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Edited by Dan-Eugen Ratiu and Connell Vaughan

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## Table of Contents

<b>Claire Anscomb</b> <i>Does a Mechanistic Etiology Reduce Artistic Agency?...</i>	1
<b>Emanuele Arielli</b> <i>Aesthetic Opacity</i> .....	15
<b>Zsolt Bátori</b> <i>The Ineffability of Musical Content: Is Verbalisation in Principle Impossible?</i> .....	32
<b>Marta Benenti</b> <i>Expressive Experience and Imagination</i> .....	46
<b>Pía Cordero</b> <i>Towards an Aesthetics of Misalignment. Notes on Husserl's Structural Model of Aesthetic Consciousness</i> .....	73
<b>Koray Değirmenci</b> <i>Photographic Indexicality and Referentiality in the Digital Age</i> .....	89
<b>Stefan Deines</b> <i>On the Plurality of the Arts</i> .....	116
<b>Laura Di Summa-Knoop</b> <i>Aesthetics and Ethics: On the Power of Aesthetic Features</i> .....	128
<b>Benjamin Evans</b> <i>Beginning with Boredom: Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's Approach to the Arts</i> .....	147

<b>Paul Giladi</b> <i>Embodied Meaning and Art as Sense-Making: A Critique of Beiser's Interpretation of the 'End of Art Thesis'</i> .....	160
<b>Lisa Giombini</b> <i>Conserving the Original: Authenticity in Art Restoration</i> .....	183
<b>Moran Godess Riccitelli</b> <i>The Aesthetic Dimension of Moral Faith: On the Connection between Aesthetic Experience and the Moral Proof of God in Immanuel Kant's Third Critique</i> .....	202
<b>Carlo Guareschi</b> <i>Painting and Perception of Nature: Merleau-Ponty's Aesthetical Contribution to the Contemporary Debate on Nature</i> .....	219
<b>Amelia Hruby</b> <i>A Call to Freedom: Schiller's Aesthetic Dimension and the Objectification of Aesthetics</i> .....	234
<b>Xiaoyan Hu</b> <i>The Dialectic of Consciousness and Unconsciousness in Spontaneity of Genius: A Comparison between Classical Chinese Aesthetics and Kantian Ideas</i> .....	246
<b>Einav Katan-Schmid</b> <i>Dancing Metaphors; Creative Thinking within Bodily Movements</i> .....	275
<b>Lev Kreft</b> <i>All About Janez Janša</i> .....	291
<b>Efi Kyprianidou</b> <i>Empathy for the Depicted</i> .....	305
<b>Stefano Marino</b> <i>Ideas Pertaining to a Phenomenological Aesthetics of Fashion and Play : The Contribution of Eugen Fink</i> .....	333
<b>Miloš Miladinov</b> <i>Relation Between Education and Beauty in Plato's Philosophy</i> .....	362
<b>Philip Mills</b> <i>Perspectival Poetics: Poetry After Nietzsche and Wittgenstein</i> .....	375
<b>Alain Patrick Olivier</b> <i>Hegel's Last Lectures on Aesthetics in Berlin 1828/29 and the Contemporary Debates on the End of Art</i> .....	385

