

8th
Visual
Properties
Driving
Visual
Preference
workshop

Friday, 27th May 2022



www.bertamini.org/lab/vpdvp.html



Programme

09:30. Welcome from Organisers and introductions

- 10:00. **Keynote 1 Nicola Bruno, University of Parma, Italy**
The place of selfies in the empirical investigations of art and visual culture
- 11:00. Marco Roccato, Enrico Cancelli, and Mariapia Lucia
Looking for the Looking Glass: Mirror and Reflection Detection in Paintings Using Computer Vision
- 11:15. Maria Loconsole, Alessandra Geraci, and Lucia Regolin
Inherent perceptual cues support numerical discrimination similarly in infants and domestic chicks

11:30-12:00. Coffee break

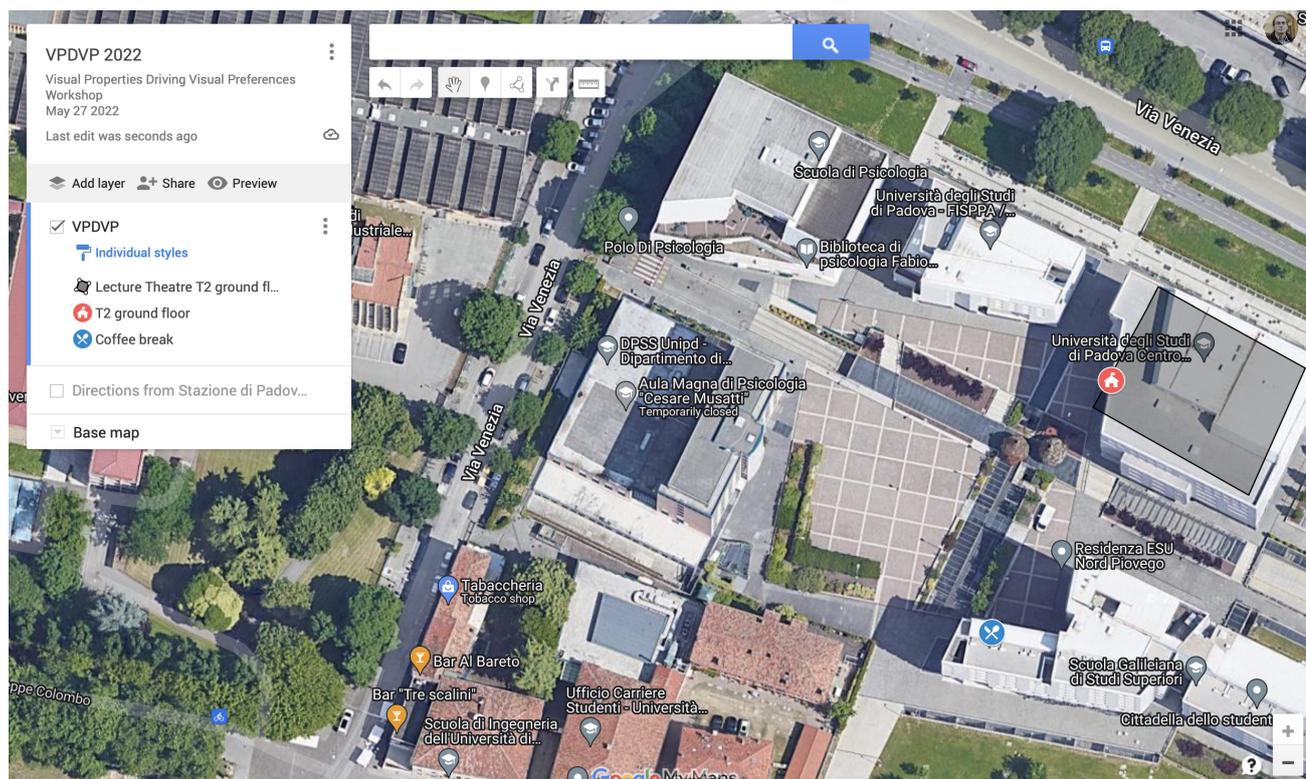
- 12:00. Anikó Illés, Bernadett Arndt, and Cintia Bali
How do we look at symmetry and asymmetry?
- 12:15. Alexis Makin, Andrew Jones, Elena Karakashevska, and Yiovanna Derpsch
Alcohol intoxication makes people more sensitive to task irrelevant visual symmetry
- 12:30. **Keynote 2 Nick Wade, Dundee University, Scotland**
Binocular Art

