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Staging Emotions

The Aesthetic Root of the Ecological Niche

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Abstract

Aesthetic experience has always been deemed characterized by a close relationship with emotions. Starting from a conception of the aesthetic connected with the model of the extended mind, according to an enactivist rather than functionalist view, this paper aims at showing in what sense the aesthetic interaction has an intrinsic emotive component, as well as in what sense emotion has an intrinsic aesthetic feature. Within this framework, emotion is not conceived of as an internal content or a factual element, but as a thick aspectual modality that, in its expressions, is staged rather than being a fictitious or simulated component. Consequently, emotion, while sedimenting itself in aesthetic devices, also results as a decisive factor in the aesthetic establishment of the ecological niche thanks to the material collusion involving *Homo sapiens* and its environment.

Keywords

Emotion; Collusion, Niche; Aesthetic device

The aesthetic character of emotion

At least since Frjida (1986), up to, for example, Hufendiek (2016), there has been a growing theoretical and experimental orientation to understand emotions as something different from specific contents within a mental container, so to speak, perhaps even of a representational kind. The emotion would, if anything, constitute an overall dynamic content of an interaction that involves, in some way, both portions of the organism and portions of the environment. As has been written, “Emotions are ways in which organisms interact with their environments that involve, but are not exclusively isolated to, what goes on in their brains” (Hutto 2012, p. 181). Here I would like to emphasize the equation of emotions with ways, i.e., relational modalities that bring together various analytically distinguishable elements without consisting in any of them. These elements would be aspects of the way in which an entire experiential arc is qualitatively connoted.

If this indication is accepted, it is necessary to reconsider the various single moments that traditional conceptions isolate as segments along the lines of the analysis of the reflex arc. In its unity, the emotionally connoted experience appears incompatible with the canonical modern gnoseologist matrix. The latter, implying the opposition between mind and world, disarticulates the experiential event in a sensory input that would elicit an emotional state as an internal content of the experiential subject who, in turn, would generate a set of consequent acts and behaviors. Contrary to this scheme, the analyses mentioned above strengthen the idea that in its various dimensions experience has its own minimum constituents in molecular, non-atomic interactional units, endowed with operational traits that are transversal and modal in nature.

In the analysis of emotions, even more so than the question of the continuum between nuclear elements at least analytically distinguishable, what acquires importance is the question of the relationship of co-belonging between vectors of an overall field. Consider the link between surprise and gasping. The emotion of surprise is neither transmitted or denoted, or even represented, through the mechanical effect or the inferentially deliberate choice to act with a gasp that would be its external mark. The surprise *is expressed* in the gasping itself. The gasp makes the surprise concretely present in the order of the action because it is, rather than a mark or a symbol that represents the surprise, a phenomenal aspect that presents it. The emotion, that is, is implemented and embodied in processes that give expressive fulfillment to the way in which an organism embeds itself into its surroundings by molding itself according to action prospects, plans, or schemes. Peremptorily said: an emotion is an overall mode of embedded enaction of an embodied mind that unfolds as a dynamic and expressive correlation, and that shapes the densely integrated experiential field we are engaged with:

emotions are not the product of an internal human mind looking out through their eyes at the external world, but rather are produced through engaging with that world. [...] Fundamentally, emotions are produced through people's material engagement with the world, at the same time as emotions are productive of that engagement; indeed these processes are inseparable from each other (Harris & Sørensen 2010, pp. 147-148).

Now, if this is true, it becomes legitimate to ascribe to emotion a peculiar manifestative status, as Hutto did:

To respond emotionally is to respond in ways that have a distinctive phenomenal character. But it also assumes that to respond in such ways is identical with, and to be understood in terms of, concrete patterns of environmentally situated organismic activity; nothing more, nothing less. Phenomenally

charged experiencing simply equates to the way in which certain creatures are disposed to respond to a range of worldly offerings (Hutto 2012, p. 181).

