better understood as forms of collusive, materially entangled "experience-with". What I have in mind here are the kinds of practices studied by anthropologists, developmental psychologists, and evolutionary linguistics, that have come to focus on language as a means to build and maintain bonds, share attention, make things in common and pursue purposes, share pleasure and suffering, and that function in a formulaic and holistic fashion, rather than analytically.

I think that, although Matteucci once states that aesthetic perception and language are at least co-primitive (Matteucci 2019a, 60), a more flexible approach to language than the one supported by Husserl's treatment of judgment could better support the kind of natural continuity toward which all three of his inspiring intellectual traditions tend.

**Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Roberta Dreon***

I am grateful to Professor Dreon for providing an accurate synthesis of the theoretical framework of my research. In particular, Dreon is right to say that a “pivotal claim” of my proposal is that “aesthetic perception and aesthetic feeling are the two practices by which the holistic structures of an experience become explicit without being objectified”. I would add, in this regard, that the non-objectifying explicitation at stake here is tantamount to the operative texture of experience becoming conspicuous and striking, according to a spectrum that goes from saliency to blatancy, in phenomena that populate a complex field spanning everyday life and spectacularized aestheticization.

In the central passages of her contribution, Dreon calls attention to some points that I find converging on an equally important issue: the peculiarity of the aesthetic and its characterization with respect to ordinary experience. This is a question that is also raised by other contributions, and which in fact is transversal in relation to my research. In fact, if one describes aesthetic experience while dismissing any specific content determination, doesn't the aesthetic end up coinciding with experiencing in a vague and generic sense?

In my opinion, the inderivability from specific contents, whether they are specific properties of the object or specific states and attitudes of the subject, shows that the aesthetic consists in a peculiarly relational connotation. To put it very briefly: aesthetic is in the first place neither an objective content one has experience of, nor a subjective content that one assumes when having experience of something; aesthetic is, rather, a way in which the interaction between organism and environment is established, in which subjective and objective polarities emerge primitively in an expressive correspondence. It is in this sense that I recognize an *operative* dimension to the aesthetic. “Operative” is understood here in a phenomenological sense, as that which acts in the constitution of a phenomenon without being thematically identifiable and yet in an indispensable way. As a matter of fact, it does so in such a way as to lose its processual and institutive peculiarity at the very moment in which it is translated into a thematic content. From

a positive point of view, it could also be said that – just like the aesthetic – what has an operative nature always eludes any definition and determination that one may attempt to provide of it, by demanding that a further processuality be carried out and that, once determined and thus fixed, would turn out to be an empty shell.

It is in this sense I maintain that the aesthetic is pervasive with respect to experience as a whole. In paraphrasing a passage in which I state this (Matteucci 2019a, 48), Dreon omits the adverb “potentially” that is actually decisive for me (“As a particular relational modality, the aesthetic is [at least potentially] pervasive...”). In fact, I believe that the potential/actual nexus is very useful to describe the relationship between operative and thematic that I have in mind in my characterization of the aesthetic. The operative components are characterized by the way in which (*how*) they are staged or enacted. Consequently, “aesthetic” is not the perception of something peculiar, but it is the perceptual praxis whose constitutive operativity saturates the scene, i.e. when what prevails over any functionalization is the expressive correspondence in which one finds oneself entangled in the experience with the environment. That such a “collusion” can be found in every real perceptual act, although according to different degrees of actuality/potentiality, does not seem to me an argument that proves my thesis wrong. Rather, it strengthens it: everywhere human experience takes place, a potential significance is presumed to precede any dichotomous relationship, any denotative meaning. The latter is reached, if anything, when the material collusion is aimed at a determination. But then the collusive elements flow back into a merely tacit operativity, to allow room for a thematic and cognitive configuration. Thus perceiving becomes ascertaining or recognizing and is no longer exploring. The thematic, therefore, does not inhabit a different world than the operative. It is a journey through the same territory that requires segmentation according to particular syntactic configurations. It makes discrete what operates as material density within a mere sensible manifestation.

The other side of the coin is that the aesthetic always appears on the verge either of flowing back into tacit operativity or ending up in thematic determinations. It always seems to be on the verge of disappearing, as everyone who pondered the fragility of beauty knows well. This is very important in order to describe the dimension that Western culture has attributed to the Fine Arts over the past three centuries. In that dimension, thematic contents (religious beliefs, philosophical ideas, properties of materials and forms, psychical contents and so on) are anything but irrelevant. But all these contents have an aesthetic sense to the extent that they sustain the course of the manifestation without making the thematization they carry with them prevail. Therefore there can exist a non-aesthetic art, in which the thematizing and conceptual (or even ideological) gesture surmounts the sensible exploration. When, instead, art is aesthetic, in a poem – as has been authoritatively observed – even the copula “is” no longer holds the value of a copula, and yet still keeps its efficacy.

As I would say also in response to the second part of the last issue tackled by Dreon, just like any human artifice, language is an ancipital device. Besides being a functional tool for cognitive determination when it plays a mainly denotative role, it is well known that language also unfolds expressive power in its aesthetic performativity. The last chapter of my book (Matteucci 2019a, 201 ff.) therefore traces language back to an expressive praxis of *aisthesis*, of which it is perhaps the most complex form. In that context, I thus speak of “elocutory enunciation” (Matteucci 2019a, 239-243) precisely to illustrate this performative capacity of the language to perceptualize, which runs parallel to its capacity to conceptualize. By virtue of it, even propositionally packaged contents, so to speak, can preserve or take on aesthetic force when they support the course of an experience-with. And here it doesn’t even make sense to ask the question of the distinction between nature and artifice. By participating in an extended mind, *Homo sapiens* embodies its own nature through the artifice, it realizes its own biology through its own culture. Its ecological niche are the expressive devices that the human organism is materially

engaged with. It is a whole texture of expressive correspondences, which “environs” the human being. Human is a nature that acts as a device, which is enacted in its significance before being identified with its meanings. The power that language has in establishing social bonds, recalled by Dreon, is due to a co-operativity that implies this collusiveness having an aesthetic matrix.

That is why I insist on the historical-material dimension of the apriori as a texture in which expressive practices are sedimented. In this sense, I emphasize how *aisthesis* expressively inheres not in a “matter” but rather in a “material”, which “bears the signs of cultural elaboration, the sensory partitions, the relics of discarded grammars that are recycled as syntactic components, the sedimentations that co-constitute a form of life as an aesthetic niche, i.e., the vestiges that human nature manifests: the material and historical apriori of the extended mind” (Matteucci 2019a, 205). It is no coincidence that, rather than merely speaking of “perception”, I opt for the formula of “perceptual praxis”, or even of perception as a “praxis of *aisthesis*”, as to accentuate its pertaining to the form of life that, in my opinion, is shared even by language in its perceptual performance, or of expressive perceptualization, as I would also say with reference to Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* and *Prose of the World*. On the other hand, I do not rule out the possibility that such a conception of the material-historical apriori involves a revision of Husserl’s notion of *Lebenswelt*. The latter seems to me to be much more than a pre-scientific common sense. It is interwoven with expressive practices and the related know-how that every propositional articulation of experience presumes. Thus, the key notion of expressiveness allows a double amendment, of both perception and language, since it recognizes in both of them aesthetic (or vital, one might say) praxes that operate in the material correspondence of a situation (Dewey) and a form of life (Wittgenstein).

