UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

THE ROLE OF EMPATHY BETWEEN COGNITION AND AESTHETIC SENSE-MAKING: THE CASE OF TRAGEDY AND THE MYTH OF MEDEA

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Culture Studies, specialisation in Literary Cultures

By

Federico Rudari

Universidade Católica Portuguesa – Faculty of Human Sciences

September 2020

THE ROLE OF EMPATHY BETWEEN COGNITION AND
AESTHETIC SENSE-MAKING: THE CASE OF TRAGEDY AND THE
MYTH OF MEDEA

Dissertation submitted to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain a
Master's Degree in Culture Studies, specialisation in Literary Cultures

By

Federico Rudari

Universidade Católica Portuguesa – Faculty of Human Sciences

Under the supervision of Professor Ana Margarida Abrantes

September 2020

Resumo

Adoptando uma abordagem baseada na fenomenologia e na semiótica cognitiva, a dissertação define e discute a empatia e o processo empático destacando o seu papel em contextos e encontros intersubjectivos, bem como enquanto instrumento para a compreensão da ligação entre observador e objecto artístico. Esta forma particular de conhecimento pertence à experiência original da percepção dos objectos exteriores, que é influenciada pela memória de conhecimentos anteriores, reservatório de significado na unidade fenomenal com o outro (Zahavi 2010, 2012), e diferentes dispositivos cognitivos (metáforas, domínios narrativos e semânticos) que contribuem para a passagem da observação à compreensão. A dissertação visa explicar como a atitude epistémica da empatia permite uma forma coporealizada (*embodied*) de compreensão, que ocorre na experiência narratológica dos estados de outro sujeito e na contemplação estética das obras artísticas. Neste contexto, o significado está profundamente ligado às dimensões emocional, física e mental do processo de fazer sentido: a dissertação analisa as reacções visuais, corporais e cognitivas evocadas pelos estímulos estéticos e a forma como os padrões de consciência dos espectadores são capazes de responder emocionalmente à experiência das obras de arte.

Além disso, o estudo teórico sobre empatia é aplicado ao estudo da tragédia, reconhecendo a sua relevância na forma de evolução desta representação literária e performativa ao longo do tempo. Abordando as particularidades significativas da tragédia e das suas personagens, este trabalho centrar-se-á no mito de Medeia ao longo da história, tanto na sua representação literária por Eurípedes (432 a.C.) como na adaptação cinematográfica de Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969).

Palavras-chave: empatia, compreensão, troca intersubjectiva, percepção estética, domínios de experiência, corporealização (*embodiment*), tragédia, mimese, Medeia.

Abstract

Adopting a phenomenological and cognitive semiotic approach, the dissertation defines and discusses empathy and the empathic process highlighting its role in intersubjective contexts and encounters, as well as a tool for comprehension of the unity between observer and artistic object. This peculiar form of knowledge pertains to the original experience of outer objects' perception, which is influenced by memory of previous knowledge, reservoir of meaning in the phenomenal unity with the other (Zahavi 2010, 2012), and different cognitive devices (metaphors, narrative and semantic domains) which contribute to the shift from observation to comprehension. The dissertation aims to explain how empathy's epistemic attitude allows an embodied form of understanding, which occurs in the narratological experience of another subject's states and the aesthetic contemplation of artistic works. In this context, meaning is profoundly linked with emotional, physical and mental dimensions of sense-making: the dissertation analyses visual, embodied and cognitive reactions evoked by aesthetic stimuli and the way spectators' patterns of consciousness are able to emotionally respond to the experience of artworks.

Furthermore, the theoretical study on empathy is applied to the examination of tragedy, acknowledging its relevance in shaping the evolution of literary and performative representation through time. Addressing the significative particularities of tragedy and its characters, the research will focus on the myth of Medea across history, both in its literary depiction by Euripides (432 BC) and the film adaptation directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969).

Keywords: empathy, comprehension, intersubjective exchange, aesthetic perception, domains of experience, embodiment, tragedy, mimesis, Medea.

Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Ana Margarida Abrantes, for the constant support throughout the research and writing process. She has always been present with stimulating suggestions, constructive discussions and enriching new perspectives. She encouraged my interest giving an exciting direction to my ideas: this work would not have been possible without her.

I would like to thank my parents, brother and entire family for pushing me to follow my interests and passions with love and affection. Even though I have been away from home in the last few years, their support has never changed. Grazie.

The last two years in Lisbon have been incredibly stimulating, full of amazing people, art and beautiful landscapes. This dissertation is dense of all the inspiring experiences I had the opportunity to live. My warmest thanks to my flatmates, colleagues and friends for their enthusiasm, creative minds and authentic spirits. Thanks to Manel for the unconditional support from the beginning to the end of this challenging process.

Last, a special thanks to all my friends, spread all around the world. Naming them all would be impossible, but they are a permanent inspiration to push the boundaries, challenging ideas and stimulating my creativity. In particular, thanks to Elisa and Matteo, the best version of me.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In order to understand the outer world from a human perspective it is essential to analyse the way we perceive it, precisely conceiving perception as the experience of making sense of what surrounds us. Explaining the manner in which we grasp objects, people and contexts we observe every day to comprehend what pertains to the world around us, has been attempted by different methodologies and disciplines, among which philosophy, cognitive science and psychology.

Since the 20th century, the concept of empathy has been addressed as central in this context. Referring to empathy as the response of *feeling into* the psychophysical experience of someone else, consistently in opposition to what is defined as sympathy, namely being moved by or *feeling for* what we observe, this idea has been applied in the definition of perception in both an intersubjective and an aesthetic framework. In particular, American philosopher Shaun Gallagher claims that our social cognition is "a form of empathy" in its entirety, since it "is our basic and default way of understanding others" (Gallagher 2012, 358). The sensorial data that we empathically collect throughout the examination of the world are fundamental when discussing the human mind, the mechanisms involved in its functioning and how it makes sense of its surroundings.