<b>Michaela Ott</b>	<i>'Afropolitanism' as an Example of Contemporary Aesthetics</i>	398
<b>Levno Plato</b>	<i>Kant's Ideal of Beauty: as the Symbol of the Morally Good and as a Source of Aesthetic Normativity</i>	412
<b>Carlos Portales</b>	<i>Dissonance and Subjective Dissent in Leibniz's Aesthetics</i>	438
<b>Isabelle Rieusset-Lemarié</b>	<i>Aesthetics as Politics: Kant's Heuristic Insights Beyond Rancière's Ambivalences</i>	453
<b>Matthew Rowe</b>	<i>The Artwork Process and the Theory Spectrum</i>	479
<b>Salvador Rubio Marco</b>	<i>The Cutting Effect: a Contribution to Moderate Contextualism in Aesthetics</i>	500
<b>Marcello Ruta</b>	<i>Horowitz Does Not Repeat Either! Free Improvisation, Repeatability and Normativity</i>	510
<b>Lisa Katharin Schmalzried</b>	<i>"All Grace is Beautiful, but not all that is Beautiful is Grace." A Critical Look at Schiller's View on Human Beauty</i>	533
<b>Judith Siegmund</b>	<i>Purposiveness and Sociality of Artistic Action in the Writings of John Dewey</i>	555
<b>Janne Vanhanen</b>	<i>An Aesthetics of Noise? On the Definition and Experience of Noise in a Musical Context</i>	566
<b>Carlos Vara Sánchez</b>	<i>The Temporality of Aesthetic Entrainment: an Interdisciplinary Approach to Gadamer's Concept of Tarrying</i>	580
<b>Iris Vidmar</b>	<i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Gifted Man: What Lies in the Mind of a Genius?</i>	591
<b>Alberto Voltolini</b>	<i>Contours, Attention and Illusion</i>	615

<b>Weijia Wang</b>	<i>Kant's Mathematical Sublime and Aesthetic Estimation of Extensive Magnitude</i> .....	629
<b>Zhuofei Wang</b>	<i>'Atmosphere' as a Core Concept of Weather Aesthetics</i> .....	654
<b>Franziska Wildt</b>	<i>The Book and its Cover — On the Recognition of Subject and Object in Arthur Danto's Theory of Art and Axel Honneth's Recognition Theory</i> .....	666
<b>Jens Dam Ziska</b>	<i>Pictorial Understanding</i> .....	694

# *Aesthetic Opacity*

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ABSTRACT. Are we really sure to correctly know what do we feel in front of an artwork and to correctly verbalize it? How do we know what we appreciate and why we appreciate it? This paper deals with the problem of introspective opacity in aesthetics (that is, the unreliability of self-knowledge) in the light of traditional philosophical issues, but also of recent psychological insights, according to which there are many instances of misleading intuition about one's own mental processes, affective states or preferences. Usually, it is assumed that aesthetic statements are intuitively clear and self-evident. However, a long tradition in psychological research has called the idea of introspective transparency and the infallibility of self-knowledge into question (Wilson 2002). This topic has only recently been recognized as an interesting problem in aesthetics (Melchionne 2011, Irvin 2014). In this paper I will discuss the main shortcomings in introspective self-knowledge, mostly referring to psychological findings. As a consequence, the development of a folk psychological account of aesthetic experience could be needed, investigating how people develop intuitive and naïve theories about their aesthetic reactions, taste, and feelings, distinct from a more objective and empirically grounded account of how judgment and preferences are actually formed in ourselves, even on a neurobiological level. However, it will also be argued that bypassing the individual judgment and his expressed choices in favor of allegedly more objective levels of description would not be an innocent step to take.

## **1. Introduction**

When it comes to aesthetic judgment and questions of taste, we assume that we are free of perceptual flaws and that we are able to formulate a judgment that rests on our own aesthetic experience and attitudes. Now, both the assessment of our aesthetic experiences and the formulation of judgments require the ability to self-reflexively see in ourselves and to correctly communicate the content of our inner reactions and thinking. In particular, from their first theorizations in the 17th and 18th centuries, taste and aesthetic experience have been considered inherently subjective phenomena,

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requiring correct introspection and self-awareness. In our everyday expression of aesthetic evaluations, in fact, we are used to expressions like:

- «I felt disturbed by this artist's performance»
- «I like more Damien Hirst than Jeff Koons»
- «I find her installations moving»
- «I am fascinated by his work»

A more complex stage of self- assessment concerns the identification of the reasons for one's own aesthetic reactions and taste: «I like him more because...», «I find it unsettling, because...», «It doesn't appeal to my taste since...» etc. That is, explaining why something causes a specific aesthetic experience or reaction is a further and more complex step of aesthetic understanding that requires some kind of correct attribution of the reason of one's own responses.