13:30-15:00. Lunch

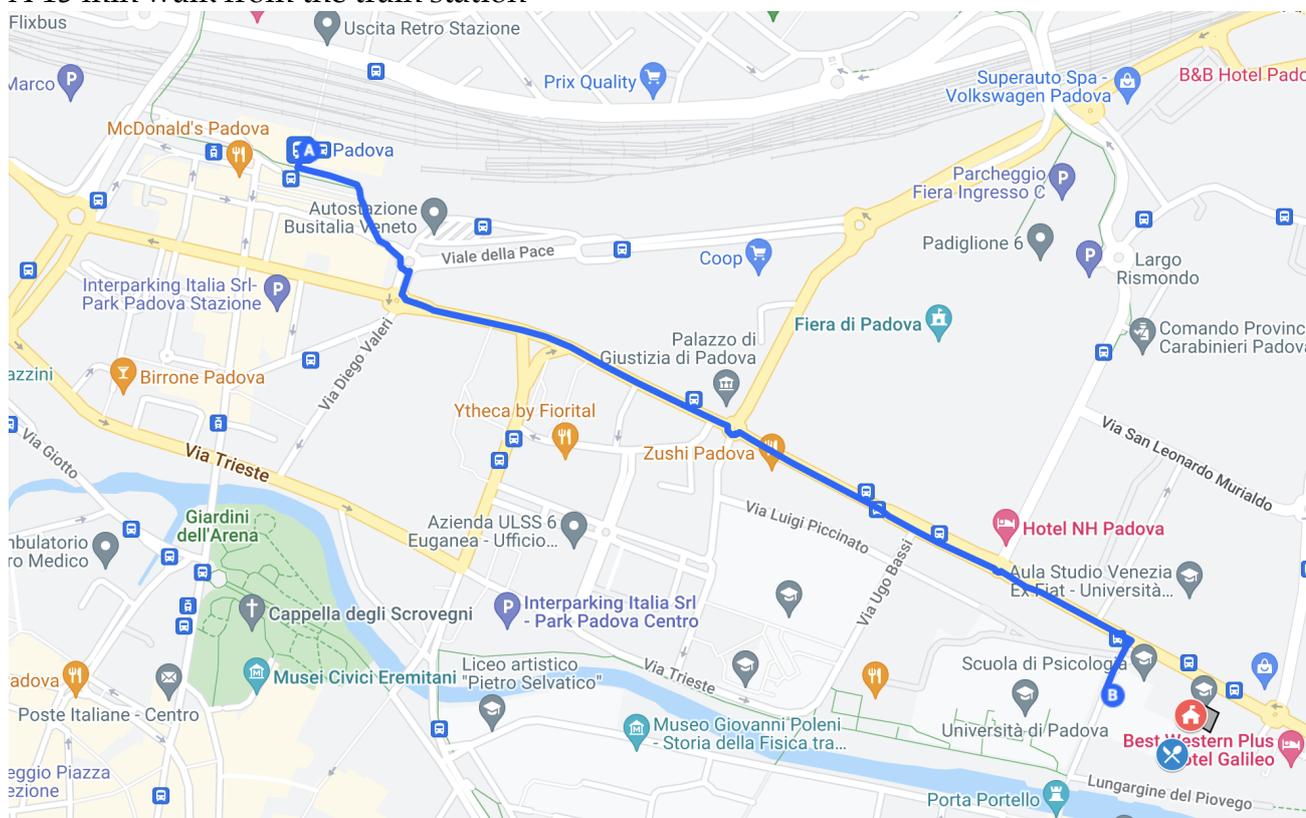
- 15:00. Ronald Hübner & Emily Ufken
The role of curvature in Hogarth's "Line of Beauty"
- 15:15. Carlo Andrea Rozzi, Alessandro Voltini, Fabio Antonacci, Massimo Nucci, and Massimo Grassi
A listening experiment comparing the timbre of two Stradivari with other violins
- 15:30. Selina M. Weiler, Thomas Jacobsen
"I'm getting too old for this stuff": The conceptual structure of tattoo aesthetics
- 15:45. **Keynote 3: Denis Pelli, New York University, USA (online)**
Some psychophysics of beauty judgement
- 16:45. Paolo Barbieri, Pietro Sarasso, Katiuscia Sacco, and Irene Ronga
The aesthetic aftereffect: an electrophysiological investigation of the top-down effects induced by aesthetic experiences
- 17:00. Michele Vicovaro, Mario Dalmaso, and Marco Bertamini
The symmetric self and the asymmetric stranger: Symmetry modulates the self-prioritisation effect
- 17:15. **Keynote 4: Michael Kubovy, University of Virginia, USA (online)**
Experiences that Drive Pleasure
- 18:15. **Onwards Roundtable discussion**