From an experiential point of view, it could be said that emotion corresponds to a way in which feeling or sensing (as I will also refer to in this text) manifests itself; it corresponds to its own style, which flows both as a whole and in the various elements that act within it and become perceivable according to this same way, for how they fit the whole. Therefore, in emotion, the manifestation is an expression rather than a symptom or representation, and sensing becomes one with making perceivable, with perceptualization. Then, emotion brings together sensing and perceiving, the two praxes in which *aisthesis* is articulated as a whole. Consequently, we will call this peculiar character of emotion “aesthetic”. In other terms, emotion possesses an *intrinsically* aesthetic character.

However, this poses a specific problem for the aesthetic reflection. In light of what has been stressed above, the nexus between the emotional dimension and the aesthetic shall not be described assuming that the emotion, or a particular set of emotions, can be a component of a segregated aesthetic experience, as the aesthetic theory has usually done, especially in its analyses of art. An effective description will have to start instead from the recognition of this same intrinsically aesthetic character of the emotional dimension that pervades human experience as such. To sum up, the reasons underlying a conception of the emotional dimension in terms of a manifestation that recruits among its own vectors acts, gestures, postures, words, physiological events and so on, also lead to consider emotions as articulations of sensing in general meant as *aesthetic praxis*.

More specifically, to the extent that emotion connotes an interaction rather than denoting a content that is internal to one of its poles, the praxis of *aisthesis* in which emotion is carried out presumes co-belonging, more than mere reciprocity. On the one hand, this means that the interaction adopts the thick mode of correspondence, escaping the risk of being considered a mere relationship between already established entities. It is precisely in these terms that we will talk about it here, recalling and accepting Ingold’s lesson (2015, p. 154: “interaction is between; correspondence in-between”), although without following him in the lexical amendment he proposes (but on this see also Perullo 2019, § 3). On the other hand, interaction as aesthetic-emotional correspondence implies a primitive coupling between organism and environment. In other words, emotion seems to be inherent in the aesthetic practice of an extended mind. We will use this notion, here, with a *caveat* aimed at avoiding objections due to certain simplifications such as those made by Nannicelli (2019) but also *contra* Hutto (2015). We will try to show how it is by virtue not of a problematic functionalist

connotation, but of its embodied enaction (see Gallagher 2017 and Johnson 2018), that the extended mind is expressed in an aesthetic-emotional interaction. In these terms, we will deem emotion as the specific mode of the relationship between organism and environment according to the paradigm of a collusive “experience-with” (see Matteucci 2018; 2019).

Aesthetic emotions

As mentioned above, assuming this perspective means abandoning canonical strategies in the analysis of emotion also in the field of aesthetics, which are widely employed in the cognitive sciences, as well as in the philosophical tradition. A first reason is that these strategies separate and reify the modal connotations of experience, and thus neutralize its operational nature. It is no coincidence that they make a dramatic reduction of the phenomenal modality of the aesthetic to the factual reality of the artistic. Consequently, the debate on “aesthetic emotions” often appears hegemonized by the theme of artistic fiction (as is also clear also from the research carried out in D’Angelo 2020). Aesthetic emotions would be, that is, internal emotional contents generated by the use of the artistic imagination that would produce a simulated duplication of the factual reality. This would be done, paradigmatically, through a novel or a film. Simply put, aesthetic emotion would be a simulated emotion. The narrative experience thus becomes a sort of cognitive lab. The sensing carried out in the latter is considered aesthetic only because (or even: to the extent that) it thematically addresses elements previously characterized as aesthetic since they are (fictional and therefore) artistic, like the characters entangled in a plot.

Now, there is no doubt that works of art can also serve to experiment *aisthesis* in relation to unprecedented factual elements. But this does not mean that in the concrete involvement through which the artistic experience develops, emotion can itself be equated with something simulated. Indeed, the very emotional impact of art seems to attest how the emotion is put into action, staged, whatever the reality status of the context one is engaged in. If one wishes to address the problem of the relationship between the aesthetic, art and the emotional dimension, starting from the case of configurations that are conventionally defined as artistic since they are fictional thus risks being misleading precisely because of the ambiguous assumption of the equivalence between the aesthetic and the simulated.

