

Foreword

Fabrizio Desideri & Ellen Dissanayake

What “sort” of mind is required in order to be able to engage in aesthetic experiences? What are the marks of the aesthetic mind and which features distinguish aesthetic mental states? As humans, we are able not only to produce cognitions, feel emotions, use symbols, but also to engage in aesthetic and artistic experiences. How did our aesthetic mind arise over the course of evolution? Is it a by-product, or a side effect, of the development of our symbolic-linguistic competences or, on the contrary, is precisely our aesthetic ability that allows the development (both in a phylogenetic and in an ontogenetic sense) of human language and symbolic thought? What is the relationship between the emergence of human modern mind and the origin of art?

These are some of the challenging issues addressed during the International Conference *The Aesthetic Mind and Origin of Art*, held at the University of Florence, Department of Education, from January, 23rd to January 25th 2014. The essays collected in the present issue of «Aisthesis. Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico» mostly stem from talks originally delivered at the conference by leading researchers and international scholars across a wide range of disciplines.

The first three contributions, by Fabrizio Desideri (*Epigenesis and Coherence of the Aesthetic Mechanism*), Ellen Dissanayake («*Aesthetic primitives*»: *Fundamental biological elements of a naturalistic aesthetics*) and Fabio Martini (*Making «art» in prehistory: signs and figures of metaphorical Palaeolithic man*) focus on the question of the *origin* of human aesthetic attitude and artistic behaviour. While Desideri speaks in favour of the existence of a non-modular device at the origin of the aesthetic mind, capable of blending non-species-specific dispositional factors, Dissanayake describes a series of “aesthetic “primitives”, or fundamental aesthetic factors, already present in early *sapiens* and that continue to influence human art making and aesthetic response today; Martini, moving from the analysis of early archaeological evidences, argues that human art origi-

nated as an organic, and not extemporaneous, system of figurations, developed by our early ancestors. The relationship between archaeology, early art and the aesthetic mind is also a central topic in Gianluca Consoli's (*Early art and the evolution of grounded emotions*) and Elisabeth Schellekens' (*On the rise of the aesthetic mind: Archaeology and philosophy*) papers.

Moving on the boundary between Darwin's theory of evolution, theoretical biology and brain sciences, contributions by Lorenzo Bartalesi and Mariagrazia Portera (*Beyond the nature-culture dichotomy: new avenues for the research in Evolutionary Aesthetics*), Salvatore Tedesco (*Compositional homology and creative thinking*) and Vincenzo Vitiello (*The aesthetic experience as a characteristic feature of brain dynamics*) all refer to recent theoretical/experimental advancements, respectively in evolutionary biology, evolutionary developmental biology and micro-physics of brain dynamics, in order to account for the emergence of human ability to engage in aesthetic experiences and exercise aesthetic preferences.

The last three essays included in the issue, by Jean-Pierre Cometti (*Making the Difference: John Dewey and the Naturalization of Aesthetics*), Elio Franzini (*Phenomenology and Neuroaesthetics*) e Roberta Dreon (*Shared aesthetic starting points? Evolutionary aesthetics from a cultural-naturalistic perspective*) call the aesthetic naturalism into question: they deeply discuss prospects, limits and pitfalls of a "naturalized aesthetics" and argue for a non-reductionist and pluralistic interaction between philosophy and biosciences, also recalling some fruitful insights from John Dewey and his cultural-naturalistic perspective on the origin of art and aesthetic behaviour.

The "Miscellanea" comprises an essay by John L. Bell, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario, Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and one of the greatest logicians of our time, discussing the nature of mathematical beauty and the connections between mathematics and the arts.