📍 Venue: School of Psychology, via Venezia 16, Padova, Room T1

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=15-pKET3YZOZAQP57YPRdlu9gf1erAx>



A 15 min walk from the train station



If you have registered for online attendance, please use the link below to join the webinar:

<https://unipd.zoom.us/j/82965833209?pwd=S0gyOWtYOFFqQzJIQVNPb0VxcDdndz09>

Passcode: VPDVP2022

Keynote Abstracts

The place of selfies in the empirical investigations of art and visual culture

Nicola Bruno

<http://www2.unipr.it/~brunic22/>

University of Parma

Since the advent of smartphones with quality cameras and preview screens, an ever increasing number of individuals is taking and sharing selfies for purposes ranging from the social to the professional. This is cultural evolution in the making, a unique opportunity to study a novel form of pseudo-artistic production and of visual communication in social interactions. In the talk I will review work documenting how selfies collected with different methods can be used to test hypotheses about neuropsychological and aesthetic constraints in portraiture and self-portraiture, about relationships between compositional choices and visual communication, and about perceptual-exploratory behaviour during selfie-taking. I will conclude by suggesting possible directions for future research.

Binocular Art

Nicholas Wade

<https://www.dundee.ac.uk/people/nicholas-wade>

University of Dundee, UK

Binocular art refers to works that require the cooperation (stereopsis) and/or competition (rivalry) between the eyes. With the invention of the stereoscope by Charles Wheatstone in the early 1830s it was possible to produce two pictures with defined horizontal disparities between them to create a novel impression of depth or rivalry. Wheatstone saw the significance of the stereoscope to art and sought to examine stereoscopic depth without monocular pictorial cues. His stereoscopic figures were outline drawings but they still contained cues to depth. Wheatstone was unable to remove all monocular depth cues from his stereograms but this was achieved a century later by Béla Julesz with random-dot stereograms. Stereoscopy and photography were invented at about the same time and most stereoscopic art is photographic. Presenting different images to each eye on the basis of colour (anaglyphs) was described in 1853 and developed later in the century. Unlike stereoscopes based on reflection or refraction, anaglyphs have the aesthetic advantage of presenting patterns that can be seen in monocular combination as well as binocularly. I will present novel stereograms (as anaglyphs) employing a wider variety of carrier patterns than random-dots. They show modulations of pictorial surface depths as well as inclusions within a binocular picture. The carrier patterns are derived from graphical or photographic textures which can have an appeal independently of the cyclopean depth they reveal. Anaglyphs displaying binocular rivalry will also be shown alone and in combination with stereoscopic depth and portraits.

