

# **Introduction**

## **Aesthetics, Technique and Emotion**

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This monographic section of “Itinera” develops some of the questions which were raised at the summer school “Aesthetics, Technique and Emotion”, held in June 2020 at the Lake Como School of Advanced Studies (<https://aeat.lakecomoschool.org/>). The summer school was organized by the University of Milan in collaboration with the European Seminar of Aesthetics ([https://sites.unimi.it/eu\\_aesthetics/](https://sites.unimi.it/eu_aesthetics/)). The aim of the school was to investigate the meaning of aesthetics today, in light of the different changes that are occurring in our aesthetic perception of the world. How is technology transforming the way we view the world and art, and what role do emotions still play in this context? What is the value of the performing arts in facing these new challenges, and how is aesthetic experience related to the current issues of morality and politics? These are some of the problems that were raised at the school and this issue seeks to develop them further.

Keywords: aesthetics, technology, emotion, art

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The first paper of this section addresses precisely this relationship between philosophy and its “outside”. Christopher Norris was a professor of philosophy for his entire life. Recently, he began to address philosophical questions through poetry. In his paper, he explains why. Rather than expressing definite ideas in an elegant way, poetry can be intended as a process from which new ideas (also philosophical ones) can emerge. The result are a number of poems which cover a variety of issues, ranging from philosophy to politics, arts, history of ideas and science. *Itinera* has already begun to publish a few of these poems in previous issues and is now presenting three of them on painters (Turner, Matisse, Magritte).

The particular *time* of the creative moment is the subject of the second paper of this issue, which is by Freddie Rokem. In fact, the author addresses two stories about the Sabbath which are told by Walter Benjamin in his essay about Kafka. Both stories are concerned with the idea of wish

and its temporal dimension. They show that *expressing* a wish can sometimes be a way of fulfilling it. However, this is a kind of fulfilment that can last only for a moment, like the gesture that constitutes the centre of Kafka's work: "Like El Greco, Kafka tears open the sky behind every gesture; but as with El Greco—who was the patron saint of the Expressionists—the gesture remains the decisive thing, the centre of the event."

The idea that only a transformation of the past can allow for its preservation is central also in Tancredi Gusman's paper. In fact, as the author writes, "one of the tasks that defines the mission of museums is the conservation of the objects they hold in their original material condition". However, performance art always implies the idea of passing; it is intrinsically "ephemeral". How can this type of art be preserved, then? Is it possible to "hold together the need to make an artistic heritage of the past accessible for future audiences and, in line with the nature of such works, allow this heritage to live on as a generative and transformative force"?

Performance is of course not the only type of art that calls into question the traditional idea of artwork as something definitely accomplished and preservable. In his paper, Saverio Macri considers a cybernetic plant made by Italian artists Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico. Beginning with this artwork, he investigates the very idea of "interactivity", referring also to Roberto Diodato's work on virtual reality.

Virtual reality (VR) is also the focus of two papers in this section, by Giulia Rainoldi and Gemma Schino. In VR, the viewers are "immersed" in the image. But is their body an invisible spectre, or rather a carnal reality? This is the question that Rainoldi raises. The spectator's body is actually the object of Schino's paper as well. Schino examines experimental research that has been done on viewers' reactions to two VR installations, both selected from the exhibition *The Intelligence of Plants*.

The question of the body is examined from different perspectives in three other papers of this section. Marco Franceschina addresses the current debate on expressiveness in Anglo-American philosophy. How can an object be expressive *of* something (ex. sadness, joy etc.)? Is this a property of the object or rather a projection of some inner processes reflected by the object? According to the author, a key to solving this problem could come from the phenomenological tradition, and in particular from Merleau-Ponty's idea of the body. Fabio Tononi addresses the question of the body from a different point of view, investigating the biological roots of what we usually call "aesthetic experience". In order to do this, he examines "the works of Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965), John Dewey (1859–1952), and Nelson Goodman (1906–1998) in connection with more recent neuroscientific discoveries and theories". Neuroscience is also the object of Ryan Slaby's paper,

which analyses, from an empirical point of view, some of the emotions – and their neural correlates – which are usually experienced during artwork observation.

Finally, the papers by Tomas Castro and Anna De Martino are both devoted, in different ways, to the particular interruption that the aesthetic experience involves. Castro addresses the connection between art and the suspension of habit: art, just like metaphors and quotation marks, “interrupts familiar expectations, and what is likely or should happen ceases to be the case”. De Martino examines the “catastrophe” from which, according to Deleuze, is the origin of the sublime and of painting itself.