If it is at all possible to distinguish between aesthetic emotion and ordinary emotion, it is certainly not the reference to a fictional rather than to a factual object to constitute a sufficient discriminating factor. The difficulty due to the use of more or less complex

contextual components, such as the awareness of being engaged with a state of affairs which is fictional rather than factual, does not make emotion either fictitious or simulated as a *modal* connotation of a correlative practice. The tendency to trace the relational back to the intentional, the phenomenal qualities to subjective attitudes, i.e. the experiential components of interaction to intracranial contents, is one of the “worst habits” of the modern conception of the mind. Therefore, when one prioritizes the question of beliefs or quasi-beliefs involved in imaginative experience, one remains prejudicially faithful to a substantial conception of the mind as the bearer of an experience *of* something (extraneous), rather than a verbal one, as processing an experience *with* its own vectors. Aesthetic emotion is then referred to a framework of action that would not involve us in its actualization. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that also in the aesthetic field sensing and perceiving, simply as human praxes, have the traits of embodied enaction. Otherwise we risk providing a sort of merely updated version of the traditional axiom of disinterestedness and of the defunctionalization of the aesthetic, which is nothing but the principle of the reduction of the aesthetic to the artistic.

A key to understanding the significance of the distinction between “ordinary” and “aesthetic” emotions is rather the analogical continuity that exists among diverse emotional situations to which we nevertheless refer by using the same term, regardless not only of their relevance, but also of our belief in their reality. In such cases, the problem is not whether or not the same internal content of an intracranial mind occurs. The question is, for example, whether and why we inscribe in a “fearful” intonation what we feel at times in a relationship between or with real individuals, at times in a relationship between or with characters of a fictional scene, and at times actually feeling fear, at times without feeling fear at all. In all these circumstances, experience is still inherent in fear, although only in some of them can fear also become the thematic content of the experience. Their common denominator is not the experience *of* something fearful, but the overall fearful experience *with* something that can be feared or not, along a continuous gradation whose range describes an operational and modal domain of emotion. With respect to this a distortion occurs if one narrowly assumes that fear consists either in a state experienced by the subject or in an objective property of the observed event, following and fostering the canonical structures prescribed by the experience-of. The experience to be described is still not aimed at determinations of another kind, as the thematic knowledge of some vector, real or virtual, as much objective as subjective, could be. One can feel how fearfully a scene appears regardless of the determination of a pure internal emotional state. Indeed, even without feeling fear in the first person, it remains possible to feel – so to speak – online the fearful way in which an experiential arc comes to manifest itself, and therefore expresses a specific connotation. On the other hand, it is not even important to

find factual traits in the scene, so much so that they may result devoid of that specific emotional charge as soon as the interaction with them sheds a different light for a different degree of correspondence. In short: a scene *appears* fearfully, it is not interpreted or taken as *if* it were fearful. It is necessary to consider the experience in its overall course and try to justify a potential characterization of emotions on the basis of how they characterize the practice of *aisthesis* operatively, i.e. on the basis of how they realize their manifestative character. The way in which experiential correspondence is expressively implemented is crucial.

This expressive basis requires as a *relatum* the first person without being restricted to it. Therefore, it makes sense sometimes to anticipate someone else's experience by saying "This must certainly appear frightening to you but not to me", while in the case of an emotion that is only to be detected, knowing it is present should imply *ipso facto* feeling it. Being linearly independent from nuclear contents essentially to be attributed to a subject or an object, the emotion, rather than a particular experience or class of experiences, is properly a way of manifesting itself of experience. As such, emotion resists introspective analyses, in a Cartesian sense. Emotions

are not the sorts of things which could be among the direct intimations of consciousness, or among the objects of introspection, as these factitious forms of Privileged Access are ordinarily described. They are not 'experiences', any more than habits or maladies are 'experiences' (Ryle 1949, p. 111).