Wade, N. J. (2021a). On the Origins of Terms in Binocular Vision. *I-Perception*, 12(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2041669521992381>

Wade, N. J. (2021b). On Stereoscopic Art. *I-Perception*, 12(3).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20416695211007146>

Wade, N. J. (2021c). On the Art of Binocular Rivalry. *I-Perception*, 12(6).

<https://doi.org/10.1177/20416695211053877>

Some psychophysics of beauty judgement

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New York University, USA

Since Fechner, beauty has always had a special place in psychophysics. I will present experiments done with my students exploring the feeling of beauty. We find that feeling beauty requires attention, and could be nothing more than pleasure. Beauty is especially integrative, sensitive to many aspects of context. Yet beauty judgement is like one-dimensional sensory ratings, in transmitting only 2 or 3 bits (i.e. 7 ± 2 categories).

Experiences that Drive Pleasure

Michael Kubovy

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Kubovy

University of Virginia, USA

I will discuss two topics: First I will discuss complexity as a visual property, and argue that in some important cases it isn't visual, because it requires counter-factual imagining. Second, I will discuss how preference might be approached from the point of view of an empirical aesthetician by listing some fundamental motivations that enter into the pleasures we may derive from art.

Abstracts (alphabetical by last name)

The aesthetic aftereffect: an electrophysiological investigation of the top-down effects induced by aesthetic experiences

Paolo Barbieri, Pietro Sarasso, Katuscia Sacco, Irene Ronga

BIP (BraIn Plasticity and behaviour changes) Research Group, Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Italy

Previous neurocomputational models of aesthetic appreciation highlighted the relationship between learning and beauty. We recently proposed “The stopping for knowledge hypothesis”, suggesting that aesthetically pleasing stimuli, while inducing an enhanced sensory processing, are able to elicit a transient motor inhibition, to redirect most neural resources on perception. In other words, aesthetic experiences may actively re-orient attention toward the sensory environment. However, it is not clear whether similar effects may be observed only transiently, in response to aesthetically pleasing sensory events, or whether instead the contemplation of beauty may induce some aftereffects in the processing of subsequent stimuli. It is possible that an aesthetic sensory context where it is expected to perceive beauty might induce a top-down effect on perceptual sensitivity, boosting attention and sensory processing. To test this hypothesis, here we present two different studies. In Experiment 1, we verified whether the listening to preferred vs. non-preferred music pieces for 5 minutes is able to modulate the subsequent sensory processing of a sequence of auditory stimuli. Through the recording of the EEG, we demonstrated that, following preferred music listening, the sensory processing is significantly enhanced, as demonstrated by ERP results and by the modulation of the neural oscillations in the alpha frequency bands. In Experiment 2, we explored the presence of motor inhibition following image contemplation. Participants were asked: to observe landscape pictures (duration: between 5 and 6 seconds); to respond as fast as possible to the offset of the image; and to rate the beauty of the presented image. We observed that participants response time were slower after the contemplation of the subjectively more appreciated pictures. Overall, the present preliminary findings suggest that aesthetic experiences are able to induce different top-down effects on perceptual sensitivity, including the enhancement of the subsequent sensory processing and motor inhibition.

The role of curvature in Hogarth’s “Line of Beauty”

Ronald Hübner, Emily Ufken

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In his book ‘Analysis of Beauty’ from 1753, the British artist William Hogarth introduced his ‘Line of Beauty’ (LoB) by depicting seven S-shaped lines and declaring #4, which has a certain curvature, as the most beautiful. Even today, the LoB has a persistently strong influence on many areas such as landscape art and design, calligraphy, furniture design, architecture, dance, etc. Therefore, it is all the more astonishing that Hogarth's claim has never been tested empirically. In our study, we made up for it and found that the LoB is indeed the most preferred among Hogarth’s seven lines. Modelling revealed that curvature is nonlinearly related to beauty and explains more than 90% of the variance in the mean aesthetic judgments. However, since the LoB also differs from the other lines in further aspects, such as thickness, length, etc., it is open whether its preference was due to its specific curvature alone. To investigate such aspects, we conducted a second experiment in which in addition to curvature also the asymmetry of arclength was varied systematically. Our results show that, for a given mean curvature, S-shapes whose lower arc is slightly longer than the upper arc, are preferred.