## 2. Shaun Gallagher to Giovanni Matteucci

Professor Matteucci addresses a number of complex questions about the aesthetic. I want to focus on the specific issue of aesthetic experience. I endorse Matteucci's proposal to characterize the aesthetic as involving a shift from an "*experience-of*" some object to an "*experience-with*", which can signify a kind of participatory experience, or I would want to say, a kind of enactive performance. There are, however, different interpretations of "*experience-with*" possible. Matteucci describes it sometimes in terms of a game, a *ludus* (the object al-ludes, the subject col-ludes); but on a Gadamerian reading, this would come along with the idea that the experience is one of being lost or entirely absorbed in the play. Alternatively, one might take "*experience-with*" to be a return to a specific conception of empathy (*Einfühlung*), à la Theodor Lipps, or more recently the mirror neuron version of basic empathy defended by Vittorio Gallese; but this interpretation would go towards an internalist view and against the extended mind view with which Matteucci aligns.

My question is whether we can get to a conception of aesthetic experience as "*experience-with*", in a more direct way by starting with performance, as in the performing arts (dance, musical performance, acting), but also extending to athletics and even everyday skilled activity. That is, instead of taking the typical or standard starting point of asking what is aesthetic experience for the observer of an artwork, that is, asking about the observer-audience perspective, we start by asking what is the aesthetic experience of the dancer, or the performing musician, or the actor portraying a character. In the performance neither the dance, the music, nor the character is an object; rather than an "*experience-of*" the dance, music, character, they are rather enacted by the performer. In this kind of enactive performance, which has to be fully embodied (not just a brain event), the performer, in some instances, has some form of aesthetic experience, which in principle does not equate to absorption or being lost in the flow (as someone like Dreyfus might think). Rather, the aesthetic experience of the performer would be an "*experience-with*" the dance, the music, the character. On the face of it, however, this looks very

different from what might count as the aesthetic experience of the observer or audience, unless, perhaps, one would think that observing is itself a skilled performance to some degree.

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Shaun Gallagher***

I believe there are many converging points between me and Professor Gallagher. In particular, I owe much to his proposal to specify the model of the extended mind in an enactivist key by retrieving pragmatism, in order to avoid aporias which are instead unavoidable in a functionalist key (Gallagher 2017, 48-64). This strategy involves the retrieval of the notion of “situation” drawn from Dewey, which he presents very clearly as follows:

the situation is not equivalent to the environment. That is, it is not that the organism is placed in a situation. Rather the situation is constituted by organism-environment, which means that the situation already includes the agent or experiencing subject. In this regard, for example, if I am in a problematic situation, I cannot strictly point to the situation because my pointing is part of the situation. I cannot speak of it as some kind of objective set of factors because my speaking is part of it. My movement is a movement of the situation. Accordingly, the trick to solving a problematic situation is not simply to rearrange objects in the environment, but to rearrange oneself as well – to make adjustments to one’s own behaviors. Indeed, any adjustment one makes to objects, artifacts, tools, practices, social relations, or institutions is equally an adjustment of oneself (Gallagher 2017, 55-56).

Shortly afterwards Gallagher adds:

As extended and enactive, the mind is *situated* in the way that Dewey defines this notion. The situation includes not just our notebooks, computers, and other cognitive technologies, and not just the social and cultural practices and institutions that help us solve a variety of cognitive problems, it also includes *us*. We are *in the world* in a way that is not reducible to occupying an objective position in the geography of surrounding space, and in a way such that the world is irreducible to an abstraction of itself represented in one’s brain. We, as minded beings, are definitively “out there”, dynamically coupled to artifacts, tools, technologies, social practices, and institutions that extend our cognitive processes (Gallagher 2017, 59-60).

Now, if it is true – as Gallagher (2017, 58) observes – that “in many regards much depends on how we understand the

coupling relation between organism-environment”, I believe that characterizing this relation in an aesthetic sense allows to best avoid functionalist representationalism. “Situation”, indeed, is tantamount to what I have often called “field”, to which I attribute the ownership of the processes that take place in it (as Gallagher writes: “My movement is a movement of the situation”). A situation does not depend on a foundation that is either subjective or objective and that would already presume a context within which the cognitive thematization takes place, i.e. the “pointing” mentioned by Gallagher. In the field of experience-with subject and object emerge by virtue of a correspondence that dynamically shapes each of its vectors, and therefore the two potential poles towards which it extends, through the ways of acting and operating of the vectors themselves, according to the basic principle of enactivism. And only this aesthetic primitiveness explains its potential criticality. A situation *manifests itself* as problematic, in the appearance that is carried out in it, according to a coupling that coincides with living in a network of plastic references that reveal the aspects of the dynamic field that is being inhabited. In its appearing under certain aspects, the situation is an expressive correspondence that underlies an extended mind.

Thus, the environment also manifests itself as an aspect of the situation, as a nature that becomes human. It operates as a relational vector and not as an entity looming over a subject. On the other hand, when the organism plays along with the situation, it finds itself established for how it manipulates expressive devices, according to a material collusion where (the practices with) the objects are what shapes the so-called subjects more than the other way around. Therefore each situation is more than merely biological. It implies a configurative artificiality; an expressiveness that, as such, is already cultural and social.

Consequently, my response to the questions raised by Gallagher’s contribution could be a simple and convinced declaration of approval. It certainly is for what concerns the enactive performance that occurs in material collusion. My analysis of the constitutive creative principle of the praxes of *aisthesis* adequately shows, I think, how I do not consider such

an experience to be equivalent “to absorption or being lost in the flow”, especially if this means simply recognizing a mere passivity of the subject. The immersive character of the aesthetic experience is not a “getting lost”, but the articulation of a know-how, the exercise – that is – of a competence in a situation resembling the exploration of an unprecedented scenario in which one has to orient her/himself. I therefore find the examples of the dancer and the musician offered by Gallagher perfectly fitting. In some recent investigations on improvisation meant as a practice of resonance I have moved exactly in this direction.

By the way, I precisely wanted to make reference to this by interweaving the “al-lusion” of the manifestation of a field and the “col-lusion” through which its vectors, even subjective ones, respond to it. These are two elements that I have borrowed and freely adapted from Pierre Bourdieu, who nicely explains the analytical-material constitution of a *habitus* and therefore what I deem being the principle of sedimentation, both in the felt body and in the surrounding environment, of an ecological niche. If so, then the notion of *ludus* loses the traits of ontological transcendence that it instead has for Gadamer, or the features of simulative practice that it takes on for the new theorists of empathy. It is rather a staging of the same field operativity.

Finally, I believe that the performative character of the aesthetic is certainly present also on the side of the so-called observer, so I would drop Gallagher’s caution at the end of his contribution. Also in this case what is at stake is the exercise of a know-how, and therefore a “skilled performance”, which is always aesthetic rather than cognitive. What one aims to get from an *aesthetic* experience as such is not the acquisition once and for all of the (knowledge of a) given. The overall content of the aesthetic experience is its own carrying itself out.