In the next section, I will point out that, since the origin of aesthetics as a philosophical discipline, the idea of introspective clarity in our aesthetic experience was called into question. Nevertheless, the viewpoint that our own internal states are transparent is still an implicit assumption both in the naïve and everyday uses of aesthetic judgment and concepts, and also in the critical language of experts. In other words, on one side we admit that there are unconscious factors behind our creativity, aesthetic feelings and evaluations; on the other side we mostly assume that anything we feel and think in front of an artwork is, on a careful inspection, clearly and unmistakably discernible.

Moreover, the actual problem of unreliability of introspective self-awareness in aesthetic matters has recently been acknowledged as scientific fact, but still hadn't had any consequences on the assumed reliability of our self-knowledge in aesthetic discourse. This has been only recently pointed out by scholars - in particular, Melchionne (2011) and Irvin (2014) -, who stressed the relevance for aesthetics of some important and interesting findings in psychological research, according to which there are many instances of misleading intuitions about one's own mental processes, affective states or preferences. This has been a central research topic in psychology since decades, but it has received little attention in aesthetics.

## 2. From the “Je Ne Sais Quoi” to the Psychological Unconscious

Already during aesthetics’ origins in modern times, philosophers have suggested that there are side of our sensorial and emotional life that cannot be grasped with rational clarity. The debates about the subtleties and the imponderable factors in the formation of our taste pointed to a “je ne se quoi” that does not allow for an explicit rationalization of our aesthetic sensibility, recalling Blaise Pascal’s “le coeur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connait point” (*Pensées*, 1669).

While Descartes equated the *res cogitans* with the conscious and excluded vehemently the possibility of unconscious thoughts, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was on the contrary the first to acknowledge the existence of unconscious ideas and to ascribe to them a relevant role in his philosophical system: “C'est une grande source d'erreurs de croire qu'il n'y a aucune perception dans l'ame que celles dont elle s'apperçoit” (*Nouveaux Essais sur l'entendement humain*, 1765). With reference to Plato’s theory of *anamnesis*, Leibniz called “small perceptions” the existence of fleeting ideas, belonging to the realm of the *cognitio obscura*, which he compares to the experiences we usually have in aesthetic perception. Christian Wolff would later translate Leibniz’s intuition as “dunkle Vorstellungen” (dark representations) or “Empfindungen ohne Bewusstsein“ (sensations without consciousness), and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten would call them the *fundus animae*, the ground of the soul composed of those obscure perceptions that, according to him, should become object of aesthetic investigation, defined as *gnoseologia inferior*.

Later, also Kant will stress the impossibility for the artistic genius to have conscious access to the sources of his own creative forces:

Hence, where an author owes a product to his genius, he does not himself know how the ideas for it have entered into his head, nor has he it in his power to invent the like at pleasure, or methodically, and communicate the same to others in such precepts as would enable them to produce similar products. (1790, *Critique of Judgment*, §46).

The unconscious as a vital creative force was, of course, a central topic for the Romantics, but it plays a crucial role also for a scientist like Gustav Theodor Fechner, who investigated aesthetic phenomena from the basic physiological processes. According to his “aesthetic association principle” (*Vorschule der Ästhetik*, 1876), the perceptual associations that determine our aesthetic responses are mostly unconscious. Similarly, Hermann von Helmholtz, in his essay about the physiological causes of musical harmonies (*Über die physiologischen Ursachen der musikalischen Harmonien*, 1857) had claimed that the laws of harmony determine our aesthetic appreciation in ways that escape our conscious comprehension.

The lack of awareness or the murkiness of our introspective life is either due to the fact that inner processes are too weak to be perceived (Leibniz’s “small perception”), or because they lie at the level of physiological mechanisms: we reasonably cannot have access to all the complexity and the intricacies of our internal life. Recognizing the difficulty or even the impossibility to gain a clear and rational vision of the inner workings of our mind should not be a concern. We could even suggest that from an evolutionary point of view an unbounded possibility of introspection would not be beneficial but a hindrance. We also accept the idea that our perception, conceptual schemas, and interpretations are also the product of a complex cultural and linguistic background we are not completely aware, and that there is always some undefinable element in our aesthetic experience that is based on pre-linguistic and unconscious foundations.