How do we look at symmetry and asymmetry?

Anikó Illés, Bernadett Arndt, Cintia Bali

Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design, Budapest, Hungary

In our previous study we found significant and relevant results about symmetry and meaning comparing artists and laypersons (Arndt & Illés, 2021). Our research question keeps on with the double issue of symmetry and meaning, and expertness also, widening the sources of methods with eye-tracking. We asked 41 artists and 35 laypersons to take part in our research which was held in a laboratory. We implied a set of simple forms varied by the dimensions of symmetry-asymmetry and meaningful-meaningless. The time of exploration was free for all. Taking into consideration that these visual elements were not artworks themselves, just simple visual stimuli, it was worth a try to describe the difference between the lengths of the exploration time we perceived in our sample. Our data implies that artists view the stimuli longer than laypersons. They have higher fixation counts, fixation durations and visit durations, both on figurative and non-figurative images. Following the elimination of the differences between the individual exploration times the statistics with the eye movement data show clear results. The main in-group differences seem to be the followings: non-experts spend more time viewing symmetric pictures, as long as the stimuli is non-figurative. According to our results, laypersons' attention during a preference task is led by symmetry, unless they have to look at figurative images. In that case, the focus shifts to other features than symmetry. On the other hand, experts' fixations and viewing times are longer on asymmetric pictures than on symmetric ones, but this difference disappears if they are looking at figurative images. These results can help in a deeper understanding of symmetry processing and the limits of symmetry-preference, since these issues already have controversial theories and results in the literature (Leder et al. 2019, Mankin et al. 2020).

Leder, H., Tinio, P., Brieber, D., Kröner, T., Jacobsen, T., & Rosenberg, R. (2019). Symmetry is not a universal law of beauty. *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, 37(1), 104-114.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0276237418777941>

Makin, A.D.J., Rahman, A., Bertamini, M. (2020) No effect of multi-axis dot pattern symmetry on subjective duration. *PLoS ONE* 15(12): e0238554. <http://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238554>

Illés, A. & Arndt, B. (2021). *Aesthetic judgement influenced by symmetry and prototypicality in the spotlight of expertness* [paper presentation]. XXIV Conference of the International Association of Empirical Aesthetics, London.

Inherent perceptual cues support numerical discrimination similarly in infants and domestic chicks

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Symmetrical grouping is a non-mathematical perceptual strategy often employed to solve numerical tasks. For instance, to enumerate a set of 9 elements, rather than adding each element one-by-one, we mentally create and manipulate smaller equal-sized subsets: 3+3+3 or 3x3. This strategy is widely attested in adult humans, though it is still unclear how early it is available and if it relies on a predisposition to disassemble groups of elements into smaller same-size (i.e., perceptually symmetrical) subsets. Here we show that four-month infants and one-day-old domestic chicks show a similar preference for perceptually asymmetrical patterns that supports complex numerical discriminations. In both studies we familiarized subjects with sets of elements of even numerosities,

and then tested them for their spontaneous preference between two novel sets of odd numerosities (i.e., 7v9, or 9vs11), one of which being a prime number. Prime numbers never allow for symmetrical grouping, i.e., for creating all same-sized subsets. Both infants and chicks inspected longer the prime numerosity (7 or 11), irrespective of it being the smaller or the larger in the comparison. Our results suggest the presence of an early-emerging mechanism that is spontaneously employed by infants and domestic chicks to discriminate sets of elements based on their perceptual features. The biological origin and the possible ecological value of such a mechanism are discussed in light of the convergent evidence from distantly related and ecologically diverse (altricial vs. precocial) species.