Therefore, as I sometimes say, what captures us aesthetically never ceases to fascinate us and induces us to reiterate experiences, in some cases even obsessively. The source of gratification is the way in which the collusion is realized each time, not the outcome to which it leads as a determination of an internal content. We listen to musical

pieces of which we know every dynamic, we reread poems of which we know every syllable by heart, we look at paintings of which we could reproduce every square millimeter – just as we reactivate the same device to perform the same activity when we are gratified by performing it. The “playful” nature of the aesthetic lies not least in this intrinsic performativity, which stands for the enactment of a significance that makes the meanings that are recruited expressive.

### 3. Tonino Griffero to Giovanni Matteucci

It is surprising how almost completely different bibliographies may sometimes lead to develop almost completely different theories. Notwithstanding the existence of several similarities between Matteucci’s insightful and far-reaching aesthetics understood as an “analytic-material phenomenology” (Matteucci 2019a, 112), based on the model of the “experience-with” rather than “experience-of” (or “knowing-how” rather than “knowing-that”), and my “pathic aesthetics” relying on the experience of “being subject-to” rather than “being subject-of” (or “feeling-how” rather than “feeling-that”), I can’t silence the existence of some differences between us.

The latter range – to mention just a few – from aesthetics’ current need to overcome certain traditional shortcomings (i.e. concerning connectivity, for him; resonance, for me) to the rejection of the simple identification of aesthetics with (allegedly great) art; from the development of a field-approach leading to a situative-environmental aesthetics that emphasizes the importance of appearances as such to the refusal of transcendental and only intracranial approaches; from the defense of an anti-intentionalist phenomenology and the cognitive impenetrability of aesthetic experience (often non-thematic) to the suspicion towards all kinds of neuro-aesthetic reductionism that are still based on a subject/object dualism; from fostering aesthetics as perceptual exploration of indiscreet surroundings (Matteucci 2019a, 159) to the denial of a merely metaphorical and/or anthropomorphic explanation of emotional characters, up to conceiving of a relationship (an in-between) that precedes the mutually related poles and that constitutes them rather than being constituted by them as their outcome

(with the “only” difference that, for me, their emergence is still aesthetic and does not already represent a transition to the representative-cognitive dimension, as argued by Matteucci).

There are still other theoretical focuses that our aesthetic theories apparently share, although developing them differently (also due to a different philosophical terminology). For example, I would not go so far as to consider *qualia* as “without subjectum, without support” (Matteucci 2019a, 152), since they undoubtedly change when their material components – as real sub-atmospheric generators – change and tinge the whole in a fairly different way. Nor is it enough for me to explain *qualia*’s ecstatic spreading through an adverbial form and, however, not applying it also to seemingly objective attributes (Matteucci 2019a, 52): for me, also “fragile” could radiate an atmosphere of caution that is irreducible to its chemical-physical properties.

However, instead of pointing out differences on specific points, I mostly prefer here to focus on the mood that permeates the book. It exudes a (perhaps excessive) pragmatic-performative-relational euphoria and, as a result, a sort of fear for everything that is relatively (ontologically) stable and relatively (phenomenologically, but also culturally) transcendent.

a) This certainly explains the underestimation of art, of the (metaphysical) reasons that lie behind the modern genesis of aesthetics, of its pedagogical and social role, which Matteucci only attributes to aestheticization (Matteucci 2019a, 35), as well as the delusion of being able to manage manifestness in the absence of (what he calls somewhat ironically) deep structures in existence (Matteucci 2019a, 71).

b) It is not enough to simply claim this to effectively get rid of the “haunted circle” of “psychologism, logicism and ontologism” (Matteucci 2019a, 100), nor is it enough to play well the same game of contemporary aestheticization and thus be able to “reduce [its] alienating and dystonic excesses” (Matteucci 2019a, 139, fn. 12) without any normative instance.

c) Beside this, I also note a somewhat stereotypical image (even in the eyes of my “pathic” aesthetics) of the cognitive sphere that sometimes seems to emerge. Since it is

possible that, almost through a rebound effect, the cognitive, in turn, arouses an affectively connoted perception, I would raise some doubts both about the idea that the way from the affective to the cognitive is unidirectional and irreversible (“the more effective the content of the experience-with, the more indeterminate the content of the experience-of”: Matteucci 2019a, 65), and about the idea that the “facts” are only those explained by the natural sciences and not the first-personal and affective ones (which are for me the “facts” above all – since it is only to them that we owe the absolute certainty of their being-in-the-world).

d) Of course, considering my topics, I “have” to say something about Matteucci’s treatment of my atmospherology (especially Matteucci 2019a, 157 ff.), which – it has to be said *a limine* – certainly does not aim to systematically define the status of aesthetics but just to offer an interpretation of the aesthetic niche (in the broadest sense) through a brand-new radical affective externalism. The way I use to talk about “quasi-things” is not meant to propose any kind of dogmatic reification, but only to ascribe to feelings poured into the surrounding space – a spatial dimension, the latter (namely, the lived space and not the geometric-physical one, of course), that is strongly underestimated by the book in favour of only mental “scenarios” – an agency normally attributed to subjects and objects. Several passages in the book try to explain the irrefutable experience of the non-coincidence between feeling and affective involvement (for example: a face appears threatening to me even though I do not feel threatened, etc.), as well as the fact (Matteucci 2019a, 195) that the “same” emotion can give rise to different forms of effectiveness (in my terms: to different felt-bodily resonances). In doing so, however, Matteucci seems to rely on a hardly usable *adaequatio* criterion (“in the absence of a compatible tuning intonation the affection would not go to the target”) (Matteucci 2019a, 164) and, what is worse, excludes the most inspiring atmospheric experience: feeling the authority of atmospheres regardless of own perceptual conditions and their expansively getting the better of other coexisting feelings. This authority cannot be kicked

down to a perception of bistable figure (a good cue which I intend to treasure, anyway!) or a result of a “peaceful” relationship. In the attempt not to identify the affective either with a subjective or with an objective state, the book underestimates the absolute involvement, here translated in the weakened form of a “collusion” and “participation” and explained through a dispositionalism that is totally alien to an emotional phenomenology aimed at emphasizing both the atmospheres’ quasi-objectivity and the absolute (that is, not merely self-attributing) subjectivity that the felt body’s involvement solely is able to attest. The quasi-thingly aggression of pain or of a threatening sky – which is “aesthetic” inasmuch as it goes beyond, respectively, medical epistemology and weather-forecasting – is not an experience that one simply “participates” to. Nor can the deep tension hovering over a conflictual meeting be paraphrased (see Matteucci 2019a, 143), except in a very reductive-subjective way, as “X perceives tensely”. Considering the aesthetic as an assurance of the coevolution of organism and environment, it is then reductive to understand an immediate affection as dependent on what is only indirectly accessible.

My main objection, however, concerns the (felt) body, the great absentee in this – in other respects – meritorious and large-scale project. Instead of an embodied, enactive and situated (extended) mind, one should actually speak of an extended felt-bodilyhood understood as intercorporeality or felt-bodily communication (or interaction). By talking about the mind (as if we knew, phenomenologically, what it really is) or the organism, at best (as if we could consider it independently of its just anatomic inspection), and not about the felt (or lived) body, in my view the book ends up escaping the main subject of any phenomenological aesthetics. Everything here is fluid, relational and put back to the praxis as a catch-all justification. Nevertheless, at the end of the day this could also be an irreducible difference in the way we develop our basic (and, as such, not rationally justifiable) *Stimmungen*.