Thus, this dissertation aims to analyse the concept of empathy not as a mere emotional condition, but a fundamental tool in the process of sense-making. As Hanenberg suggests in his work *Cognitive Culture Studies* (2018), cognitive and cultural studies can meet to complete each other approaching the physical and mental dimension of culture, its principles and experience, as well as introduce and address the influence of culture in cognitive perception. In this frame, this dissertation aims to focus on the analysis of tragedy, and in particular the myth of Medea in its forms and practices, bringing together its cultural understanding together with cognitive and neural findings on which this perspective, crossing boundaries between disciplines, is grounded. Moreover, bridging the historical perspective on a cultural object, upon which contemporary forms of literary and performative artistic expression are grounded, with a cognitive vision of the mind permits not only to address a specific genre with more recent findings and methodologies, but also to re-mediate a form of artistic practice which cannot be neglected when considering the fields of literary and performative studies up to recent times.

In fact, on the one hand empathy is considered in this dissertation in its epistemically essential role played in understanding, considering with a phenomenological perspective the relevance of individual and collective experiences, perception and intentionality. On the other hand, sense-making is studied acknowledging the centrality of its process itself, following a cognitive semiotic approach focused on the relevance of meaning and the expressive and embodied mechanisms involved. The research questions leading this project focus on the relation between empathy and the aesthetic experience, and specifically the case of tragedy. What is the role of empathy in aesthetic perception and comprehension? In what way does the empathic process influence the aesthetic experience, and which are the cognitive mechanisms involved? How does this process apply to the specific case of tragedy, both considering it as a literary work and a performative actors-audience exchange?

This research does not intend to be limited to the interpersonal dimension of empathy exclusively in subject-object relations, but it aims to address as well the role of empathy in the aesthetic experience, focusing on its influence and function in artistic perception and narratives. The methodology involved bridges a systematic literary review which approaches disciplines and compares them with an analysis of the experience of the world, which starts from a first- and second-person perception of empathy and the empathic experience to reach a shared conception of the phenomenon. Specifically, the particular case of the Greek tragedy is addressed as the central case study, in an analysis that gives particular emphasis to the audience and its experience. Adopting the example of *Medea*, both the literary work by Euripides (432 BC) and its film adaptation by director Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969), empathy and sense-making will be framed in this particular context of perceptive experience. In fact, tragedy by its mimetic essence and unique way of depicting human nature represents a significative example in the analysis of the audience's psychophysical experience, especially considering the role of empathy in the relationship between spectators and tragic heroes.

The first chapter of the dissertation discusses empathy and the empathic experience, specifically focusing on intersubjective contexts. To start, several conceptions of empathy are presented following multiple theories, approaches and authors, so as to trace how the concept has been described and perceived until reaching today's interpretation. After distinguishing empathy as a "cognitive state resulting from efforts to understand the other" (Tan 2013, 340) in contrast with the exclusively emotion-based sympathetic experience, the

first section goes through essential theorists who delineate empathy as a cognitive phenomenon, an approach followed through this dissertation (Husserl 1982, 1989, Stein 1989, Stueber 2006). Then, highlighting the essential role played by empathy in intersubjective relations, the chapter proceeds by describing the mechanisms involved in interpersonal processes and oriented to meaning making. In fact, since perception and comprehension are deeply connected, the chapter develops a comprehensive pattern on the mechanisms implied in understanding, addressing corporeal actions and physical manifestations as embodied field of individual expression (Schutz 1967, Lakoff and Johnson 1999). In conclusion, the third section of this chapter deals with the reception and understanding of others' psychophysical states, both through the entanglement of semantic domains (Brandt 2004), recollection (Bruner and Kalmar 1998) and emphasising the key function of simulation. From this theoretical framework there emerges a definition of empathy as a multifaceted concept that encompasses both physical and mental processes that are portrayed in an extensive and coherent picture of this cognitive phenomenon.

The second chapter shifts the focus from an intersubjective perspective to aesthetic appreciation. Maintaining a central attention on empathy and the claim that empathy is essential in meaning making, this section questions the role played by empathy in the reception of artistic works and performances. Starting from the acknowledgement of the situatedness of art in the outer world, as both a product of human culture and an object of intensified attention and observation, this chapter questions aesthetic perception and the intangible, bridging the gap between the physicality of art as a product and the temporary duration of its experience. In particular, defining empathic perception on both an individual and collective level, the chapter continues suggesting that the mediated experience of aesthetic appreciation along with the intermediary role of art and the simulative participation of the spectators embodies those essential elements that constitute the tangible dimension in the intangibility of aesthetic perception. The third section concludes referring to empathy as the spectators' response to characters, whether literary or performed, through whom the audience is able to vicariously experience the vicissitudes of the depicted story.

The third chapter discusses tragedy as an example of how empathy is involved in sense-making in the context of artistic expressions. In particular, after a brief introduction on the historical and cultural context in which tragedy developed and its philosophical interpretation unfolded by Nietzsche (1999), mimesis is discussed as central in the cognitive

experience of tragedy, as it contributes in the aesthetic expression as a bridge between mental and bodily simulation while shaping narratives and representations to be empathically accessible for the audience. The analysis of tragedy's textual structure, poetic form and the representative tools implied in the portrayal of its characters are applied and questioned through the study of *Medea*, both in its literary version by Euripides (staged in Athens for the first time in 431 BC) and the cinematic adaptation by Pasolini (1969). Empathy and empathic understanding, as addressed in the first two chapters, are tackled in the tragic context as essential paths to meaning making in the reception of these works.