It is necessary, in other words, to consider the affective quality (the *diathesis*) in addition to the affection taking place (the *pathos*), the operative modality of the experience-with that is irreducible to contents that are internal to the experience-of. And this means locating emotions within the dynamic perimeter of *aisthesis*, without undermining their obviously possible, but not hierarchical, link with cognitive, volitional or other kinds of components. But then any principle of determination and/or ontological partition, such as the distinction between real and fictional, lacks impact on any of their characterizations, even the aesthetic one. Therefore, the path that should lead to identify the aesthetic emotions starting from the reality/fiction character of the vectors involved is infeasible. "Aesthetic" is not the emotion felt in one's innermost self because it is consciously disconnected from reality. A different way of proceeding could be to insist on the above mentioned characters: when the emotional quality with its own expressive manifestation tends to absorb the energies in force in the experiential field, by preventing its aiming at thematic determinations from becoming hegemonic, the aesthetic component of the emotion tends to saturate the scene. Then, we are urged to talk about "aesthetic emotions".

The aesthetic extension of the mind

What has just been observed not by chance parallels what happens with the other praxis of *aisthesis*, i.e. the question of the so-called “aesthetic perception”. As I have tried to show elsewhere (Matteucci 2019; forthcoming), a perceptual praxis is characterized in an aesthetic sense regardless of the selection of specifically determined objective (properties) or subjective (acts or attitudes) internal contents. An “aesthetic” perception occurs when there is an ante-predicative corresponding *with* what I call aspectual complexes that imply (in the strong sense of appealing to them) involvement in their own manifestative field, effectively bringing into play sensible constraints expressed in the form of properties as invitations to participation. One could therefore say that the solicitation that arises in the praxis of perceiving, its *allusion* (*ad-ludere*, to invite to the game), is echoed by the performative engagement, the *collusion* (*cum-ludere*, to take part in the game) that is carried out in a praxis of sensing, and therefore by expressively realizing an emotion. The peculiarity of aesthetics in a pregnant sense seems to lie in making this correspondence a unitary and thick whole of *aisthesis* that excludes distinct and subsequent phases. What invites one to participate in the game is the aspectual complex, which can be analyzed secondly in terms of individual properties, i.e. of *aistheta* expressing an *aisthema*. With its sensible tendential constraints thus intervening expressively, the experiential phenomenon carries out a collusive practice that attests “how” one participates in the game and therefore expresses an emotional attunement that regulates the phenomenon or, better, operates transversally to it:

In the development of an expressive art, the emotion operates like a magnet drawing to itself appropriate material: appropriate because it has an experienced emotional affinity for the state of mind already moving. Selection and organization of material are at once a function and a test of the quality of the emotion experienced (Dewey 1934, p. 90).

Being able to feel “what” co-belonging in the field is tantamount to profiling the *overall* content of the phenomenon as a unitary background, to the extent of translating the affective *diathesis* into emotional *pathos*. The allusive invitation of the phenomenon is thus realized in the ways of participating in it; to perceive is to feel, and vice versa. The allusion of affection (a perceptual instance) is transformed into colluding according to an affect (an emotional instance) that thus appears on the experiential scene as an integrated aesthetic phenomenon. Here the constraints of belonging to online interaction are manifested, i.e. the aspects that

tendentially express the way in which the involvement in the work is felt. And it does not matter that the bearing of feeling is ascribed to a decentralized vector, as when the affection, despite being sensed as intrinsic to the phenomenon taking place, does not translate into a feeling that is factually experienced in the first person, in an emotional *pathos*.

Just like the “aesthetic property”, also the “aesthetic *pathos*” inter-venes instead of supervening. That is, the intervention of tendential constraints that orient at the same time perceiving and sensing also affectively connote an “aesthetic field”, in which is unfolding the coefficient sequence of the various internal contents that act as vectors of the overall content (see Berleant 1970). Therefore, the various features of a face that expresses sadness tend to appear sad. And therefore, conversely, even the most schematic iconization can have expressive efficacy, when the presence – as an addition – of a sign that marks a connotation aims, like an emoticon, to spread an overall tone in which one is invited to inscribe even merely propositional contents.

