

# Embodied Aesthetics

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## Overview

### Aims and Scope

**Embodied Aesthetics** aims at rejecting the mainstream view of aesthetics, according to which the aesthetic dimension of experience and thought is neither conceptual nor propositional. **Embodied Aesthetics** rejects the influential aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant. This is considered to adopt the mind-body dualism of Enlightenment faculty psychology, in which feeling as bodily occurrence is contrasted with thought as intellectual cognitive process and which contributes to reducing aesthetics to feeling alone considered to be non-conceptual and incapable of giving rise to knowledge. **Embodied Aesthetics** is the study of everything that goes into the human capacity to make and experience the bodily pre-linguistic cognitive, emotional and sensory-perceptual conditions of meaning constitution having its origins in the organic activities of living creatures and in their organism-environment transactions (Johnson, 2007). In other words, aesthetic experience is considered to be a matter of embodied interaction (see also Fingerhut, 2011). Following John Dewey's pragmatist aesthetics **embodied aesthetics** considers an aesthetic experience to be the integration of all the elements of ordinary experience that gives the experience a larger feeling of wholeness in the interactive flow of organism-environment transactions. This experienced wholeness is considered to convey the aesthetic quality of *an* experience (Scarinzi, 2012). Its paradigmatic case is meaning-making in art and its theoretical background the embodied mind thesis (Johnson, 2007).

### Embodied Aesthetics meets Enactivism

Mark Johnson in his work *The Meaning of the Body* (2007) brings the embodied anti-dualistic approach to aesthetics closer to enactivism (for a detailed description of enactivism see *The Embodied Mind* by Varela & Thompson & Rosch, 1991). In considering enactivism as a framework for the anti-Kantian view of aesthetics Johnson points out that Dewey's interactive flow of organism-environment transactions is possible thanks to the agent's coupling with the environment in a relation of co-determination. In the enactive approach to human experience by coupling with the environment an agent actively generates his/her identity by selecting from the environment his/her viable world called "cognitive domain" that is brought forth or enacted by that agent's

autonomous mode of coupling with the environment. In the process of bringing forth the cognitive domain, self-regulatory preferences and hence bodily viable degrees of values of environmental factors in the interactive flow of organism-environment transactions are constituted (Scarinzi, 2012; Savva et al. 2012). The most challenging aim of embodied aesthetics within the enactive framework is the investigation of the embodied constitution of the aesthetic quality of a sensorimotor experience. It is to answer the question of how the viable degrees of value (enjoyable/more enjoyable; pleasurable/more pleasurable) of an experienced situation are brought forth in interaction. The felt pleasurable quality of the viable degrees of value is considered to emerge through the conscious experiential access to the aroused lived body. This is the locus of contact between cognition and emotion in experiencing *the aesthetic* of aesthetic preference constitution (Scarinzi, 2012).

## Future Work

In the future development of the embodied and enactive approach to aesthetic experience the dialogue with artificial intelligence can be promising. Conceptualizing *the aesthetic* as a degree of viability may contribute to fostering the discussion about the possible development of the ability of autonomous systems to recognize the degree of viability of a situation and hence of enjoyment in interaction.

## Researchers

ID 2175: Alfonsina Scarinzi, Dr. Phil., M. A.

## Publications

[1] Alfonsina Scarinzi (ed.) (2015), *Aesthetics and the Embodied Mind: Beyond Art Theory and the Cartesian Mind-Body Dichotomy*, Contributions to Phenomenology, Vol 73, Springer Science + Business Media Dordrecht [\[1\]](#)

[2] Alfonsina Scarinzi (ed.), (2014) *Embodied Aesthetics: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Aesthetics and the Embodied Mind*, 26th - 28th August 2013, Philosophy of History and Culture, Vol. 34, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden [\[2\]](#)

[3] Savva, N., Scarinzi, A., Bianchi-Berthouze, N. Continuous Recognition of Player's Affective Body Expression as Dynamic Quality of Aesthetic Experience, *Transactions on Computational Intelligence and AI in Games*, vol. 4, issue 3, (Special issue), guest edited by Cameron Browne, Simon Colton and Georgios Yannakakis, 199 – 212, 2012 [\[3\]](#)

[4] Scarinzi, A. Grounding Aesthetic Preference in the Bodily Conditions of Meaning Constitution. Towards an Enactive Approach, *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, 43, 83 – 103, 2012 [\[4\]](#)

## See Also

[1] Fingerhut, J. *Sensorimotor Signature, Skill, and Synaesthesia. Two Challenges for Enactive Theories of Perception*, In: *Habitus in Habitat III. Synaesthesia and Kinaesthetics*, (ed. with Sabine Flach & Jan Soeffner), Berne & New York, 101-120, 2011

[2] Froese, T., Ziemke, T. Enactive Artificial Intelligence: Investigating the Systemic Organization of Life and Mind, *Artificial Intelligence*, 173, 466 -500, 2009

[3] Haworth, J. T. Beyond Reason: Pre-reflexive Thought and Creativity in Art. *Leonardo* 30, 2, 137 - 146, 1997

[4] Johnson, M. *The Meaning of the Body*, The University of Chicago Press, 2007

[5] Xenakis, I., Arnellos, A., Darzentas, J. The Functional Role of Emotions in Aesthetic Judgement, *New Ideas in Psychology*, 30, 212 – 216, 2012

[6] Xia, X., Biloris, N. A 4EA Cognitive Approach for Rethinking the Human in Interactive Spaces, In: *Rethinking the Human in Technology-Driven Architecture*, Maria Voyatzaki, Conference Proceedings, Constantin Spiridonidis (ed.) 2012

## **External Links**

[5] [http://www.creativity-embodiedmind.com/lightbox2/john\\_t\\_haworth.html](http://www.creativity-embodiedmind.com/lightbox2/john_t_haworth.html)

[6] <https://sites.google.com/site/enactiveaesthetics/home>