In order to shape an effective practice for the study of empathy and its application to artistic comprehension, it is crucial in this dissertation to follow a suitable methodological perspective to frame the research in the multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary field of culture studies. In particular, the process of perception and comprehension is considered in relation to body, mind and the emotional dimension, since the variety of "phenomena of human consciousness, memory, empathy, and intersubjectivity have profoundly altered our collective understanding of the nature of our psychic and physical lives, as well as the seamless interface between those two aspects of experience" (Gallese and Wojciehowski 2011, 3). Aiming to bridge the theoretical and philosophical approach, on the one hand, with the cognitive study on perception, this dissertation intends to structure a procedure of analysis adequate for a system of comprehension deeply grounded on bodily experiences and expressions, involving conceptual frameworks and social and cultural contexts. Empathy is conceptually defined through different approaches (philosophy, narrative and aesthetics) through a systematic literary review grounded on a multiplicity of disciplines (Assmann 2012). Later, the process of meaning making drawn from the comparison of disciplinary and cultural traditions is examined in correlation with the particular context of the aesthetic experience and meaning making in art.

Moreover, addressing cognition and perception through a phenomenological perspective, a certain degree of subjectivity (first-person) and intersubjectivity (second-person) is involved in the methodological approach of analysis. In this specific context, this dissertation employs what Gallagher (2007) defines an approach on "phenomenology that understands intentionality as a form of being-in-the-world, and recognizes the importance of embodied action for shaping perception, offers an interpretational framework different from purely functional or syntactic interpretation of the empirical data" (Gallagher 2007,

272). In this research, predominantly following a cognition-based method, semiotics plays a fundamental role in its way of studying interpretation and comprehension. In particular, addressing empathy, a cognitive semiotic perspective highlights the relevance of *operative knowledge*, which Sonesson (2007) defines as a specific sort of consciousness "that must exist at some, probably low, level of awareness, in order to render behaviour *understandable* (and thus explainable)" (Sonesson 2007, 91).

In the analysis of the case study, the methodology will be oriented to the phenomenological understanding of the aesthetic experience of tragedy, bridging its philosophical interpretation with the actual cognitive process involved in the reception of both the literary and cinematic versions of *Medea*. The selected field of study, tragedy, specifically following these two mediations of *Medea* is analysed in its narrative and textual expression employing tools from narratology and reception theory, as well as in its performativity, direction and storytelling using methods of visual analysis from theatre theory and film studies. The object of analysis in the encounter with the theoretical baggage brought into discussion is approached taking into account the visual, cognitive and psychophysical experience of it. For this reason, when discussing tragedy and its forms of representation the experience of empathy in aesthetic perception and comprehension is approached with tools grounded on new ethnography. In fact, this method of investigation allows highlighting the both subjective and relational nature of this aesthetic experience, giving a prominent importance to the object of analysis as perceived through individual experiences. Specifically, this methodology "is particularly interested in modes of experiencing the world, such as emotions […], embodiment […] or the sacred […], which have often been neglected by rationalistically oriented modes of social scientific inquiry" (Saukko 2003, 57). In this context, dialogic, collective and intersubjective paths of understanding, as well as mental, emotional and corporeal forms of sense-making are enhanced and implemented. On the one hand, this work addresses tragedy as a literary, social and philosophical phenomenon, focusing on its way of portraying the specific Athenian and the generic human condition. On the other hand, the tragic experience is investigated following the role of perception between imagination and mimetic expression, the empathic reaction of the audience arisen by the actors on stage and the portrayed characters, as well as the cathartic function of tragedy itself.

In brief, this dissertation aims to elaborate a comprehensive definition of empathy and an exhaustive characterisation of its mechanisms. Starting from the study of empathic perception in intersubjective experiences, the research aims to understand the role played by empathy in aesthetic comprehension, when observing artistic works in the variety of forms they can assume. Through the case of Medea and the possibility of exploring literary tools and cinematic means of expression, this dissertation questions the way empathy influences aesthetic perception and the mechanisms involved in meaning making processes.

The research conducted throughout this work addresses the specific features of empathy as both an intersubjective and artistic form of understanding. In particular, empathy is tackled in its cognitive dimension as an essential tool in perception and comprehension. Both in interpersonal and aesthetic contexts, empathy is proved throughout this dissertation to be deeply grounded on bodily and simulative processes, in which domains of experience, hermeneutic background and narrative devices play a crucial role. In the particular context of tragedy, and specifically in the case of the myth of Medea, empathy is found to be an essential mechanism to decipher the mimetic representation of events, the portrayed characters and their psychophysical states through the *as if* perspective of the audience, able to fully understand and feel into the depicted reality.

The study of empathy and its cognitive relevance are increasingly central in the analysis of cultural objects, their manifestations and comprehension. This work aims to follow the recent developments in the field of cultural analysis claiming the importance of empathy in the study of tragedy, a genre that spans from antiquity to the present day. This dissertation addresses the understanding of tragedy and its experience, which seem timeless as both are engrained in human nature.

1. Empathy and Sense-Making

1.1. A Multidisciplinary Genealogy of the Concept of Empathy: Definition and Relevance

Defining multifaceted concepts is a complicated process in research, especially when their common sense is employed (and often misleading) in everyday expressions. Frequently, we see a shift from an academic use of terms to a more generic and encompassing one. Empathy is undoubtedly one of these terms. Often included in day-to-day conversations, the use of the concept of empathy in ordinary circumstances is often mistaken for other mental and emotional states, such as sympathy, compassion, affinity, and even pity. However, in the most varied contexts, terminological discrepancies and involuntary inaccuracy are commonplace. For instance, in contrast with what many people think, specifically in the philosophical and semiotic fields, shared views (Stein 1989, 109; Gallese 2003, 519; Gallagher 2012, 357; Zlatev 2008, 223) on empathy agree that it does require a congruent emotional participation of the subjects involved in order to take place. In fact, as opposed to sympathy, empathy implies sharing an actual psychophysical state or condition with the other, in a shift from a *feeling for* to a *feeling into*.

