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**Preface:  
Aesthetics and Affectivity**

The role of affectivity in aesthetic experience, and its importance in the study of aesthetics, is highlighted in this special issue. As the editors indicate in their introduction, it has been a theme since ancient times. And yet there remains some ambiguity about this since affectivity is so closely associated with the body, and, at least on many conceptions, aesthetics is supposed to involve experiences on a higher plane. Recent science and philosophy have focused on more cognitive contributions to our understanding of mind and experience, and in some cases this focus leads theorists to ignore affectivity. I think this is sometimes reinforced by a particular framing of issues in the field of aesthetics when it is oriented to the experience of the observer or appreciator of the artwork. One way to redirect our considerations is to think of the aesthetic experience of the artist, and specifically the performer, in the context of performing arts.

In studies of performance, however, one still finds models that overemphasize the role of cognition and cognitive control. One example of this can be found in recent debates about skilled performance where bodily processes clearly have a role to play, and the question is whether and to what extent higher-order cognitive processes are necessary for instructing and controlling the motoric elements involved in performance (for example, in dance, musical performance, theatrical acting, etc.). One side of this debate is well represented by Hubert Dreyfus (2002) who argued that expert

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performance should in some sense be mindless and that thinking about what one is doing most likely interrupts and diminishes performance. On the other side we find theorists like Barbara Montero (2016, 38) who argue that “self-reflective thinking, planning, predicting, deliberation, attention to or monitoring of [...] actions, conceptualizing [...] actions, control, trying, effort, having a sense of the self, and acting for a reason” are important factors that can improve performance. Christensen, Sutton, and McIlwain’s (2016) proposal, which they refer to as a ‘meshed architecture’ model, nicely captures the idea that cognition and motoric processes need to be integrated. The model involves a vertical ordering divided into two poles: cognition at the top, descending to do its job of instructing and controlling what they portray as motoric automaticity at the bottom.

On either side of this debate there is little or no mention of affectivity, and for that reason the models proposed remain very narrow. One can introduce affect into the meshed architecture model, however, to get a fuller and more complex account of skilled performance, and the aesthetic experience that goes along with it. Affect shapes our ability to cope with and to couple with the surrounding world. In the broadest sense it includes emotion processes, but also more general and basic bodily states such as hunger, fatigue, pain, pleasure and more positive hedonic aspects. Affect may work differently in different types of skilled actions and performing arts (e.g., dance *versus* acting). The important differences may have to do with the way that affective factors are integrated or meshed with motoric/agentive factors, including the kinetic and kinaesthetic feelings associated with body-schematic processes. Affect may involve emotion-rich expressive movement, as in dance—movement that is like gesture and language in that it goes beyond simple motor control or instrumental action. Affect can mediate or modulate the different mixes or integrations of expressive and instrumental movements in athletics, dance, or musical performance.

In this regard, motor processes do not carry on autonomously, delivering technically proficient movement, to which we then add an affective or expressive style that may be occasion relative. Specific affective states may slow down or speed up such processes, for example, or lead to the adoption of a specific initial posture that has continued influence on the performance or on how the agent is functionally integrated with the world. Affect may in fact elicit and modulate appropriate cognitive processes, e.g., levels of attention and action monitoring. It can clearly facilitate an integration of cognitive and motoric processes—enriching the vertical mesh in expert performance. Importantly, however, affect allows for an integration attuned to targets and

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environmental features, taking us into what we can call the horizontal features of the performance situation. In this regard, affective processes take shape in our interactions with environmental and intersubjective factors. Simon Høffding's (2019) phenomenological analysis of musical performance, for example, shows that the specifics of the built environment (playing in a concert hall *versus* playing in a pub), as well as the musical instruments, the score, the music itself, the people with whom we are playing, the audience, and so forth, can all have an effect on the performer's affective condition, which, in turn, can loop around and affect the way that we cope with all of these factors (Gallagher 2021).

It's not difficult to see that such affective mediations, modulations, and meshings will have an effect not only on performance, but on the performer's aesthetic experience. In this regard, in the aesthetic experience of the performer, the performance (the music or the dance, for example) is not an object that is merely observed. From the performer's perspective, it is performed and is experienced in a way that is the result of the integration of all of the above-mentioned factors. To be clear, at this point I'm talking about aesthetic experience *in* performance (i.e., the experience of the performer)—not about the aesthetic experience *of* the performance or of the art (i.e., the experience of the observer). Of course, the latter (for example in listening to music or observing a ballet) is not unconnected with the former. Indeed, one might think that the aesthetic experience of the observer may in some way replicate, or derive from, or contribute to the aesthetic experience of the performer, as we find in empathic conceptions of the aesthetic.

As I mentioned, questions about aesthetic experience are typically framed in terms of the observer/audience perspective, and in a way that downplays the significance of the performer perspective. But, if the meshed architecture, which includes not just cognitive and motoric processes, but also affective, ecological and intersubjective factors, helps us to understand aesthetic experience in the performer, might it not also help us understand aesthetic experience in the observer? John Carvalho (2019), for example, has argued that viewing art is a kind of skill. He emphasizes the idea that the aesthetic appreciation of observed art—specifically painting—involves skill acquired in the practiced experience of observing art and thinking about it. So one proposal, that fits well with an embodied-enactive approach to experience, is that we can think of the observer/audience perspective as involving a skilled performance, and therefore think that there is also some kind of meshed architecture involved even in observation.

Merleau-Ponty (2012, 315-316) offers a well-known example in this regard.

For each object, just as for each painting in an art gallery, there is an optimal distance from which it asks to be seen—an orientation through which it presents more of itself—beneath or beyond which we merely have a confused perception due to excess or lack. Hence, we tend toward the maximum of visibility and we seek, just as when using a microscope, a better focus point, which is obtained through a certain equilibrium between the interior and the exterior horizons.

Indeed, one can think that in the observational stance there is a mesh of elements that include the painting itself, the museum, cultural practices, other people, as well as cognitive, affective, and motoric processes, such that the agent-as-observer is moved to take the proper stance in attunement with the artwork.

But here I'm just scratching the surface. This special issue dives deeper into the relevant issues, allowing new insights into the phenomenological analysis of embodied affectivity and its relation to perception and aesthetic experience, situated in a material and intersubjective world that includes institutions, cultural practices and normative structures.

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