On the other side, there are more serious issues concerning self-knowledge, starting from Sigmund Freud's investigation of the unconscious up to contemporary researches in experimental psychology about people's ability in assessing aspects of their inner life that have been traditionally considered unproblematic and straightforward. The problem here is not the inaccessibility of deep unconscious foundations, but the systematic illusion of certainty where we expect immediate clarity.

Moreover, the theoretical acknowledgment of the imperfect character of our introspection is rarely followed by a similar awareness in

the everyday practice of lay people talking about aesthetic experiences and also in the words of critics and experts in aesthetic matter. Cartesian self-transparency still seems to be present in everyday contexts, where it is assumed that aesthetic statements are intuitively clear and self-evident. In other words, we usually assume that we always do know what we feel and in which aesthetic experience we are just involved, and that we are able to clearly assess our taste and recognize the reasons of our aesthetic responses. The real problem of opacity is the fact that our judgment may be unreliable even in cases in which we mistakenly feel sure of our judgment.

### **3. Varieties of Opacity**

Even those who believe that introspection generates some truthful knowledge of our mental dispositions would acknowledge that not all mental states can be brought to light since we don't have access to all causal mechanisms governing our mental life. But, as said, more troubling is the question if the mental dispositions we believe to correctly introspect correspond with the real internal states we are trying to pin down. Leaving the psychoanalytical tradition aside, a quite consistent trail in psychological research has called the idea of introspective transparency and the infallibility of self-knowledge into question (Wilson 2002). Several well-known psychological studies (in particular Nisbett and Wilson 1977 is considered a seminal work in this domain) have shown that subjects are often mistaken about their own motivations and mental states and about the causes of their own preferences and decisions. The important point is here that the fallibility of introspective judgment is not the product of an incidental lack of focusing but a systematic feature of our self-reflection. The main shortcoming in introspective self-knowledge consists not only in our difficulty to clarify the reasons of our feelings, but also in the tendency to formulate wrong reasons for them, or even in not being completely accurate in the appraisal of the feelings themselves. Eric Schwitzgebel (2008) writes more radically:

We are prone to gross error, even in favorable circumstances of

extended reflection, about our own ongoing conscious experience, our current phenomenology. Even in this apparently privileged domain, our self-knowledge is faulty and untrustworthy. We are not simply fallible at the margins but broadly inept. (Schwitzgebel 2008, abstract)

In aesthetics, as we just saw, we have a long tradition in theorizing the “je ne sais quoi” and the impenetrability of the unconscious life, but beside this acknowledgment, investigations on topics such as aesthetic experience, judgment, taste and so on take Cartesian transparency and intuition for granted. But if we consider the numerous investigations on this subject, there is no reason for aesthetics not to be concerned with their results.

Melchionne (2011) speaks of “aesthetic unreliability”, as “the variety of ways in which it is difficult to grasp our aesthetic experience and the consequent confusion and unreliability of what we take as our taste”, adding that:

Often enough, we suppress or exaggerate our responses to the point of self-deception. We have difficulty in identifying what in an object causes our response to it. The instability of our feelings over time is such that we are unsure if our responses are caused by our mood, factors in our environment, or the object to which we are attending. (Melchionne 2011)

In short: what people believe to like, thus, could not always be what they actually like. Furthermore, what people believe to be their reason for appreciating something, could also not always be the real reason for their appreciation. And, more worryingly, even what we *believe to feel*, at the very moment we are feeling it, could be an illusory product of an undetectable deception.