However, describing and constructing the relation between the common conception of empathy and its philosophical and scientific understanding can be intricate and misleading at times, considering that many definitions have been given from various perspectives: psychological, cognitive, neuroscientific and behavioural. This universally known form of experience is not only intrinsically present in everyone's day-to-day intersubjective social relations, but in the last century it has also been playing a key role in the phenomenological study of meaning. In fact, in her work *On the Problem of Empathy* (1989), Stein claims the essential role of empathy in phenomenology, whose final goal "is to clarify and thereby to find the ultimate basis of all knowledge" (Stein 1989, 3). Nevertheless, both in the experiential context of intersubjective exchanges and the philosophical investigation on the study of meaning, "what counts in the strict sense as empathy are those experiential acts in which a foreign subject is not merely hypothesized or inferred, but rather given and experienced" (Jardine 2014, 274). Limiting empathy to an emotional state or a sensory perception would be simplistic and reductive. Empathy allows every subject to "understand other persons as minded creatures, to recognize others' states of mind, and to make sense of their behavior in light of their mind's causal powers" (Stueber 2006, 1). This naturally

developed capacity allows every subject to effectively perceive and understand other individuals in the outer world, as well as it enables to constitute "the psychological foundation of our ability to be social animals and to become full members of society" (Ibid.).

Before analysing the empathic process and its features, it is crucial to bear in mind that each interpersonal relation is multifaceted and singular. In fact, "there is no uniform way in which we relate to others, but […] our relations are mediated through the various pragmatic circumstances of our encounters" (Gallagher and Hutto 2008, 23). This is to say that empathy constitutively depends on circumstances which facilitates and affect the intensity of the empathic experience, like language, cultural backgrounds and social practices. Furthermore, the study of intersubjective processes, including empathy, has always been complicated and problematic, given that they presume the investigation and comprehension of other individuals' minds. The epistemological issue of "how I can know there are any minds that are not mine […] given the way I know that I have a mind" (Avramides 2001, 2), has always found disparate ways to be answered, involving behavior, knowledge and cognition-based methodologies, which are grounded on the direct study of experience, intentionality and emotional and semantic models of comprehension. For these reasons, in order to properly understand empathy and its peculiarities, it is essential to claim in the first place that due to its intersubjective nature, which has been (and still is) long discussed as an element of comprehension of foreign subjects' mental states, empathy is strongly affected by the question of conceptualisation, accessibility and opportunity to grasp foreign individuals' minds. In fact, empathy can subsist only when two subjects are involved and confronted, and a specific form of interpersonal relation is experienced. In this frame, both parts concerned are actively and spontaneously taking part in the process of living a particularly involved feeling, emotion or mental state, but they are related to it on different levels of experiential proximity. The different "facets of empathy include involuntary copying mechanisms; emotional mimicry; feeling distress when observing the suffering of others; mind reading; deciphering others' thoughts, states, or emotions" (Breithaupt 2011, 1), making the empathic mechanism central in intersubjective understanding.

When empathy takes place, two subjects are implicated with different modes of experience. On the one hand, one individual is pragmatically performing a set of actions, and going through a particular mental and emotional state: he or she is directly involved in that performative experience. That person embodies the primary source of empathy, since

the considered relevant state pertains to that psycho-physical *persona* as part of his or her empirical immediate practice. On the other hand, the other subject involved is able to live the same psycho-emotional condition through observation, recognition and inner imitation. The simulative action of using one's self as a model for deciphering external subjects allows a mere observative action to shift to an actual emotional share. The potentiality of psychophysical sharing becomes effective as a result of empathic engagement, which is achieved through imagination, bodily and linguistic communication and mental recollection of previous experiences, patterns that is investigated and discussed across the chapter and entire dissertation.

In empathy, the link between observer and observed is first of all visual, but the ability of developing a mechanism of recognition about an emotional state is equally mental. This emotional participation involves a proper perspective shift, which consists in assuming another person's point of view in the experience of a psychophysical state. In order to make sense of what is perceived, "the observer must rely on his or her own internal motor knowledge", since "[w]hen we observe an action, our motor system becomes active *as if* we were executing the very same action that we are observing, that is, we simulate the action" (Zahavi 2012, 219-220). This process of scrutiny allows an implicit and effective emotional and behavioural sharing, but in order for the observer to identify and clarify the empathic process's meaning, it is necessary that the new non-primarily performed state of the other makes sense in the context of a fully comprehensive experiential synthesis. The transition of perspective has the function not only of elucidating the peculiarities of a grasped element, but also of predicting, following a personal point of view, what that specific action or mental state could lead to. Indeed, the entirety of the first-person experienced state "serves as the basis for my third-person ascription of the emotion to the other" (Zahavi 2010, 5). In fact, observation, as the phenomenologist Zahavi suggests, opens an automatic mechanism of external experiencing (third-person perspective) starting with the consciousness of what has been directly lived (first-person participation). When empathising with another individual, one is able to confer to the other an explainable mental state from a third-person perspective, while first-personally experiencing one's own mind. Perceiving the other, "[w]e assume that our access to our own mind is more direct and in some way epistemically privileged than our access to the mind of another […], but we recognize each other as same-minded and as persons who have access to their minds form a first-person perspective" (Stueber 2006, 2).

In other words, the way we dispose of direct access to our mind ensures the employment of individual information as a model to comprehend the personal state of the person we are empathising with, assuming a general equivalent functioning on a mental level shared by all human beings.