In short, the aesthetic praxis concerns the aspectual complex of perception and, simultaneously, the background of *aisthesis* with respect to sensing. The former, in the way that is typical of allusion, in which the manifestation as experience presents itself with the character of affection. The latter, in the way that is typical of collusion, in which manifestation as experience presents itself as an emotional affect that activates the phenomenal field. Going back to the previous example, the usage of an emoticon is not limited to associating a symbol of the emotion with a propositional content; the emoticon is successful when the words of the message are read altogether with the relevant intonation. Both the perceptual property and the emotion are “aesthetic” for the expressive way of implementing their own operativity, not due to some of their single determined elements or their causal inputs, and beyond cognitive contents possibly recruited within the field itself. This happens when the operativity of sensing, in addition to tacitly functioning, becomes manifest in an experiential arc that, in its aspectual complex, points to its own background as if this were its matrix. Then, in the *pathos*, a *diathesis* is revealed, and one enters a plane of experience which, by virtue of its pregnant aesthetic characters, does not depend in a proper sense on a subject or an object. Rather than a momentary circumstance, it is an overall qualification of the face shown by the experiential phenomenon anyways.

Thus, in the emotion an expressiveness that is impersonal surfaces. Indeed, it turns out to be sedimented as a dispositional value in an extended mind that is rightfully at once an inter-subjective and trans-objective endowment, as this expressivity is intrinsic to a phenomenal relationship rather than to a factual *relatum*. The conclusion to be drawn is significant: emotions appear fully aesthetic insofar as they reveal immanent operative aspects, that is,

peculiar and intrinsic *ways* of experiencing-with. Ways that are indeed activated in contingent circumstances, but that are also always underlying and tacitly functioning as potential expressions. And this has nothing to do with simulation. If anything, this concerns something that is actualized in an expressive *mise-en-scène* – or staging – that can concern the fictional as well as the concrete, the artistic as well as the everyday, the useless as well as the useful.

Aesthetic devices and emotional shaping of the ecological niche

The vectors involved in this collusive interaction appear as arranged according to a mutual correspondence relationship that radiates into the field where the mind is aesthetically extended. As Cassirer (1961, p. 93) would say, each of these vectors acts with respect to the others in its capacity of an *alter* rather than an *aliud*. Because the plane in which this partnership takes place is the involving one of *aisthesis* (hence as perceptualization and emotion), what is at stake is an ante-predicative correspondence taking place in a horizon of significance that exceeds and sustains every dialogical form in a straightforwardly propositional sense. This is what happens in the childlike, mythical and artistic relationship with the environment, which is emotionally charged and inderivable from the objectualizing intentionality. Such relationship operates in the pre-theoretical dimension of the so-called “naive world view”, that “entrusts itself to the expressive exploration [*Ausdrucksuntersuchung*] and feels completely at home with it. No theoretical argument can shake it in its conviction” (Cassirer 1961, pp. 99-100; transl. modif.).

It is worth noting how far off from subjectivism all this is. The question can also be clarified in terms of “material engagement”. This principle has been introduced for the purposes of an archaeological analysis of human nature according to an extended model of the mind that emancipates itself from computationalist representationalism also through the identification of an “affect of engagement” (see Malafouris 2013, pp. 85 ff.). At the root of material engagement, or material collusion, is located the ability that non-neural entities have to present themselves as emotional and evocative partners, in addition to being also cognitive ones (see Turkle 2007, pp. 5-6). They “help people to construct a material order of emotions and feelings that gradually forms an ecology of relationships and expectations about the self and others” (Malafouris 2013, p. 86), so much so that “objects create subjects much more than the other way around” (Miller 2008, p. 287). This practice differs from animistic mind reading as long as it remains an expressive correspondence. It explores scenarios which are bound to sensible emergencies and is also engaged with “the sensual properties of things and the

aesthetic experience of things” that “permeate every aspect of our cognitive activities and permeate our social and emotional relationships” (Malafouris 2013, p. 87).