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Tonino Griffero***

While I have nothing to add with regard to the similarities that Professor Griffero points out, I find it difficult to understand how to respond to the various objections that he makes. If they mean that my research does not fall within atmospherology, I have no problem to admit it. The very perspective of a “pathic aesthetics” advocated by Griffero, which draws from a living “subject-to rather than subject-of” corporeality, is problematic for me. What I see in it is a simple reversal of modern gnoseologism, in which one merely changes the sign of a dualist division that, in my opinion, the aesthetic calls into question. This is what the attempt to start from the relationship as such, as an experiential dimension and not as an ontological entity or reality, aims at, recognizing that the aesthetic concerns the phenomenology of experience rather than the ontology of the world. Perhaps this is the underlying reason for Griffero’s particular reading of my research, which he blames for what he calls a “pragmatic-performative-relational euphoria”. On the contrary, my ambition would be to describe the praxes of *aisthesis* in their ambivalent active/passive dimension, as I tried to show, and not only to declare.

I am not surprised, however, to learn that the aesthetic cannot be reduced to an atmosphere. This could actually mean that an atmospherology does not describe the aesthetic as such. As a matter of fact, my reference to atmospherology emerges during an articulated analysis of the aesthetic implications of emotional experience. The pressing question in that context is: what makes an emotional experience *aesthetic* and why is there apparently a privileged link between the *aesthetic* and the emotional? To this end, emotion is described in its performative, manifestative and extended components, rather than as a “quasi-thing”. And if what makes an emotional experience aesthetic appears to be something different from its (presumed? verified?) being atmospherical, then this perhaps supports the idea that talking about emotions as quasi-things presupposes the adoption, using reversed values, of the modern canon, which mortifies precisely the aesthetic component of experience.

As for the single questions that Griffero lists, I would like to clarify what follows. *Ad (a)*: It was not my intention to underestimate art, but to invite to consider art also from the point of view of the aesthetic before considering it from the perspective of the modern cultural ideology of the Fine Arts. And this was in no way meant to disregard art's pedagogical and social role. Rather, the question of aestheticization is introduced to show how strikingly and evidently today the aesthetic has exceeded the limited sphere of the Fine Arts. This forces us to rethink the aesthetic/artistic pair which, I believe, has been entrenched in recent centuries' thought. *Ad (b)*: The question of the "normativity" eventually involved in aesthetics is not evaded, but rather largely discussed, I think. The point is that it is dealt with in those operative, and not thematic terms that I deem congruous with the aesthetic. Thus this question plays, for example, a crucial role in the chapter of my book on creativity, where I advocate the opportunity to replace the usual reference to rules (whether determining or reflecting) with a reference to the tendential constraints of the manifestation and experiential exploration (in particular see: Matteucci 2019a, 104-109; 2019b, 170-171). *Ad (c)*: I absolutely do not aim to support an alleged one-sidedness and irreversibility in the relationship between the aesthetic and the cognitive, or even between the phenomenal and the factual, so much so that I speak of "primitives" that are largely intertwined, to the point of mutually sustaining each other (as in the examples available in Matteucci 2019a, 146-148). *Ad (d)*: I have already commented on my only partial convergence with atmospherology. I must clarify, however, that I do not believe that my position can be reduced to the criterion of *adaequatio*. However, this is not due to the fact that I fear this ghost that haunts every twentieth-century hermeneutics, as it were, but is rather connected to the performative and enactive character of the extended mind on which I insist. The passage quoted by Griffero (taken from Matteucci 2019a, 164) concerns a relationship that stands out by itself as expressive correspondence, and therefore as "resonance" – a principle underpinning the last chapter on expression and which elsewhere I have explored explicitly in these terms. But it is

precisely because of this relational characterization that I confirm my reluctance to speak of “quasi-things”, as well as those quasi-subjects that seem to me to be ontologized bodies, for a description of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic resonance is not the rumble that occurs in the empty hollow of a sound box (such as the lived body, subject to an atmosphere, would be); it is rather the material vibration of a harmonious plane that is carried out in the very manifestation of the vectors that enact the phenomenon by corresponding to the collusive field.

The general final objection raised by Griffero confirms what has already emerged. Starting from the body would imply to start from a *relatum*; it is the blind alley that even Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* cannot help ending up in. Describing a relationship that also recruits the full corporeality as its own vector is a different enterprise. And it is precisely in this relationship that the “extended mind” lies, certainly neither in a disembodied spirit nor in a physiological, cerebral or visceral endowment. And so I try to remain faithful to a conception of phenomenology as description of institutive relational structures rather than more or less material instituted entities, of phenomena rather than facts.

#### 4. Jerrold Levinson to Giovanni Matteucci

My understanding of Professor Matteucci’s views is based on the papers Matteucci (2018) and (2019b), plus a careful reading of sections of Chapter 2 (“Il paradigma dell’esperienza-con”) and Chapter 4 (“Il precepire estetico”) of his book (Matteucci 2019). Given the pitfalls of communication across different languages and differing philosophical traditions, the risks of misunderstanding are of course far from negligible.

1. One of the central ideas in Professor Matteucci’s novel approach to aesthetic experience is the notion of *experience-with* an object in contrast to *experience-of* an object. The distinction is characterized by Matteucci along roughly these lines: while *experience-of* implies distanced apprehension of preexisting perceptual content, *experience-with* implies being made to perceive in a way that is not specifiable prior to and outside of the experience itself. When one has *experience-of* an object, neither the subject nor the object is changed; when one has

experience-*with* an object, by contrast, subject and object are altered in the process and partly fuse with one another, giving rise to something that does not antecedently exist.

The notion of *experience-with* an object, which Matteucci regards as fundamental to an experience being an aesthetic one, arises naturally from an ecological-phenomenological view of perception familiar to us from the writings of figures such as John Dewey, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and James Gibson. It is good to be reminded that aesthetic experience is often a complex affair, involving aspect perception, horizons of consciousness, response to affordances, and the like—that aesthetic experience is more than a mechanical registering of fixed, already constituted appearances.

Matteucci's analysis of aesthetic experience as consisting centrally in *experiencing-with* foregrounds above all aesthetic experience's *interactivity*, its conscripting of imagination, exploration, and conjecture to a more pronounced degree than other perceptual experiences. But is not all perceptual experience interactive to some extent? Does not all such experience involve give and take between subject and object, in which both subject and object find themselves temporarily transformed in the course of their interaction?

More importantly, in my view Matteucci fails to recognize that such interaction can be conceived as a way of *discovering* the aesthetic or artistic or expressive properties of the object experienced, rather than a process in which those properties are *created*, where such properties are understood as something like powers or dispositions to affect in particular ways subjects that engage with them. From my perspective, it is precisely by *interacting* with an object – perceiving it under various aspects, focusing it in different ways, being affected by it, that one comes to *know* it, including knowing what *properties* it has.