Alcohol intoxication makes people more sensitive to task irrelevant visual symmetry

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² University of East Anglia, UK

Abstract visual symmetry activates a network of brain regions in the extrastriate cortex. This symmetry activation can be measured with event related potentials. Amplitude at posterior electrodes is more negative when participants view symmetrical compared to asymmetrical stimuli. This difference wave is called the Sustained Posterior Negativity (SPN). Previous work has shown that the SPN is robust to changes in task, memory load and visuospatial attention. However, it is unclear whether the SPN is also robust to changes in mental state. To find out, we measured SPN waves in alcohol and placebo conditions. In the alcohol session, participants received a 0.65g/kg ethanol dose from 3 vodka – lemonade drinks immediately before EEG recording began. In the placebo session, participants received 3 non-alcoholic vodka lemonade mixers with similar sensory properties. Alcohol and placebo sessions were completed by the same participants on different days. Stimuli were comprised of 64 Gabor elements arranged randomly or with 4-fold reflectional symmetry. Gabors were either green or black and participants discriminated element colour. Initial results from 13 participants were surprising: Contrary to our predictions, the SPN was *enhanced* by alcohol intoxication. Meanwhile, the P1 component was unaffected, and the N1 component was reduced. This suggests moderate alcohol intoxication specifically facilitates task irrelevant perceptual organization. This could contribute to the aesthetic and hedonic qualities of drunkenness.

Looking for the Looking Glass: Mirror and Reflection Detection in Paintings Using Computer Vision

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People tend to make systematic mistakes about what is visible from another person’s viewpoint and what is visible when looking through mirrors, and perspective-taking tasks can be used in conjunction with questionnaires to gauge performance in mentalizing abilities (Soranzo, Bertamini, & Cassidy, 2021). One phenomenon linked to distortions in perspective taking during perception of pictures is the Venus effect. The Venus effect takes place when viewers seeing a person’s reflection in a mirror are led to assume that the reflected person sees the same reflection as the viewer, even though viewer and reflected person do not share the same line of sight (Bertamini, Latto, & Spooner, 2003). A first online experiment was carried out by asking participants to describe in writing the content of paintings showing different scene layouts, replicating and extending previous findings on the Venus effect. Designing computer vision systems that can emulate human performance in detecting scene layouts that can elicit Venus effect could prove useful for investigating the basis of perspective-taking skills. However, mirror detection, a prerequisite for this task, still poses several challenges (e.g., ambiguity between co-occurrence of objects and actual mirroring, similarity between reflection and reflected object). For this reason, we firstly fitted machine learning models to a set of images chosen

from online art catalogues. The images were split evenly into two subsets, consisting of 250 paintings with mirrors and 250 paintings without mirrors but of similar style and content (i.e., depicting human figures). This was done to assess whether a model can generalize the concept of mirror in non-naturalistic artworks. Secondly, we analyzed the model performance in discriminating between three classes of paintings set up by human judges based on scene layout, to understand if the models can mimic human performance. In these two sets of experiments, our models achieved an accuracy of 78% and 54% respectively, showing encouraging discriminating capabilities that warrant further investigation using larger datasets.

Bertamini, M., Latto, R., & Spooner, A. (2003). The Venus effect: people's understanding of mirror reflections in paintings. *Perception*, 32(5), 593-599. <https://doi.org/10.1068/p3418>

Soranzo, A., Bertamini, M., & Cassidy, S. (2021). How do children reason about mirrors? A comparison between adults, typically developed children, and children with autism spectrum disorder. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.722213>