Some relevant findings in the experimental research on the opacity of introspection that have direct relevance for questions concerning aesthetics have been investigated by few scholars such as Melchionne (2011) and Irvine (2014). I summarize six main problems that have been studied in the psychological literature and that can be directly applied to topics in aesthetics:

1) The first one is the *influence of contextual or irrelevant factors* on our judgment. Preferences and judgment variability is notoriously caused by irrelevant and contextual factors such as the way a question is formulated and *framed* (Shafir, Simonson, Tversky 2006). Preferences and decisions can be reversed according to how you look at a problem. For example, if people are faced with a choice between a luxury vacation to Bali or a vacation in a cheap local resort ("What do you prefer between the two?"), they would tend to prefer the exotic and fascinating destination. But if the question is reformulated as "Which one of the two would you discard?", then many people choosing Bali in the first formulation now would discard it, because of its expensiveness. Rationally, the two questions have the same meaning and answers should be consistent with each other, but often they aren't. Now, if a person's choice mutates according to how the question is framed, then we have a situation in which her preferences seem dependent on an irrelevant contextual factor.

Similar to these cases of verbal framing are aesthetic choices that depend on spatial arrangements of items that are evaluated by subjects. Nisbett and Wilson (1977) described a "position effect" in choices that are similar to aesthetic evaluations. In one study they asked people in a department store to choose the best quality item, that is, the one they preferred, among four actually identical pairs of stockings. It turned out that items located on the right and inspected last were chosen much more frequently: the position effect was very strong. When asked to motivate their choice, the subjects gave reasons that were mainly focused on the qualities of the chosen product, even though they were all the same. They never mentioned the item's position on the shelf as a relevant factor. Even when the possibility of the position effect was openly mentioned to them, they denied that it could have had an effect on their choice. Nisbett and Ross developed many experimental demonstrations of reconstructive and interpretative processes, where misattribution of reason (see below, 2. case) and confabulation (3. case) are caused by influencing factors that escape our conscious awareness.

Another contextual factor is *mere exposure*, namely the fact that repetition and frequent exposure to an object or a person increase our liking

for them. As Cutting (2003) showed in the case example of impressionist paintings, the more a painter's work was shown in pictures and books to people, the more they liked it later. Similarly, *contrast or assimilation effects* occur when items are implicitly compared, biasing our judgment of the single element: in Arielli (2012) visual artworks were more or less favorably judged according to similar works put next to them that were modified to look aesthetically less pleasing and disharmonic. Under some circumstances, a contrast effect was observed (the original painting was appreciated more by subjects), in other cases an assimilation effect occurred (the original painting was judged as less pleasing).

These phenomena show how aesthetic preferences and opinions may vary depending on circumstances and accidental influences. Moreover, personal prejudices, mood, environmental and "atmospheric" factors can cause changes in aesthetic evaluation without the person recognizing their influence. We rationally consider all these factors as irrelevant, but they do have often an influence that should be investigated, since they are usually not recognized as playing a role in our aesthetic judgment, no matter if trivial, like in consumer's choice, or culturally sophisticated.

2) *Misattribution of reasons*. The failure in the identification of hidden causes influencing our judgment leads consequently to biases in identifying the reasons of our aesthetic impressions. This happens for instance when we ignore the real cause of our emotional reactions. As in a classic psychological experiment (Dutton and Aron 1974) a female researcher interviewed some male passers-by in a park. A group of these men was stopped in the middle of a footbridge that was suspended several meters in the air and rocked by the wind, a very scenic but also anxiety-inducing site. A second group was interviewed on a common pedestrian walkway in the park. At the end of the interview, the woman handed out a card with her phone number and told the subjects that they might call her if they wanted to know more about the ongoing research. The goal was to count how many men would actually call back, using this score as a measure of their attraction toward the woman. It turned out that two-thirds of those subjects that were stopped on the hanging footbridge contacted her again,

while only one-third of the men from the other the experimental group did so. According to the researchers, this could be explained by the hypothesis that the burst of adrenaline and the anxiety caused by being suspended on the footbridge were wrongly mistaken by a considerable number of subjects as a feeling of excitement for the interaction with an attractive woman.