Formae formatae of this material collusion are tools and works that act not so much to attest a felt *pathos*, but to express a *diathesis* that, like a sort of *forma formans*, intervenes to connote the interaction. To the extent that it is charged with aesthetic significance, the tool or work becomes a device for activating an emotional potential which is impersonal since it is dispositionally embedded. Moreover, the device makes this potential accessible and preserves it to the benefit of future activations. Just like a natural language also includes the principles of signification of the word to be made (as Merleau-Ponty would say) “speaking” in a situation, as well as of the spoken word that always appears to be established, so an essential “feel for the game” is nested in the device as a result of the material embedment in it of dispositional structures. The tacit knowledge that is constituted by all this unfolds also, but not exclusively, in codifiable creative practices, ranging from art to fashion (see Entwistle 2009, pp. 130-9). “Knowing-how to correspond” means inhabiting a scaffolded environment according to those connotations.

Hence, the emotion expressed with the production of effective devices in the antepredicative sphere of perception and sensing contributes to shaping the surrounding reality in a certain way that remains potentially familiar even as new vectors intervene, which in turn are shaped by the same environment. The emotion sediments itself as it is aesthetically appreciated, that is, “valued” through an operative expression (i.e., as it is practiced) and not through a thematic judgement (i.e., as it is categorized). So it becomes a possible co-evolutionary factor for the human organism and its environment. Much more than acting as a content conveyed by the document of a personal affectivity, in its aesthetic realization the emotion can serve to “build” the world as human nature at least dispositionally expressed through devices that are experientially effective in this regard. The role of aesthetic devices and emotions is then outlined with respect to what has been called “ecological niche”. This is a controversial notion if interpreted as a denotation of a factual reality (see Pocheville 2015). Yet, it seems to be heuristically useful for describing the institutive processes that are implied with it.

One could say that a device, even an unsophisticated one, charged – in the sense we suggested before – expressively, is “aesthetic” exactly to the extent that it articulates an emotional connotation of the ecological niche. In other terms, devices are aesthetic not because, by virtue of some sort of presumed and preliminarily established artistic nature they would be endowed with, they enable the construction of an aesthetic-artistic niche as an ontological or factual domain alongside other domains of a different kind. It would be very

difficult to disassociate such a conception from the segregationist and anti-relational idea of aesthetics that dominates in the modern tradition and that is reflected in the thesis according to which emotion is an internal content. The notion of “aesthetic niche”, introduced by Menary (2014), works only as long as through it we explain – perhaps, however, *contra* Menary – how in a collusion that is aesthetic because it remains inscribed in the praxes of *aisthesis* (and therefore in the ante-predicative dimension of sensing and perceiving), the environmental context is manifested in a primitive way as modally connoted by affective diatheses that can be activated in the experience *with* the devices that make the unfolding of an enactive extended mind operative. The environmental context then takes on the character of an overall ecological niche, potentially exceeding mere current contingencies. The term “aesthetic niche” thus becomes the short formula indicating the aesthetic construction of an ecological niche because it is inevitably endowed with emotional dispositions that can be activated through the experience with the devices that are integrated in it. In the aesthetic emerges a primitive root (although not necessarily original with respect at least to the thematic-objective, predicative root) that is essential to the co-evolutionary link between biology and culture that characterizes *Homo sapiens*, a body that lives acting in expressiveness, not a brain that builds, projects or identifies expressive contents.