In this sense it is crucial to acknowledge the temporal dimension in the chronological relation between primary and secondary experiencing. In fact, empathy is primordial in its being present, even if it is not primordial in its content, precisely because the subject of the empathised experience is different from the one empathising (Stein 1989, 7). Namely, empathically experienced states are unprecedented in their way of being perceived and experienced through simulation, while the state itself is only primarily experienced in its original form by the empathised subject. To illustrate, we need to consider that "as our own individual is announced in our own perceived experiences, so the foreign individual is announced in empathized ones […]: in one case there is a primordial, while in the other a non-primordial, givenness of the constituting experience" (Stein 1989, 34). The personal state that is empathically experienced is always perceived in a mediated form, which relates in essence with how one discerns what he or she is observing from the act of observation. Different theoretical proposals[1] have tried to classify and define the cognitive process of empathy and they seem to agree that referring to empathy implies addressing a "primary, embodied, non-inferential, way of knowing another's mental state" (Gangopadhyay 2014, 117). Specifically, following a phenomenological perspective, this knowledge-oriented mechanism can only be guaranteed through a directly experienced access to a subject's mental state, which does not depend on the development of theoretical formulation on what observed. Namely, the heterogeneity of shapes of the experience of empathy can assume a variety of experiential possibilities, which required to be personally experienced to cognitively make sense, since the experience of the other subject's state does not coincide with the other's own direct experience.

From the perspective of cognitive science, de Vignemont and Singer (2006) compile a list of the sufficient combination of conditions for empathy to take place. The authors state that "[t]here is empathy if: (i) one is in an affective state; (ii) this state is isomorphic[2] to

---

[1] E.g., simulation theory (Gallagher 2012), theory of mind (Zunshine 2006) or phenomenology-based approaches (Stein 1989).

[2] It corresponds to another, similarly structured in form or nature.

another person's state; (iii) this state is elicited by the observation or imagination of another person's affective state; (iv) one knows that the other person is the source of one's own affective state" (Vignemont and Singer 2006, 435). However, even if the observing subject's state has an essential relevance, empathy is first and foremost an other-oriented phenomenon, placing emphasis on the primary generated condition: the focus is on the other and his/her psycho-physical condition. As explained by the philosopher Stein[3] (1989), "how we perceive foreign consciousness has usually taken the turn of how in one psycho-physical individual the perception of another such occurs" (Stein 1989, 21). In other words, empathy allows us to realise that the world around us is constituted not only by extraneous physical bodies, but also foreign subjects who are in their turn psycho-physical individuals with a personal psychic life, external but accessible to whoever observes it.

As a first step to understand the empathic process, it is fundamental to comprehend that it is possible to share and perform a specific set of emotions, but it is essential to make sense of them first. When empathically participating in one's personal state, foreign subjects and their mental complexity cannot be simply supposed or speculated, they need to be perceived and experienced as a whole. As stated by Gallese (2003), when interpersonal relations are associated with the understanding of emotions and actions, they are built on "automatic, unconscious embodied simulation routines" (Gallese 2003, 517). Along with the reception of personal feelings, "internal representations of the body states associated with the other's actions, emotions and sensations are evoked in us, and it is "as if" we were doing a similar action or experiencing a similar emotion or sensation" (Zahavi 2012, 220). Considering the *as if* element described by Zahavi, it is of primary importance to understand how the psychophysical sharing is performed in the relationship with other individuals observed.

As highlighted by Jardine (2014), "phenomenologists have classically attempted to identify and describe a form of experience, empathy (*Einfühlung*), in which other embodied minds are grasped as such, and which more complex and cognitive forms of intersubjectivity take as their point of departure" (Jardine 2014, 273). The corporeal manifestation of psychophysical states is addressed as essential in the way it constitutes the first and immediate visual stimulus that the observer approaches. In fact, "the role of the other's

---

[3] Edith Stein was Edmund Husserl's student at University of Göttingen, where she pursues a doctoral thesis on empathy under the philosopher's supervision.

embodied expressivity in intersubjectivity is to engage one's perceptual cognition in such a way that it results in the subsequent perceptual awareness of the other's mental state" (Gangopadhyay 2014, 124). For this very reason, Schutz (1967), in his work *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, bridging philosophy and social sciences, claims that empathy is first and foremost a perceptual phenomenon able to shape the cognition of the world surrounding us, in the context of which other individual's body ceases to be a mere physical entity, giving room to an embodied possibility to communicate and transmit personal states of the inner self (Schutz 1967, 20). However, it is opportune to take into account that, even if perceptual observation plays a fundamental role in intersubjectivity, it is not a sufficient condition for empathy to properly function. As it will be further unfolded, the activation and accomplishment of a sense-making process is essential for the observing individual.

Defined by Zlatev as *bodily mimesis* (Zlatev 2008, 216), the shared ability to communicate and represent personal states through the body is essential for intersubjective cognition, both in episodic situations and broader cultural frames (Donald 1991, 168), since to one's own body pertains "attitude, beliefs and dispositions" (Gallagher 2005, 37). We are able to perceive other people's states, intentions and feelings because their embodied expression is explicit in behaviours and actions. Our instantaneous perception of individuals around us is "fast, automatic, irresistible and highly stimulus-driven" (Scholl and Tremoulet 2000, 299), given that the common interpersonal mode of interaction is instantaneous and non-mentalised (Gallagher and Hutto 2008, 21). In fact, as a first approach to make sense of others' inner state, "[t]he perception of emotion in the movement of others […] does not involve taking a theoretical stance […] of some inner state" but "[i]t is a perceptual experience of embodied comportment" (Ibid., 22).