Another example of misattribution of preferences are all cases in which taste is developed due to social conformism or need of group distinction (as Pierre Bourdieu put it). In these cases, we tend to search for explanations (“I like this artwork because it’s innovative”) that appear to be socially respectable and use them to replace underlying socially opportunistic reasons we wouldn’t like to admit or we are not aware of (“I like it because liking it makes me look culturally sophisticated!”).

3) A similar case arises when we *confabulate* reasons. People often tend to make up reasonable explanations for their judgment or choice even if they don’t have any. For example, we are more drawn to easy explanations than to complex one. We could thus give the reasons for an aesthetic judgment making use of explanations that are quickly available to our mind. Similarly, we could be tempted to say that we appreciate a specific painting because of its symbolic meaning and stylistic features, but actually we could have been drawn to it because we were used to have a reproduction in our office, that is, we were subject to an exposure effect we are not aware of. In this case, we substitute a personal reason with an apparently more objective and cultivated explanation: we unintentionally offer a wrong reason for our appreciation getting rid of a bad, but maybe more truthful, one.

4) *Misattributions concerning past and future experiences*. Taste and aesthetic judgment involve elaboration and recollection of previous experiences. If memory could be sometimes misleading and distorted, as has extensively been investigated in psychology, then judgment based on past affective recollection could also be biased (Ariely 1998). Similarly, we fail to understand what we have enjoyed in the past and what has made us happy because we selectively suppress or amplify our memories according to their affective impact. One example of introspective illusion due to this kind of

recollection error is the *peak/end effect* (Fredrickson, Kahneman 1993), i.e. the tendency to overemphasize the extreme moments (the peaks) of pleasure and discomfort in a past experience and its conclusion (the end). Since taste inevitably involves reflection and recollection of a previous experience, the peak/end effect can potentially cause a distortion in the retrospective assessments of our engagement with artworks and aesthetic experiences.

Moreover, we could also wrongly predict what would make us happy or what we would (aesthetically) appreciate in the *future*, that is, our ability in “affective forecasting” could be also biased. For instance, we could mistakenly think we would prefer to visit a museum than going to the theater, but to find out later that we were wrong in assessing our preferences. Psychologist Daniel Gilbert (Gilbert, Wilson 2000) has shown in detail how much we are afflicted with “miswanting”, that is, all cases in which we make incorrect predictions about what we believe that will please us in the future, ending up wanting things now that we actually don’t want after we obtained them.

If there is a discrepancy between the pleasure we experience now, the recollection of past’s delights and the anticipated pleasure of the future, then aesthetics should also investigate the temporal orientation of our evaluations. For instance, a novel could be very entertaining while we are reading it, but it could leave no particular impression after we are finished. A different book, on the contrary, could challenge our patience while we are struggling with reading it, but leaves a positive impression when we think back about it at a later date. Judgments would then dramatically vary depending on the moment in time in which they are formulated. Similarly, we could hypothesize the existence of specific aesthetic experiences that are particularly pleasurable when they are only in the future, more than when they are presently experienced or remembered in the past.

5) *Verbal overshadowing*. We could assume that deeper self-reflection, crucial engagement with our and other's opinion, and verbal clarification of our own aesthetic reactions could contribute to lessen the impact of those biases. But does it really work like that? Does thinking and talking about our own aesthetic preferences and reaction allow for a clearer

image of our true preferences?