A listening experiment comparing the timbre of two Stradivari with other violins

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The violins of Stradivari are recognized worldwide as an excellence in craftsmanship, a model for instrument makers, and an unachievable desire for collectors and players. However, despite the myth surrounding these instruments, blindfolded players tendentially prefer to play modern violins. Here, we present a double blind listening experiment aimed at analyzing and comparatively rating the sound timbre of violins. The mythic instruments were listened to among other well regarded and not so well-regarded violins. 70 listeners (violin makers of the Cremona area) rated the timbre difference between the simple musical scales played on a test and a reference violin, and the results showed that their preference converged on one particular Stradivari. The acoustical measurements revealed some similarities between the subjective ratings and the physical characteristics of the violins. It is speculated that the myth of Stradivari could have been boosted, among other factors, by the specimens of tonal superior quality, which biased favourably the judgment on his instruments and spread on all of the maker's production. These results contribute to the understanding of the timbre of violins and suggest the characteristics that are in a relationship with the pleasantness of the timbre.

The symmetric self and the asymmetric stranger: Symmetry modulates the self-prioritization effect

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It is well established that individuals can create strong and reliable associations between an arbitrary stimulus, such as a geometrical shape, and the self (Cunningham & Turk, 2017; Sui et al., 2012). Here, in two experiments we tested whether such an association can be modulated when the symmetry of the shape is considered. Participants were first asked to associate, in one condition, the 'self' with symmetric shapes and a 'stranger' with asymmetric shapes, whereas, in another condition, the association was inverted (i.e., self-asymmetric vs. stranger-symmetric). The two conditions were manipulated either within (Experiment 1, lab-based) or between (Experiment 2, online) participants. In both experiments, participants were involved in a speeded classification task requiring to classify

a given shape (symmetric vs. asymmetric) and a label ('you' vs. 'stranger') as matching or nonmatching with the previously learned association. In both experiments, faster responses and greater accuracy emerged when both the shape and the label matched with the self-identity with respect to all other conditions, but this was true only for the condition in which the self was associated with symmetric shapes. When the self was associated with asymmetric shapes, no evidence of such a self-prioritization effect emerged at all. These results appear to indicate a sort of cognitive resistance for the associations in which the self is related to stimuli characterized by negative valence (asymmetric) and strangers are related to stimuli characterized by positive valence (symmetric). In other words, there appears to be a spontaneous tendency to associate the self with aesthetically pleasant stimuli and strangers with less pleasant stimuli.

Cunningham, S. J., & Turk, D. J. (2017). Editorial: a review of self-processing biases in cognition.

Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology, 70(6), 987-995.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17470218.2016.1276609>

Sui, J., He, X., & Humphreys, G. W. (2012). Perceptual effects of social salience: evidence from self-prioritization effects on perceptual matching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 38(5), 1105-1117.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029792>

“I’m getting too old for this stuff”: The conceptual structure of tattoo aesthetics

Selina M. Weiler, Thomas Jacobsen

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Body modifications are gaining acceptance and popularity. As a result, the question of how different subpopulations appreciate tattoos in terms of aesthetics arose. The purpose of this study was to investigate the conceptual structure of tattoo aesthetics, with a particular emphasis on the effects of internalized social norms and expertise. In a timed free-listing task, three groups (≤ 49 years, ≥ 50 years, and experts) of 497 participants were instructed to write down adjectives that could define tattoo aesthetics. We highlighted the variance and complexity with which individuals verbally expressed their perceived aesthetic appeal of tattoos using several statistical analyses, including a generalized Procrustes analysis. Surprisingly, the results for two of the three groups did not reflect a coherent concept of beauty, nor did they present a clear bipolar dimension of beautiful/ugly. Nonetheless, the concept of beauty was found to be prevalent in tattoo aesthetics, as well as the identification of aesthetic and descriptive-evaluative dimensions, with adjectives such as beautiful, ugly, multicolored, and interesting being the most notable, albeit not with the highest valence. The study discovered a high overall diversity of terms that elicit cognitive and affective components, as well as results influenced by person-situation interactions in a field-theoretic sense, based on the complexities of the phenomenon.

Weiler, S. M., & Jacobsen, T. (2021). “I’m getting too old for this stuff”: The conceptual structure of tattoo aesthetics. *Acta Psychologica*, 219, 103390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2021.103390>

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