Likewise, Husserl (1982) emphasises the relevance of intuition as the major tool for comprehension and judgement in its *prima facie* dimension. In the study and definition of the concept of empathy, Husserl is one of the fundamental philosophers who have contributed to the shift from an emotional perspective to a phenomenological one. He not only was a precursor of many studies conducted in most recent times (Zahavi 2012 or Jardine 2014), but his theories formulated during the beginning of the twentieth century are still recognised as crucial and valuable in the conduction and development of contemporary research. Throughout his studies, Husserl roots the validity of the empathic act in the

experiential references attributed by the observing subject to the foreign perceived condition. If for the observed individual, Husserl claims, feelings, emotions and actions are self-given as original, for the observing subject they are not performed in the same way. Actually, our experience of the other, even if bodily given *in propria persona* (Husserl 1973, as cited in Zahavi 2010, 10), cannot be completely conveyed in its original formula since the access to individual consciousness is limited: every time empathy is experienced, it is impossible to discern it from the 'I' experiencing it. For this reason, empathy is not only reduced to an understanding process: as an all-encompassing phenomenon, it requires an experience-based enacting oriented to "live" in first person the affective state that has been recognised in the other. The observed individual ceases to be experienced as a foreign subjectivity and "[t]he achievement of objective observation – of empathy – is therefore to operate as a projection apparatus that glorifies the other and elevates them to the status of a self" (Breithaupt 2019, 48). Specifically, "[i]t is precisely because of this difference, precisely because of this asymmetry, that we can claim that the minds we experience are other minds", since if "I had the same access to the consciousness of the other as I have to my own, the other would cease being an other and would instead become a part of myself" (Zahavi 2010, 12). In brief, empathy strongly depends on the acknowledgement that the experienced state belongs to an outer subject. In fact, the peculiarly empathic condition of *feeling into* does not preclude the awareness about the external nature of the concerned state, but rather it takes place by virtue of this clear separation between the self and the other: without a definite separation between the observing and the observed subject, there would be no other to empathise with.

According to Husserl, empathy consists in the unitary experience of *expression* (a certain state, a feeling or emotion, an action, …) and the *expressed* (the other subject itself), since what is grasped from the outside is an already mediated combination of these undiscernible two. In other words, "[i]n a certain way, I also experience (and there is a self-givenness here) the other's lived experiences; i.e., to the extent that the empathy (*comprehensio*) accomplished as one with the originary experience of the Body is indeed a kind of presentification, one that nevertheless serves to ground the character of *co*-existence in the flesh. To that extent, what we have here is thus experience, perception" (Husserl 1989, 208). In other words, Husserl claims that the comprehension-oriented direction pursued by empathy profoundly relies on the physical expressivity derived from the embodied resemblances of experience. In fact, the corporeal presence and share constitutes the initial

step for empathy and empathic understanding to happen. However, "this co-existence […] does not, in principle, allow itself to be transformed into immediate originary existence (primal presence). It is characteristic of empathy that it refers to an originary Body-spirit-consciousness but one I cannot myself accomplish originarily, I who am not the other and who only function, in regard to him, as a comprehending analog" (Ibid.). In this context, physicality plays a key role in the success of the empathic phenomenon. In fact, individuals' physicality represents the first and most direct contact with the other, manifesting through bodily expression a particular and personal state. "For Husserl", Gallagher (2007) explains, "understanding another person is not a matter of intellectual inference but a matter of sensory activations that are unified in or by the animate organism or lived body that is perceiving another animate organism" (Gallagher 2007, 286).

Each individual's empathic capacity is developed from an "innate, instinctual, and, beyond that, ultimately inexplicable human tendency to motor mimicry" (Stueber 2006, 8). This particular sort of bodily identification and impulsive drive to another's thoughts and behaviours denotes the peculiar impulsive and non-theoretical nature of empathy, considering the empathic encounter itself the context in which the other's mental states and emotions achieve such validity (Stein 1989). Empathy does not look at the other as a simplified representation from a neutral positioning, but, throughout a cognitive process, it gains sense in the foreign experience. Similarly, the empirical process in question allows to grasp at the same time the entity and consciousness of the other self in his or her entirety. Those psychophysical states that are able to give rise to episodes of empathic binding function as interpersonal channels for a comprehensive experience of understanding other subjects. Both Husserl and Stein support empathy as an interpersonal category "of reciprocal intersubjectivity between minded individuals" (Stueber 2006, 9). Gaining sense in its peculiar reciprocity, "[e]mpathy not only allows me to solve the basic problem of other minds; that is, it not only allows me to recognize another person as being minded", but "[i]t also enables me to develop myself more fully as a reflective and self-critical individual, since it enables me to recognize the opinions of others about myself" (Ibid.). Thanks to its mutual nature of action, empathy constitutes a relational process and effective source of knowledge, not only about the other but also about myself.

In addition, Husserl emphasises how the far-reaching consciousness of a certain present condition is deeply rooted on what is absent. That is, his perspective shares many

features with Lévinas' theories (1979), stating that the presence of the other rests on his/her absence as other4. Following this standpoint, Husserl agrees that in order to attribute meaning to a present subject, it is essential to refer to absent elements of his or her distinguishingly personal identity, since developing a complete awareness of a foreign subject requires more than what is only explicitly given. In every form of perception, and empathy, appresentation (*Appräsentation5*), intended as the perception of the other subject as a present being by completing what is grasped by the interpretation of a single experience, is crucial. The 'I' is able to experience the other precisely because of the element of otherness that clearly sets the two individuals apart as two distinct bodies and minds. In fact, Husserl (1989) suggests, "[i]t is only with empathy and the constant orientation of empirical reflection onto the psychic life which is appresented along with the other's Body and which is continually taken Objectively, together with the Body, that the closed unity, man, is constituted, and I transfer this unity subsequently to myself" (Husserl 1989, 175). This is essentially because we need to understand origins and intentions of what we perceive in order to grasp and understand an experience as given. Others are appreciated not only as physical and psychological individuals, a part of the perceived world around the subject who observes, but also as subjects who are existing in a world they directly experience as well.