Biases could also emerge during the process of verbalization and linguistic categorization: researches show that too much conscious overthinking and verbalization could distort the assessment of our authentic aesthetic experience. The so-called phenomenon of *verbal overshadowing* (Schooler, Engstler-Schooler 1990) shows that the conceptual categories we use in our explanations could be too coarse and force our subjective experience in schemas that are oversimplifying or outright wrong. This is a bias that could threaten the expression of our aesthetic likings: thinking (and speaking) too much about our taste could lead us to choices that are more distant to our real preferences. For instance, in Wilson (et al. 1993, see also Wilson, Schooler 1991), students were exposed to a series of art posters and asked for their preferences. In one group, however, the subjects had also to provide explicit reasons for their preferences, while the other group had only to choose and take the poster home without saying anything. After the subjects selected and took home the poster, the researcher observed what they did with them. Surprisingly, the ones who were asked for explicit reasons for their preferences were later less likely to hang their poster on their dorm rooms' walls than those who were not asked to analyze their feelings. The findings suggest that, when asked for reasons, our preferences are likely to be put under rational scrutiny and eventually be forced into conceptual categories that lead to choices that are less authentic. In the effort to clarify what and why we like something, we try to build a plausible and coherent story and at the same time we also try to give a good social impression of ourselves, showing others how cultivated our judgment is and giving them acceptable explanations, but eventually falling prey to pre-established schemas and clichés.

6) *Affective ignorance*. In conclusion, even emotional self-knowledge is not straightforward (Jaeger 2009, Shoemaker 1994): there are situations in which we believe to feel x, but we are actually feeling y. We could confuse fear with excitement, sadness with melancholy. Or confuse good mood with aesthetic pleasure. This is a crucial point, because it runs counter the assumption that our immediate subjective impression could at

least not be wrong. I could be biased in assessing the causes of my feeling, I could be verbally superficial in expressing them, but then, we think, we cannot be wrong about the simple fact that we are feeling exactly what we are feeling. This, however, would only be correct in the assumption that we have some kind of non-mediated pre-conceptual grasp of our (inner) experiences.

The negation of this assumption constitutes a relevant anti-Cartesians conclusion, since we would debate the *intuitiveness* of our self-knowledge. If I feel pain, this sensation seems to be a non-mediated “quale” of my phenomenal experience. In a similar way, the certainty of self-consciousness is not debatable and thus escapes the skeptical challenge of the Cartesian doubt. An important criticism of this certainty was notoriously expressed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1868), according to which there is no such thing as a non-mediated intuition of mental phenomena. Instead, every knowledge and experience of internal or external events is the products of inferential processes: “We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.” (Peirce 1868, p.141). The inferential nature of what we assume to be an immediate intuition opens up the possibility of biased subjective experiences: in the example made above about the wrong interpretation of subjects’ feeling that were interviewed in a park, they believed to feel attraction or excitement, but were actually frightened by the heights under the footbridge. This shows that there is no a two-step process in which an unadulterated feeling gets misinterpreted during a subsequent appraisal’s stage. People’s feelings are appraised and interpreted from the very beginning by the particular situation in which they find themselves.

#### **4. Opacity and the Coherent Self**

What do these findings mean for aesthetic research? Are we really such poor judges of ourselves and should we give way to a skeptical conclusion? Certainly, it seems that findings that call into question the transparency of

introspection need to be integrated as a relevant topic in aesthetic investigation. The acknowledgment of aesthetic opacity could compel us to think about ways to avoid these biases, even though, from a psychological point of view, these phenomena could not be easily neutralized, since they are deep and basic features of our mental functioning. Melchionne (2015) suggests a common sense approach for avoiding the risks involved in a distorted assessment of one's own aesthetic taste and preferences, namely the exercise of "norms of cultivation" concerning, among other advices, the awareness of contextual factors, the self-regulation of exposure, and caution against quick satisfactions. Irvin (2104), on the other hand, pleads for the use of mindfulness as a way to mitigate biases in aesthetic evaluation.

From a different point of view, the issue of aesthetic opacity means also that we should distinguish between at least two levels of explanation, similarly to other domain of investigation in human psychology where we have a separation between an intuitive and "naïve" level of folk psychological understanding of a phenomenon and the scientific description of the same phenomenon. In the same way, we could envisage the development of a "naïve (or folk) aesthetics", concerned with the description of how we intuitively explain our aesthetic experiences, judgment and taste, as opposed to the investigation of how we really judge and experience aesthetically. This should happen through a more objective (and empirically grounded) account of how judgment and preferences are actually formed in ourselves.