It is thanks to this dispositional material connotation, and therefore to its emotional charge, that the ecological niche can be shared in something like a culture, or a common meaningfulness. Human cooperation can be independent from the reference to some cognitive construct, and even more so from the mythical reference to an alleged primordial artistic attitude whose origins are unknown or to an ineffable aesthetic sense. Extension of the mind and perceptual-emotional valuing (“valuing” in the sense suggested by Berleant 1970, pp. 134) of the world are two sides of one coin at the experiential level of the material correspondence. This valuing is an inderivative way to participate in an extended mind, to experience with the environment. And it is from such a valuing, or valorization, rather than from an obscure process of artification, that any “artistic” language takes its first nourishment. This language is nothing but one of the practices that make portions of reality familiar and easily activatable thanks to specific modalities. The latter are highly expressive modalities because they are operatively shared in the very relationship in which a niche is configured. The “uniquely human” cooperation, as Tomasello would say, acts first on the modalities of relationship rather than on correlated things, if it is to have some sort of germinal *significance*. That is exactly what a single effective aesthetic device (eligible in some cultural systems as a work of art) preserves. And it can be activated by anyone who responds participatively to the invitation coming from the field that has as its vector the corresponding object, carrying out

perceptualizing behaviors in which an emotional tone is staged. Without possessing the universal thematic truth of a cognitive experience-of, emotion has the operative and even impersonal validity of an aesthetic experience-with.

An important role in this process is certainly played by the human ability to proceed online but beyond the factual, to remain faithful to the real even when one's action succeeds in revealing a facet that manifests itself differently from what it "is" or it consists of. When a child rides a broomstick, the interaction in progress forcibly gives the wooden stick, just as it is, the appearance of a (odd) horse and at the same time it prescribes to the child, just as it is, the behavior of a (unlikely) knight. It is, in other words, a primitive fictional competence that is realized in creativity (see Picciuto and Carruthers 2014) as an "aestheticizing" adaptation through *pretense*, staging. It is a way of establishing itself of a relationship by means of behaviors that cannot be derived from the propositional content of a mere simulation and at the same time correspond to a peculiar attunement. Riding a broomstick means to carry out in a presentational manner a collusive interaction, an expressive correspondence, instead of representing the horse-knight pair. And it takes emotional strength to do it, especially when it is a linguistically already profiled consciousness that must overcome the cognitive resistance that the factual states of affairs would otherwise apply. It is necessary to feel oneself riding by perceptualizing the environment "as a consequence", and therefore to activate, in its unprecedented expressive aspects, an emotion of riding that seems to emanate from the device, while it is not enough to be astride a stick to fictitiously represent the state of affairs of a ride.

Understood in this performative rather than representational acceptance, fiction as the staging of emotion provides a key aspect for the construction of a shared ecological niche, namely neutrality with respect to the agent who is operating. Emotion sediments itself as potential energy in the aesthetic device. The activation of the device in a corresponding praxis carries the emotion out in experience *with* vectorial factualities assuming a position in an aesthetic field that manages to be unique if connoted in a very peculiar way. Corresponding with the device thus means to experience according to the mode of that emotion. Not because we passively receive special factual elements, but for the pretense through which we collude with the aspects of an ongoing manifestation.

On the other hand, if the act in which an emotion is configured remained the exclusive possession of a single individual because it is circumscribed within a factuality – as a theory of the intracranial mind would presume – the development of a tradition would be inexplicable. The latter would be resolved in a collection of inexpressive products that would be at most reanimated by means of projection, and without the slightest guarantee of their operative

stability. Something different happens if creative products are dispositions made intrinsic to the material by inhering in the situations of an extended mind. As its scaffolding, they involve organism and environment according to a certain modality, a certain quality, that affects the fabric of potential expressiveness of the factual. This makes possible an intra- and inter-generational sharing of the relational mode, a collective acquisition of the aesthetic knowledge which it contains, and which is sedimented in the devices. The practices with which one participates in an aesthetic field are therefore *also emotionally* embodied by the vectors that are implied due to the correspondence between organisms and environmental devices in which the extended mind aesthetically unfolds. The related impersonal potential shapes the ecological niche because it innervates the individual realization of each act endowed with aesthetic-emotional significance. In the same way as a certain evolutionarily selected spectrum of the visible defines the operative field of human visual interaction, also in its comparative values, so the potential that is sedimented in aesthetic devices defines the operative field of emotions that are staged as corresponsive interactions that furnish an ecological niche. Otherwise the devices would become mere relics abandoned by unknown forerunners and swallowed up in a naturalness both mute and mythical. And, instead, being able to count on certain devices is at one with inhabiting an ecological niche with a particular profile. A certain literature expresses our world when e.g. a novel, rather than reflecting or denoting it, shows its potential, and so connotes it.