Empathy was addressed in this first section emphasising its multifaceted nature, which has been central in different authors' works, and the complexity with which it involves the accessibility of other people's mind. As shown, empathy in its philosophical and cognitive definition profoundly differs from the general notion of the term. The crucial role of subjectivity and its ascription to other subjects as well as the recognition of intentionality in individuals we empathise with are fundamental for the *as if* empathic experience to take place. The distinction of the two involved subjectivities as distinct entities has been proven as essential, leading to the awareness that empathically experienced states belong to the other and can only be grasped in a non-primary form. Moreover, following the works of Husserl, Gallagher and then Gallese, the embodied nature of empathy and the empathic experience has been acknowledged as crucial for the functioning of this cognitive process.

---

4 Lévinas (1979) theorises the other as what is absent in the *présence-absence* spectrum. Without explicitly referring to subjects as physical or conscious entities, he states that what is other, distinct from an individual is what cannot be grasped or possessed, what is *absent* in his/her spectrum of possibilities.

5 Essential concept in phenomenology, appresentation is crucial for empathy in the way the other's subjectivity is made co-present in its personal nature.

This first section aimed to give a first explanatory introduction about the phenomenon of empathy, as a phenomenological concept and its fundamental features. To summarise, empathy can be conceived "as being (1) a primary, non-reducible, other-directed feeling of concern or interest that (2) is characterized by a clear distinction between empathizer and the other person, that (3) targets the other's situated experience and (4) consciously ascribes that experience specifically to that other" (Gallagher 2012, 376-377). While both philosophers and neuroscientists have been trying to exhaustively define this phenomenon, the next sections of this chapter deal with the specificities of empathy as an intersubjective mechanism and its role in sense-making processes.

1.2. Cognition and Empathic Sense-Making: An Embodied Form of Understanding

Empathic perception is a broad phenomenon that moves from the elementary conception of an "unmediated quasi-perceptual ability to recognize other creatures directly as minded creatures and to recognize them implicitly as creatures that are fundamentally like us" (Stueber 2006, 20), to a more exhaustive capacity to "conceive of another person's more complex social behavior as the behavior of a rational agent who acts for a reason" (Ibid., 21). In other words, empathy is a large-scale phenomenon which not only allows the involvement and participation in states belonging other subjects, but also the recognition of their subjectivity and the intentionality in their actions. However, empathy is not only a process of perception, but also a tool for comprehension. Or, inverting the perspective, empathy "also requires a minimal and more explicit comprehension of the *mental state*" (Gallagher 2012, 356) of a person. In this specific context, understanding and empathy are mutually essential to each other, and they subsist in a frame of reciprocal support. In fact, intersubjective understanding is not only consequential to empathy, but empathic processes can achieve a deeper and more complete stage when inter-personal knowledge is profound, personal and concrete[6]. As shown, empathy is crucial when understanding states belonging to external subjects, since through the experience of *feeling into* it is possible to recognise and acknowledge external subjectivities and their intentionality. According to Stueber (2006), it is "epistemically essential" (Stueber 2006, 131) for the comprehension of agents

---

[6] In the case of empathy, understanding as such is central, whereas with regard to sympathy care, interest and concern for the other are also involved (Scheler 1954, 8-9).

other than us. Understanding, intended as a sense-making process oriented to fully comprehend the other, is not an automatic result of experiencing empathy, but an inherent brain-based activity common to every human being. Mental processes, behaviours, emotions and any other psycho-physical activity non-primordially experienced contribute to the formation of personal knowledge through the other about us *in primis*, other individuals and the outer world. As highlighted by Zeki (2009), "a central and primordial function of the brain is the seeking of knowledge and […] it does so through the formation of concepts […:] a solution that evolution has devised to solve the problem of acquiring all sensory knowledge" (Zeki 2009, 1-2). In other words, Zeki claims that concepts formation is essential for the acquisition of knowledge, since the way we make sense of the outer world relies on the mental abstraction of what we observe. In fact, the form of the comprehension of what is sensorially grasped depends on the way it is shaped into ideas and assimilated by our mind. These recently formed concepts are not static and permanent. On the contrary, they are subject to alteration in light of what is subsequently experienced. In fact, the process of understanding does not rely only on "what is available in the world outside", but on "what is available in the brain as well" (Zeki 2009, 52). Since the only form of "direct and non-inferential knowledge is my own" (Zahavi 2010, 5), I have the chance to make sense of what is present in other subjects' minds solely by projecting what I have access to (that is, what is already framed in my mind and I consciously know). In fact, the mind of the observing subject, with its structured knowledge, serves as model to simulate intentions, feelings and beliefs of the other, playing a key role in the successful constitution of meaning. When observing what is other for us, it is possible to make sense of the elements that pertain to the outer world only in the way they are reconstructed by the brain as concepts.

In this particular form of understanding the subjectivity of the empathised individual is a central source of meaning, at a point where the actual experience of the observed person and its embodied state becomes a direct source of awareness of the other as an active subject. Or, alternatively, as a possible intuition of 'what is meant', intended as an attempt of unity within the diverse possible interpretative meanings (Husserl 2001). As a result, empathy constitutes an as intuitive as powerful instrument, enabling one to perceive another subjectivity external to the subject experiencing it. Indeed,

> "[i]f the perceived material object is, in a sense, relatively unproblematic as an example of the intuitively given, […] the other personal-subjective life is intuitively present only in a somewhat enigmatic sense. Empathy is intuitive insofar as it is that mode of

experience by which the subject achieves, through the two moments of perception and explication, a *sui generis*[7] grasp of a transcendent personal-subjective life, in its transcendence and yet also, to a certain extent, its determinate comportment" (Jardine 2014, 285).