I submit that Matteucci's brief for the deep interactivity of aesthetic experience need not deny that there is a sustainable distinction between subjects and objects. Nor that objects have aesthetic and artistic properties when not being experienced. Nor that experience involving an object may be at once both an *experiencing-with* an object (whereby the subject cooperates with

and is transiently entangled with the object) and an experiencing-*of* the object (whereby the subject is positioned to discern the properties actually possessed by the object).

2. Matteucci rejects the thesis of aesthetic properties as higher-order perceptual properties, supervenient on lower-order ones, instead proposing that aesthetic properties so-called are in reality just non-aesthetic properties functioning differently in aesthetic contexts – contexts in which there is experiencing-with objects – which novel functioning he labels *intervenience* (see Matteucci 2019a, 148-151). But the examples adduced to illustrate this position, such as the properties of *blueness* and *angularity* that some paintings of Matisse or Klee exemplify, do not support the position, since this simply overlooks that ‘blue’ and ‘angular’ are *ambiguous* predicates, having both a *non-aesthetic*, or literal, employment, and an *aesthetic*, or metaphorical employment. Ontological differences, such as between properties of fundamentally different kinds, do not disappear because one chooses not to recognize them.

3. Matteucci shows himself to be an enthusiastic embracer of the Extended Mind paradigm of mental life (EMP), as opposed to a more Classical or Cartesian paradigm of it. The EMP holds, in brief, that the mind is more than the brain, or even the brain-body complex, and that it extends to entities outside that complex, that is, outside the embodied person. On the EMP, the mind includes tools, devices, and props that aid in perception, cognition, emotion, or memory. Entities such as computers, cell phones, journals, notebooks, calculators, search engines, the cloud, and so on.

But even if one fully accepts the EMP, it is still perfectly possible to distinguish the subject so extended from a given object with which it interacts and thus experiences. To say that two things, X and Y, interact, that they respond to or react to or affect one another, does not in itself entail that X and Y are no longer distinct, does not render inevitable dissolution of the distinction between X and Y.

Furthermore, should we accept the EMP as understood by its proponents – that is to say, in a strong sense, whereby mentality is taken to extend literally to inanimate objects, rather than just a metaphor that brings into relief important

aspects of the way human beings now cognitively interact with and impact the world around them? I for one am inclined to respond in the negative.

4. I return in conclusion to Professor Matteucci's preferred conception of the aesthetic, which he opposes to more traditional ones, a conception that is well expressed in these quotations from the paper "Implications of Creativity" cited above. "It is the modality in which the interaction between an organism and its environment takes place that qualifies an experience as aesthetic, and not properties of either the organism or the environment in themselves" (Matteucci 2019a, 172). "The aesthetic designates an organism-environment interaction so integrated as to generate a kind of collusion or interpenetration between them" (Matteucci 2019a, 173).

But is this not true of *every* case of successful perception? That there is this sort of integration, interpenetration, or interactivity? It seems to me that the distinctive character of *aesthetic* perception, which perhaps resides in the species of *attention* it involves, has been missed. Interactions in which an object is involved vary in *character* or *focus*, in what they invite us to attend to and in what way, and it is that, in my view, which makes them *aesthetic* or not (see on this my essay Levinson 2016, and particularly endnote 7).

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Jerrold Levinson***

Professor Levinson points out that experience-with, as I describe it, would imply a process of transformation of both subject and object: "when one has experience-*with* an object [...], subject and object are altered in the process and partly fuse with one another, giving rise to something that does not antecedently exist". I thank him for drawing attention to this aspect. It is something that my research perhaps evokes but in fact neglects to discuss, thus lending itself even more to criticism of partiality. However, I would call this neglect programmatic, so to speak. I do not delve into what changes in the subject and/or in the object for a precise reason that is very important to me. Saying that subject and/or object are "altered" in the course of experience-with would logically imply to believe that these two polarities are already "genuinely" constituted

before the experiential interaction. And this is precisely the point, as I have tried to reiterate extensively in previous answers while talking about the primitive relational operativity of the aesthetic as expressive correspondence.

In this sense, the aspects that we categorize in judgment as aesthetic properties operate expressively in the in-between of a correspondence (cf. Ingold 2015, 154), they *inter-vene*: they deserve this qualification as long as they unfold an aesthetic potential. Therefore I am not only talking – as Levinson would hope – about a “discovery”, but actually not even about a “creation” of aesthetic properties. One would otherwise run the risk of tracing aesthetic perception back to an ascertainment of something that is thematic, to an act that is cognitive or, in any case, functional to knowledge. On the contrary, I believe that the perceptual praxis is aesthetic insofar as (it is a matter of degree!) it is not resolved in the mere ascertainment. So-called aesthetic properties are not discovered or created, but rather *expressed* in the praxis of perceiving and feeling as aspects of the manifestative field: they are embodied in cor-responding perceptualizations of gestural, verbal and behavioral configurations, which reveal not so much what they are but how they operate – in other words, by further articulating their operativity. It is the way in which (i.e. *how*) we look at a painting, or listen to a musical piece, that testifies whether we know *how* to perceive with it, that is, whether we correspond to what thus intervenes to connote the situation. In my opinion, Frank Sibley’s seminal essay on aesthetic concepts indicates a similar path, especially in its second part, when it deals with the way the critic must operate in order to be *aesthetically* effective in her/his practice of “perceptualization”, and not of “conceptualization” (see Sibley 2001, 13 ff.). I believe that these pages should be read in continuity with the analysis of performativity carried out by Austin’s linguistic phenomenology, a crucial hidden reference for Sibley.

The problem is therefore not whether it is legitimate to attribute to an object certain properties of some order instead of another. Simply because it obviously is. One possible outcome is nevertheless the assessment of more or less intersubjectively working properties of the perceptual interaction. One can

always attempt to transfer the knowing-how which is intrinsic to the aesthetic in a technical knowing-how or even in a knowing-that. The problem is, if anything, to understand in what sense aesthetic experience embodies this knowledge. Now, as I see it, knowing-that and a technical knowing become aesthetically relevant to the extent that they restore their own operativity as aesthetic knowing-how. Knowing the physical or factual properties of a color, a sound, a linguistic construction can be a requirement for working according to a certain style. However, the aesthetic experience of that color, sound, or text consists in the way the device operates as a manifestation, and not as a given that is determined by cognitive or technical contents. On the contrary, the history of artistic failures often attests how technique and knowledge, if reduced to their thematizing character, can prevent the aesthetic manifestation from taking place. Let us just think of how difficult it is to perform a musical piece even once it has been thoroughly “studied”, despite the easiness shown by some musicians (including some who are not really high-skilled) in making it extraordinarily working in spite of imperfections, and sometimes even by virtue of them. So I agree with those who maintain that an intrinsic part of art is a certain “imperfection”, provided this is a sign of the fact that it is the density of the field that sets the standard details of a material and never a purely ideal completeness. In this sense, although not beyond these limits, I would say that the density of the field “prevails” over the determination of the details. And it is precisely in this light that I would recommend understanding my refusal to assume an ontological perspective in my analysis of aesthetic properties.