The material operative collusion

As has been observed, an emotion:

is not some unique distinguishable ingredient, scene or feature of all that its victim is doing and undergoing; rather it is the temporary complex of that totality. It is not like a gust, a sunbeam, a shower or the temperature; it is like the morning's weather (Ryle 2009, p. 89).

It is therefore not a matter of facts, states or events, but of an expressive manifestation that is densely endowed with aspectual characters. Precisely on these aspectual characters – since they are immanent in and material with respect to the field of the extended mind – the configurative expressiveness is exercised, first of all that configurative expressiveness which takes on culturally an artistic value. What word to use, or gesture to perform, or sound to emit, or line to trace, so that the aesthetic realization of a configuration capable of expressing an emotion is generated, is decided by an orientation towards points of maximum density

spanning perceiving and sensing. And this cannot be ascribed to a deliberative process. One proceeds by exploring tentatively when dealing with a material, a niche sediment, which is pervaded with underlying significance as an historical-material apriori. This is because the praxes of experience-with find in the extra-cranial scaffoldings much more than a reflection not only of the “inner world”, but also of brain activity. The potential that emanates from the supports set up as devices is, that is to say, as inaccessible to introspection as it is irreducible to its physiological counterparts. As has been properly made clear, if it is true that emotional complexions “can be realized and structured through acts of musical or written expression”, then “it does not make sense to single out the neural constituents as the privileged locus” of an emotion (Colombetti and Roberts 2014, p. 1260). How, then, to consider the role played by the neurophysiological endowment in the experiential phenomena of the extended mind?

The field of the collusive experience situated in a niche is a network of potential activations, also for the neurophysiological system of an organism. Organs that make embodied and enactive complexions similar take part in it in an analogous manner not simply by virtue of an inferential wiring or a common algorithmic infrastructure (according to the standard vision of computationalist cognitivism), nor by virtue of a simulative projection like the one hypothesized by Goldman (2006). The relationship, rather than psychological, would seem to be anthropological, since it concerns the interaction between organism and environment in their corporeal, physiological and physical materiality coupled with cultural significance. An emotion expressed and configured selects a way in which *Homo sapiens* experiences *with* its environment that implies body and movement schemata that are irreducible to images of a single body or a single action, of which they are rather operative tendencies.

I would reconsider in this sense what Gallese and Caruana (2016) highlighted. Conversely, what the current theory of empathy describes in terms of “embodied simulation” could be reformulated in terms of *material operative collusion*, ascribing a mental feature not exclusively or primarily to neural events, but to the relational modalities that constitute and establish the extended mind in which we participate. In this way the elements on which is built the proposal of an “experimental aesthetics” put forward by Gallese (2017) could be reinterpreted. Among other things, this reinterpretation would allow avoiding the usage of the notion of simulation. This usage is due to the unsuitable shift from an analogy of proportionality to an analogy of attribution, as if the analogic nexus allowed conjecturing on the internal contents of the correlated terms. Instead of resorting to the notion of simulation it could be useful referring to a gradation of staged collusive intensities, that moreover does not imply entering a different “level” of experience depending on an always problematic predetermination of the borderline between real and fictional, and therefore also between

artistic and non-artistic. It is not by chance that the experimental aesthetics developed by the theory of embodied simulation is desolately art-centric. But as I tried to show, the aesthetic-emotional interaction that is also specified in the activation of specific neurons can find a justification able to avoid the risks of functionalist and attribution fallacies that are run when projecting neurophysiological facts on experiential phenomena such as the staging of emotions.

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