But what does it exactly mean to objectively describe what our "real" judgment and preferences are? Most experimental findings we previously saw are based on the identification of discrepancies between verbal assertions and actual behavior, or, as the economists put it, between declared and revealed preferences. Verbal declarations confabulate reasons that are not real, they could reveal how subjects ignore some hidden reason that influences their decisions, or they express preferences in a particular time that are later not really desired, revealing thus a temporal inconsistency. Basically, the difference between what one says and what one does in aesthetic matters is the revealing sign of the underlying opaqueness of our mental life.

Now, the discrepancy between “said” and “done” is certainly revealing, but it shouldn’t be confused as sign of the difference between “wrong” and “right”, or between “biased” and “objective”. Doing so would not be an innocent step and should be critically pondered: in fact, deciding upon what is naïve and unreliable instead of true and objective is a sensitive matter, particularly, in a domain like aesthetic experience. In some extreme views, as in the recent developments of neuroaesthetics, even the validity of the preferences expressed by true choices and behavior could be questioned, since people could make aesthetic choices that do not correspond to their physiologically revealed “deep” preferences. If this were the case, then neuronal processes would be able to tell more about our aesthetic experiences than what we consciously would be able to tell, or even more than what our behavior would show, since actual choices (“revealed preferences”) could also be subject to biases, as in conformism and opportunistic behavior. But, as we clearly could see here, there is the risk of confusing different levels of description and explanation, dispossessing as a consequence the true subject of the aesthetic experience, that is: the person. If neither personal judgment, nor actual behavior, but neuronal and physiological reactions “decide” how we really aesthetically feel and evaluate, we would bypass the individual experience in favor of the alleged truth of his physiological reaction (see also Schwarzkopf, 2015) and this would be, in my opinion, a categorical mistake.

Instead of a discrepancy between “true” and “false” aesthetic judgment or experience, we maybe should speak of different levels of manifestation of the subject’s attitudes. Aesthetic evaluation through words needs not to be less meaningful than aesthetic evaluation through behavior. There is no guarantee that actual behavior and choice reveal deep preferences instead of verbally expressed preferences. I may verbally express more careful aesthetic evaluations than those expressed by choices and behaviors which could be influenced by habits, education or social conformism. Or to put it more simply: what I do is not truer or deeper in revealing my aesthetic attitudes than what I say. For the same reason, stability and coherence (across contexts, situations and time, as in affective forecasting) don’t automatically mean that we are facing “truer” or deeper

taste and attitudes than variable or context-dependent preferences. This is a complex issue that we can't delve into here, but the assumption of stability and temporal coherence of the subject's preferences and judgment should not be taken as an indisputable condition.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings in the psychology of taste, preference and decision making are on one side interesting for contemporary debates in aesthetics as they show the inconsistency between expressed preferences and choice, incoherence in aesthetic attitudes among past, present and future "selves", and the effects of verbalization and thinking in causing biases. On the other side, I would suggest that inconsistencies are not necessarily symptoms of misleading expression of true attitudes that need to be dug out, but rather they are an expression of different sides of our aesthetic identities. There is hardly a "deep core" of true attitudes, our mental life consists instead of features that are not always coherent. According to this view, introspective opacity (and in particular, aesthetic opacity) consists in the amount of inconsistency between the person's different sources in which he manifests himself. The notion of an authentic self (my *true* aesthetic attitudes, taste and emotional reaction showed by means of empirical – even neuroscientific - research) as opposed to "illusory" selves is problematic.

Aesthetic education and expertise could lead to a higher awareness of one's own evaluative processes, helping to avoid prejudices and mitigate some of the phenomena of aesthetic opacity we previously saw. But opacity is also an essential aspect of the confabulatory nature of our mind: we are not able to describe neither the causal physiological processes occurring in our brains, nor all the imponderable and irrelevant factors that influence our everyday experience and judgment. The attitudes we express and the reasons we give for our judgment are part of an imperfect self-construction of our identity and it would be superficial to consider it to be a mere illusion.

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