I would consider the predicates that Levinson then defines as “ambiguous” as, rather, “bistable predicates”. As Sibley clarifies when, in the aforementioned essay, he comes to consider aesthetic terms of which “we cannot say that these are learned by a metaphorical shift” (Sibley 2001, 22), these predicates too are as little ambiguous as little metaphorical. What is missing, in fact, is a “more literal” way of expressing what they say. The aesthetic use of such predicates reveals, in this sense, an “inter-venient” potential, i.e. operative within the experiential field, which is to be articulated in further

corresponding sensible praxes. This is not a matter of ascertaining an internal content, but of an overall content that cannot be totally reduced to non-aesthetic thematization. Transforming the dynamic tension between the operative (aesthetic) and the thematic (non-aesthetic) into an ontological difference between properties of different hierarchical levels is already an act of thematization. It would be the same as transforming the illocutionary force of a performative utterance into a (element of) constative propositional content, where it is instead a matter of experience *with* the utterance. Nevertheless, such hypostatization is still possible, and even legitimate for the construction of a theory or even a science, while it remains reductive with respect to the density of the experiential field. My hypothesis is that such is the general nature of aesthetic pseudo-predication, as I explain in the last chapter of the book where I deal with the similar operativity (or inter-venience) connoting also the so-called aesthetic judgments and so-called aesthetic descriptions.

As for the third question from Levinson, I would like to underline again that the conception of the Extended Mind paradigm that I support is enactivist, not functionalist, as it has often been instead the case, since the now canonical proposal of Clark and Chalmers. Functionalistically, the mind “extends” itself because some of its functions are attributed to portions of the external world, i.e. to the scaffoldings or supports that we find in the external world (as in the famous example of Inga and Otto’s notebook). From an enactivist approach, instead, I would speak of extended mind as a specification of what John Dewey meant when he recalled that “mind is primarily a verb” (Dewey 1987, 258). Much debate on the notion of the mind starts from the neglect of this indication. Considering this verbality means – or at least it may mean – emphasizing the modality rather than the substantiality of the mind. Mind is the mode of operation that involves in its own field the expressive continuity that is a coupling of organism and environment rather than a substantial entity that acts on body and world. In this sense, it is primitively (also) a relationship of correspondence that is embodied in non-thematizing environmental explorations. This is why I believe that, when we

speak of an extended mind, the idea that a mind which is intracranial first, and only then “gets extended” in order to include portions of the outer world, is misleading. And this is also why I believe that the paradigm of the extended mind has much more than a merely metaphorical meaning, given its ability to properly describe the collusive relationality on which judicative and cognitive acts are grafted. As Peirce wrote, “it is no figure of speech to say that the alembics and cucurbits of the chemist are instruments of thought, or logical machines.” (Peirce 1887, 168)

### **5. Claudio Paolucci to Giovanni Matteucci**

The Extended Mind theory has been connected, by Andy Clark himself, to a theory of perception based on Predictive Processing (PP). The main idea is that the brain and the mind try to anticipate the world by using previous knowledge stored both in the brain and the environment. This is why percepts, according to Clark, are always conceptualized, since perception is not the sampling of the features of the external world, but the effect of the creative activity of the brain that uses concepts and meanings in order to generate the perceptual flow. This view is known to have some important scientific and empirical data to rely on. In *Estetica e natura umana*, Matteucci rather opts for the idea of “Perceptual Praxis”, whose main feature is to be not finalized and functional to knowledge or cognition. So, given the focus on action that both the PP and the Perceptual Praxis seem to share, which is the relationship with meanings, habits and previous knowledge that perception has in Matteucci’s view, grounded on the “cognitive disengagement” (Matteucci 2019, 111) of perception and aesthetics?

The idea of experience introduced in this book (“experience-with”) is extremely original. However, at least in some parts of the book, it seems to be traced back to somehow classical oppositions: (i) the phenomenological opposition between “predicative” and “ante-predicative”, with the correlative primacy of the second term over the first; (ii) the overthrowing of the Kantian relation between experience and judgement (see Melandri and Piana’s quotations in chapter 4). In my opinion, Matteucci’s notion of “experience-with” and his version of the “Extended Mind” grounded on the “prototypicality”

of the aesthetic have the power of overcoming these old oppositions. For instance, the “experience-with” and the extended mind have their prototypical embodiment in aesthetics, but we can also find them in every other dimension of our experience, not only in his aesthetic aspects (the Extended Mind theory was introduced mainly as a theory of beliefs and propositional attitudes). This paves the way for a continuity between “aesthetics” and “noethics”, between experience and judgement, and from my point of view there is no need to trace back all those original ideas to old ways of thinking and to old oppositions coming from phenomenology and Kantian philosophy.

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Claudio Paolucci***

I do not have much to add to what has already been said, in order to reply to Professor Paolucci’s observations. On the contrary, he grasps in a very effective way the passage from a functionalist key to an enactivist key in the conception of the paradigm of the extended mind when he emphasizes the shift that is due to the transition from “predictive processing” to “perceptual praxis”, glimpsing in this the change of scenery from cognitive experience in the proper sense to aesthetic experience.

Also with regard to the opposing couples that Paolucci correctly lists, I would like to refer the reader to what has been said in some previous replies. I would just add that there is continuity between operativity and thematization, the same way in which the discrete set of natural numbers and the dense set of rational numbers are infinite. For example, the range between 0 and 10 represented on a straight line describes the same extensional range regardless of whether the digits are considered symbols of either natural or rational numbers, and yet according to distinct orders for density/discreteness, or even for a distinct texture – for a distinct relational mode of possible exploration. Similarly, the potential of aesthetic density still innervates propositional predication, but it is expressed the more it emancipates itself from its own denotative function. On the basis of this relationship, in the final chapter of the book I carry out an analysis of linguistic expression, talking about para-propositionality, para-evaluation and para-description as

aesthetic uses of what has a propositional, evaluative and descriptive form.

I therefore agree to a certain extent that this means parting from “old ways of thinking and [...] old oppositions coming from phenomenology and Kantian philosophy”. The continuity between experience and judgment recalled by Paolucci probably contradicts a doctrine based on the modular faculties of the mind. Yet, from a phenomenological point of view it remains crucial to distinguish between density and discreteness, and therefore between ante-predicative field and predicative configuration. There must be some residuality in the passage from the one to the other, if – as Umberto Eco wrote – we must recognize that “in the magma of the *continuum* there are lines of resistance and possibilities of flow, as in the grain of wood or marble, which make it easier to cut in one direction than in another” (Eco 1999, 53). I would say that the main topic of my research is precisely the “processing waste” generated by the predicative treatment of the experiential material, so to speak, convinced as I am that there is a potential for meaning that nurtures the propositional meaning itself as expressive. Therefore, I consider the material analytics that I try to carry out as a way of practicing a non-continuistic (and perhaps *à rebours*) reading of what is already largely to be found in Husserl’s phenomenology, following a direction that is not canonically genetic but – so to speak – archaeological.

## **6. Richard Shusterman to Giovanni Matteucci**

I should begin my question with a clarification. In your critique of the subject/object dualism you see in what you call the aesthetic “experience-of” (in the chapter “The (Aesthetic) Extended Mind”) you identify the distinction I make between transformative and demarcational theories of aesthetic experience as the first example of such a dualism. However, my transformative/demarcational distinction is not to contrast theories that emphasize the subject’s experience versus the object and its properties; it is rather to contrast theories that seek to transform our understanding and concept of aesthetic

experience and art versus theories that seek simply to define or demarcate the extension of our established concept of aesthetic experience or of art. Either of these two kinds of theory could emphasize either the subject or the object in aesthetic experience (cf. Shusterman 1997; 2006; 2019).

