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Foreword

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This issue of *Aisthesis* grew out of the international and interdisciplinary conference «From the Aesthetic Mind to the Symbolic Mind. Perceptual Dynamics, Mimetic Practices, Human Theatricality» held at the University of Florence on 26-28 October 2017. By bringing together researchers from various academic disciplines (philosophy, archaeology, psychology, performing arts, anthropology) and with different backgrounds and expertise, the conference intended to cast new light on central notions such as «aesthetic mind», «mimetic practices», «theatricality», and to refresh the debate about their relevance and role in human experience and their mutual connections.

What are the main features of an aesthetic mind and how does the human aesthetic capacity relate to the ability for symbolic thinking? What are the cognitive implications of an aesthetic attitude in humans, and how our sense of the self is modified, shaped, moulded by the ability to perceive aesthetically and aesthetically encounter the world? An aesthetic mind is, *per se*, an expressive or theatrical mind, i.e. a mind that expresses itself in gestures, practices, performative acts: what are the implications of the concept of «theatricality» for our understanding of the functioning of the human mind? This is only a small sample of the many questions and issues addressed by the conference participants; the most part of the papers presented at the Florence conference is now included in this issue of *Aisthesis*.

We would like to follow, in this foreword, at least some of the many relevant threads that the issue weaves together. Christoph Wulf, whose paper opens the issue, provides relevant insights into the anthropological value of mimetic-performative practices, and the role that they play in the constitution of the individual imaginary (Christoph Wulf, *The mimetic creation of the imaginary*). At the crossroads between anthropology and aesthetics, Lorenzo Bartalesi's paper investigates the relevance of the aesthetic dimension to human cultural transmission processes (Lorenzo Bartalesi, *From the*

aesthetic mind to the human cultures: Towards an anthropology of aesthetics). This idea of a common ground between aesthetic practices and cultural processes is also discussed, from an evolutionary perspective, in José Ignacio Contreras's contribution (*Playing with pattern. Aesthetic communication as distributed cognition*), whereas the relevance of the aesthetic dimension to symbolic thought is at the heart of Fausto Fraisopi's paper: he asks what the aesthetic experience and scientific theorizing have in common with each other (Fausto Fraisopi, *From Aesthetic Structures to Symbolic and back: Complex Dynamics between Art and Science*). Valeria Maggiore, Federica Buongiorno and Anna Caterina Dalmaso all focus, in their contributions, on different features of the human mind, and on how the aesthetic dimension opens up a unique window through which these features of the mind can be better appreciated and investigated. The human mind in plastic, and the more so the more it is involved in aesthetic experiences (Valeria Maggiore, *Is aesthetic mind a plastic mind? Reflections on Goethe and Catherine Malabou*); the human mind is extended, and phenomenology can provide the missing theoretical framework to develop a more complex and comprehensive theory of the (digitally) extended self (Federica Buongiorno, *From the Extended Mind to the Digitally Extended Self: A Phenomenological Critique*); the human mind is a techno-aesthetic mind, and technicity, as a cultural and symbolic attitude, is constitutively rooted in the aesthetic dimension of human experience (Anna Caterina Dalmaso, *Techno-aesthetic thinking. Technicity and Symbolism in the Body*).

Fascinating insights into the close relationship between the aesthetic and the symbolic dimension of the human mind are also provided by the book symposium «The Geometric Enigma», which features three critical pieces by Dean Falk, Fabio Martini and Ellen Dissanayake dealing with Ellen Dissanayake's and Ekkehart Malotki's latest book, *Early Rock Art of the American West: The Geometric Enigma* (2018). In this book, the earliest human graphic expressions in North America, which consist almost exclusively of non-represen-

tational images composed of geometric marks, are interpreted in the light of Ellen Dissanayake's theory of «making special behaviour», i.e. as instantiations of a universally human artifying behaviour which predates the emergence of symbolic thought and makes it possible.

As hinted above, an aesthetic mind is, *per se*, an expressive, theatrical mind. This issue of *Aisthesis* is further enriched by a special focus on Marina Abramović's performance art and artistic legacy, featuring an interview with Abramović by Marta Rosa and two critical pieces by Andrea Mecacci (*Eating an Onion. Notes on Marina Abramović*) and Maddalena Mazzocut-Mis (*Theatricality and performativity: the relationship between artist and spectator*). Rosa, Mecacci and Mazzocut-Mis all contribute, in an original and thought-provoking way, to the exploration of the concepts of «performance», «theatricality», «performativity», and how they are related to the aesthetic and symbolic functioning of the human mind.

The final part of the issue – *Varia* – collects six relevant essays on various topics and subjects in modern and contemporary aesthetics: on theoretical issues in philosophy of art (Andrew Benjamin, *Doubt and Indifference: Threshold Conditions within the Work of Art* and Elena Tavani, *Theatricality in Installation Artworks. An overview*), on photography (Michele Bertolini, *La trasfigurazione della quotidianità: medium, sguardo e costruzione finzionale nella fotografia di Jeff Wall*), on painting from a cross-cultural perspective (Ju-Yeon Hwang, *Culture and Affect in Aesthetic Experience of Pictorial Realism: An Eighteenth-Century Korean Literatus' Reception of Western Religious Painting in Beijing*), on music and musical experience (Mariangela Calleja, *The Sublime in Music and the Musically Sublime in Lutoslawski's Three Poems of Henri Michaux, 1961-63* and Lucia Angelino, *Les frontières entre réel et imaginaire à l'épreuve des promenades sonores in situ*).