I come now to my main line of questioning, which involves some sub-questions. The basic question is whether you would be satisfied with replacing the subject/object dualism of aesthetic experience with a new dualism of “experience-of” and “experience-with” or whether you prefer a monistic theory where only “experience-with” would be seen as valid for understanding aesthetic experience (because you think “experience-of” is contaminated with old-fashioned dualism). Would you agree that there are a broader range of different conceptions of aesthetic experience that reflect and serve the different forms and purposes that aesthetic experience takes (a view I’ve in fact proposed)? Or would you insist that there are only the two concepts of aesthetic experience that you outline and that we should ultimately reject the dualistic one for the new one of “experience-with” that you argue is more suited to contemporary culture’s preoccupation with experiencing art and other aesthetic matters collectively through social media and “selfies”. Don’t you find something redeeming in the traditional view that respects the alterity of the art object as something that gives more power and edification to aesthetic experience and that generates more enlightening art criticism? (I think here also of Adorno’s emphasis on the enigmatic character of the art object and its challenge to “selfie” subjectivity, hardly a subjectivity he would endorse). To sum up my question, given the complex variety of aesthetic experience (including the complexity of the multiple, overlapping social fields in which it takes place) would not a broader conceptual pluralism be useful? Besides the different conceptions I’ve analyzed elsewhere, but following your interesting prepositional approach, could we perhaps also embrace an “experience-in”, an “experience-on”, or even an “experience-off”?

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Richard Shusterman***

I owe Professor Shusterman an apology. In fact, I did not do justice to his seminal essay on aesthetic experience (Shusterman 1997), while using it exclusively to draw a scheme that I consider exemplary for introducing positions that emerged later, leaving aside his intentions and rich insights, and even more so regardless of some further developments in his research. The reason, however, is that I found his approach well suited to bring out a dichotomous polarization that persists in contemporary aesthetic reflections. So, I would say that mine was a clumsy manner of paying tribute to the excellent clarity of his argumentation.

As for Shusterman's questions, I have already had the opportunity to point out that I do not see the distinction between "experience-of" and "experience-with" as a dualism, if by this is meant the stance of two mutually exclusive principles. Hybridization phenomena are indeed recurrent, and I think that *Homo sapiens* stands out for its ability to manage the interweaving between primitive antinomic instances (and hence not juxtaposed ones, although seemingly contradictory if conceived of as fixed) even on the same sensible-perceptual level. In order to explain this interweaving, I often refer to the gestalt-switch of bistable perception or even to the "twofoldness" dear to Richard Wollheim. These phenomena only find a proper explanation when one is able to gather the different levels that intersect in them. We make an experience with the famous duck-rabbit image only when every figural ascertainment fails, by grasping in the internal contents of a perception *of* it (now as duck, now as rabbit) the aspects of an overall manifestation that takes place in the experience that we have *with* it, that is, when the switch is enacted. This becomes possible only if the relationship does not concern ontological determinations (which, if contradictory, would necessarily exclude each other) but operative modes that are carried out in the same experiential arc. The fixed contradiction thus becomes a principle of mutual indeterminability, which as such is capable of accepting both the primitive instances that I emphasize, while at the same time restoring them in their perceptualizing operativity. What happens when, in seeing a

human being covered by an animal's skin, we experience *with* it the apparition of a divinity, or even when, in seeing and manipulating the display of a touch-screen device, we experience *with* it a virtual match of some sport, seems to me a good explanation of the phenomenon. As a matter of fact, moreover, today's designers (like all artists have always done) are familiar with the problem, since they try to design experiences by producing certain interfaces.

Finally, as to the question of the plurality of experiential modes, from a factual point of view I agree with Shusterman's suggestion, but at the same time I think that, from a strictly phenomenological point of view, this is not relevant. If, with Dewey, we consider experience as the interaction between organism and environment, it's either one of the two following things. When we want to describe this interaction, we can start from the distinction between organism and environment as already constituted entities; if so, then the interaction has to be considered phenomenologically extrinsic, as the tenet of "experience-of" does (which, in fact, tries to reconnect downstream what had been previously disjointed). Otherwise, we can start from a description of the relationship as a "situation", as a field from which organisms and environment tend to emerge. This complex instituting process does not have the features of a categorial determination. As shown in a perhaps not univocal but anyway certainly accentuated manner by the first phases of development of a human being, it rather has the traits of the expressive correspondence that shapes an extended mind, since, in place of something merely external, the environmental vectors populate the same situation in which a sense of the self is being shaped. Then, however, experience has to be conceived of starting from the intrinsic nexus that binds to the same field all the vectors acting in it. This is precisely what I try to capture through the formula "experience-with". Phenomenologically, experience-of cannot but being considered as extrinsic and experience-with as intrinsic.

When, on the other hand, we aim to describe factual forms of experience, then we can certainly find various and further articulations, expressed by the wide range of prepositions that, not by chance, are made available to us by

natural languages. But for each of these concretizations the question remains whether they are “experiences-of” or “experiences-with”, or combinations of them. I would also add that, in my opinion, the sense of otherness is even more radical in experience-with, precisely because it arises through continuity. The texture that I have tried to describe in my writings reveals a perception that generates salience, that makes itself be felt as a shudder interrupting all automatisms precisely because it is not cognitively dominated but rather appears. In its aesthetic meaningfulness it is both a promise and a threat, as it is charged with an expressive appeal, so much so that it awakens the maximum “tenderness for things”. Identifying, and therefore violent, is rather, on its part, the experience of, even in the form of the “religion of modern art” that a philosopher like Adorno abhorred, perhaps even more than the mass art produced by the culture industry that he famously disliked.

## 7. Simona Chiodo to Giovanni Matteucci

Matteucci’s book offers a major contribution to the development of a philosophical perspective that, first, attributes a crucial role to the aesthetic when it comes to shaping our complex experience of the world and, second, actually overcomes the dualism between the human as the (experiencing) subject and the world as the (experienced) object. More precisely, Matteucci’s notion of “experience-with” can even strengthen the very philosophical notion of extended mind, in that “[a]esthetic statements, after all, make possible the experience of the immanent background, of the emotional *habitus* (*Stimmung* or mood) of an extended mind’s field of experience” (cf. Matteucci 2019a, 245; my translation).

I think that this philosophical perspective is promising, and my question to the author is a kind of provocative boost, as it were, to ask to what extent the aesthetic, as it is thought of by him, may provide us with tools that, paradoxically enough, may even risk to be atrophied in Western culture, which (as I am trying to argue in my current research) has been hypertrophying for millennia, on the contrary, what we define as *logos* (sometimes literally against other human resources).

In order to do that, I would like to start from an example of something that really happened to me. A few years ago, a member of my family was told by the staff of a good public hospital that she could have the chance to run a genetic test, since in her family there were cases of a specific cancer. The hospital used a protocol to distinguish those who could run it from those who could not run it. The first step was to fill a questionnaire on the health history of the family. I helped the member of my family fill it: several data were necessarily imprecise, whether because they were not available at all or because we could not remember them. The second step was the analysis of the questionnaire we brought back to the hospital. Finally, we got an official letter from the hospital in which it was literally written down that, according to the “predictive algorithm” that processed the data of the questionnaire, the member of my family could not have the chance to run the genetic test, since her risk to be genetically predisposed to suffering from that specific cancer was not high enough. Of course, the decision of the “predictive algorithm” was meaningful not only for her, but also for her relatives (starting from me). As for the member of my family, she did not know what an algorithm is precisely, like most people of her age. Yet, accordingly to the circumstances in which she had heard about algorithms, she thought that an algorithm is something that we can rely on, being more reliable than a human being. As for me, even if I knew something more about what an algorithm is (starting from its constitutive limits), I realised that my first reaction was the reassuring thought according to which I could have avoided checking my health yearly, i.e., feeling anxiety yearly, waiting for the results of the tests. I may sum this experience up by saying that we both thought, at least at the beginning, that an algorithm may happen to be more reliable than a human being (doctors included), since the former can be absolutely stable and the latter can be absolutely unstable (for instance, the latter can make a mistake for the most idiosyncratic emotional reasons).

This is quite a typical Western bias, which may be quite wrong, as well as quite dangerous. In any case, the fact that a letter, and not a doctor, says that an algorithm (and, in

particular, a “predictive algorithm”), and not a doctor, has the power to decide that someone cannot have the chance to run a genetic test, is most meaningful for both epistemological and ethical reasons.

Now, let us try to add some possible aesthetic reasons. In particular, I want to stress what follows: contemporary medicine seems to progressively make protocols absolute, and to consequently risk, first, to end up neglecting precious resources that a human being has and an algorithm has not, and, second, to end up atrophying these precious resources. More precisely, we may think that a doctor, differently from an algorithm, can understand, somehow intuitively, that something is going wrong with her patient from the look on her patient’s face, for instance. In this case, the doctor knows something that may be crucial even if she cannot say precisely what and why, or even if all she can say is only that it is a matter of a kind of feeling.

My question to the author has to do with this “intuitively”, with this “kind of feeling”: according to Matteucci’s philosophical view, what may be the meaning of this “intuitively”, of this “kind of feeling”, which may be crucial? More precisely, what may be the meaning of relying also on the doctor as a human being, and not only on “predictive algorithms”? More provocatively, are we allowed to think that, beside the aesthetic (or even included in the aesthetic), there are human resources that we are progressively not only neglecting, but also atrophying, by even arriving to think of them as a kind of taboo in Western culture? Should we try (even courageously) to name them, also through our philosophical tools? And should we think that, after all, it may be a nonsense to invest billions of Euros or dollars on algorithms and almost nothing on the most embarrassing mysteries of the human mind, i.e., on what is remarkably far from *logos*?

(After all, even Goodman wrote in *Languages of art* that “[i]n daily life, classification of things by feeling is often more vital than classification by other properties: we are likely to be better off if we are skilled in fearing, wanting, braving, or distrusting the right things, animate or inanimate, than if we perceive only their shapes, sizes, weights, etc. And the

importance of discernment by feeling does not vanish when the motivation becomes theoretic rather than practical”. Yet, it may be necessary to go even one step further).

### **Giovanni Matteucci: *Reply to Simona Chiodo***

As explained above in the *Précis of the research*, I suggested to leave Professor Chiodo’s contribution last because it raises fundamental problems and various kinds of perspectives that exceed at least in part the limits of the research I have done so far.

A first question concerns the way appearances should be considered. To see in someone’s face that “something goes wrong” can mean, on the one hand, understanding what appears as an expression of an emotionally connoted relational mode, as one could say by recalling Dewey’s analysis of emotion in *Art as Experience* (for example: Dewey 1987, 48-50 and 70-76), or as an *Abschattung*, to recall the analysis of passive syntheses carried out by Husserl. In this case, in fact, what appears is a complex of “aspects” (in a phenomenological sense) in which an experiential interaction unfolds. So “sensing a discomfort” means being able to articulate a response capable of triggering a manifestation that, within these boundaries, results to be shared as a whole. There are relational therapies that increase the well-being of patients by leveraging this experience-with, as happens with narrative medicine or, more fundamentally, in structures that host terminally ill patients. Here the disease ceases to be a mere nuclear content to be tackled only cognitively (with medical techniques and sciences) and becomes again a collusive experiential field. However, it would be naive to argue that, in such contexts, the content of medical knowledge is set aside or forgotten. Instead, it becomes (or perhaps returns to be) operative more than (or beyond) being thematic, integrating itself into expressive correspondences.

On the other hand, instead, to see in someone’s face that “something goes wrong” can mean considering the appearance a mere symptom instead of an aspectual complex. In this case, a trait that canonically characterizes the experience-of, that is, the contraction of the appearance in the lower form of a

substantial being that would only be “behind” it, resurfaces. This is what we try to delegate to purely formal algorithms and protocols, since it is an internal content of experience that can be more easily translated into a propositional and judicative form. Then, “sensing an aspect” comes to mean performing an act of interpretation, not a “perceiving-as”, as Wittgenstein would say. Thus, the experiential dynamism of the phenomenon is lost and, with it, its aesthetic significance. There is no doubt that Western culture, especially as far as its model of knowledge is concerned, has tended to privilege this experiential mode, and the risk of atrophy underlined by Chiodo lies in this, I believe. But it is precisely in this sense that I believe that aestheticization also offers an antidote to the reduction to quantitative functionalism that is embodied by today’s rampant commodification processes. When it is aesthetic, the sense of otherness carries an ethical force far more compelling than in the simple cognitive acquisition.

A second issue concerns an underlying humanism that inspires Chiodo, but which runs the risk of being regressive. The infinite negotiation between qualitative and quantitative does not occur independently of the artifice. On the one hand, I honestly would not feel reassured just because a diagnosis is made by a human being rather than a machine. On the other hand, those who work in the field of computer sciences know well that artificial intelligence systems are not only computational devices. As the phenomenon of deep learning shows, more and more elements of qualitative density are emerging in the complex processes that artificial devices realize with much greater efficacy than human beings, and for reasons that will remain unparalleled whatever science *Homo sapiens* will ever be able to acquire. Phenomena of this type could even be understood as unexpected cases of experience-with, disturbing precisely to the extent that one would rather confine the device to a docile experience-of that is cognitively controllable. This is almost like saying that humanism moves equally in the shadow of mere instrumental knowledge, except that it aims ideologically to claim a mythical and residual ineffability of the Human.

It is not therefore a matter of repudiating algorithms, or of contrasting them with “the Human”. Algorithms are also ways of making nature human, even in the inhumanity of such nature where devices are considered only in terms of their quantitative and determinant/determinable performance. They are instead configurations that discretize the dense field of experience to which they give expression – like any artifice, starting from language, of which Plato, not by chance, stigmatized the written form. There is a problem only if we rely on the fetish of the written word instead of relying on the speaking word (possibly even written and anonymous, or even mechanical!), so to speak – even as far as algorithms and their still largely unexplored aesthetic potential are concerned.

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