A unique form of understanding, empathy is characterised as *sui generis*, depicted as such at first by Lipps (1907, as cited in Zahavi 2010, 4), who refers to the empathic process as a proper "modality of knowledge […] as irreducible and original as our perceptual experience of objects or our memory of our past experiences" (Zahavi 2010, 4). After years of research, Lipps (1907) published one of the most relevant studies on the specificity of empathic understanding, describing it as genuine as the original sensorial experience of formerly perceived elements that currently belong to our memory. Coined by Vischer (1994) in the first place, Lipps employs the notion of *Einfühlung* not only to address the perception of inanimate objects, but also psychophysical states of other subjects. For the first time, Lipps expands this definition of *feeling into* experience from a mere aesthetic perspective to a phenomenological sphere comprehensive of interpersonal relations.

Jardine explains empathy as the fundamental passage that allows whoever observes to translate a momentary perception in a concept, able to simultaneously explain the psychophysical state of an individual and the individual himself or herself. Asserting that it is possible to derive meaning from the encounter with and perception of the other "presupposes a theory of the knowability of the other self and therewith a theory of the latter's pregiveness" (Schutz 1967, 20). According to the philosopher, this assumption depends foremost on the certainty that a particular meaning belongs to the observed person's state, and that the meaning under consideration can be grasped with the same degree of understanding that would pertain to any observing individual's behaviour.

In this frame, the way we constitute our knowledge of others is singular and specific. Phenomenologically, making sense of others and the perceived world "takes as its point of departure *the way* things make sense to us, that is, *how* they mean" (Sonesson 2007, 89). This meaning-oriented reduction is essential to acknowledge that sense-making is always related to the observing perspective.

---

[7] Empathy is defined as a form of knowledge *sui generis* referring to is peculiarly unique modes of operation. Phenomenologically and cognitively, it cannot be reduced to any simpler concept or phenomenon previously defined in other studies.

The first procedural step of the sense-making process "is to recognize the existence of configurations within our conscious life" and, "[h]owever diverse the lived experiences may be, they are bound together by the fact that they are *mine* [… ,] unity conferred by the reflective glance, the unity of *meaning*" (Schutz 1967, 74-75). On the contrary, when empathy is experienced, this unitarian consciousness on meaning leaves room to a more complex and intricate field of experience, which involves the dual relationship of two minds intersubjectively bound, which requires to be consciously acknowledged by the observer. In fact, Zahavi continues, Lipps theorises that this developed awareness is fundamental for the encounter with another subject to gain meaning. This awareness is validated by the recollection of the observer with personal prior self-experience, which serves "as a reservoir of meaning that is transferred onto the other in a purely passive manner", establishing an unprecedented "phenomenal unity" (Zahavi 2012, 235). Facing the interpretation of an outer personal state, every observing subject spontaneously tends to distinguish within the variety of past experiences available the ones that can jointly assemble a meaningful interpretation of what is perceived and recognised. Thanks to the resemblances to recollected memories, it is possible to detach what is empathically grasped from a mentally abstracted form of the involved emotions and move to the concreteness of the other's experience in question. In this context, it is fundamental to be aware that the empathic drive is oriented towards the reproduction and expression of a specific grasped mental state, and not to the pure ascription of a commonly defined and generalised feeling. Empathy assumes the form of inner participation to a foreign state.

Following this Schutz (1967) raises a fundamental issue, questioning the role of involvement in social relations: "[i]f we become participants, do we lose our objectivity? If we remain mere observers, do we lose the […] subjective meaning of the action?" (Schutz 1967, xxii). However, empathic participation does not consist in a literal reproduction of what is understood, but in a unique and personalised version which can be affected by the emotional and corporeal consciousness derived by preceding experiences. In fact, referring to specific entities other than us, and specifically to other individuals' states, it is fundamental to consciously acknowledge that the "world I glimpse empathically is an existing world, posited as having being like the world primordially perceived" within which "[t]he perceived world and the world given empathically are the same world differently seen" (Stein 1989, 63-64). Even if a consistent number of actions and reactions is

spontaneous in the manner our body generates it, the way we perceive and interact with other entities always includes a certain degree of consciousness about the dynamics taking place. Being aware of the social conventions that are involved in a particular framework of experience ensures a more effective understanding of foreign subjects and relative states.

Indeed, sense-making of other psycho-physical individuals during empathic processes cannot be discerned from recollection, since understanding is constructed along similarities and analogous references generated by what has been already lived in the past. This formerly assembled collection of experiences "by its very nature is built up before our eyes in continuous and discrete synthesis of manifold experiences and in the shifting appearance of ever new sides and phases that are peculiar to it as an individual" (Schutz 1967, 76). In particular, comprehension of what is other than us depends on "certain modes of thought and feeling that are common to many because our brains, at a certain fundamental level, are organized along very similar and common lines" (Zeki 2009, 5). The observing subject does not rationalise the process of understanding, producing theoretical knowledge on the individual empathising with, but he or she employs himself or herself as an instrument to make sense of the other, with a "distinction between *the genuine understanding of the other person* and the abstract conceptualization of his actions or thoughts as being of such and such a type" (Schutz 1967, xxv). That is, "[i]t is *not* true that a person uses only a sensory-cognitive apparatus to perceive things and people, and then shares this information with other mental systems. The implication is rather that one must prepare one's *entire self* for the act of perceiving and recognizing […] the fundamental property of the objective person in perception" (Breithaupt 2019, 43). In other words, the framing and understanding of other people's psychophysical states deeply depend on the self and on the way the observer mind is capable of shaping and giving meaning to what is perceived.

Moreover, Schutz (1967) questions how intersubjective knowledge can be effective and universal, basing his analysis on interpersonal relations. In the first place, it is essential to remember that meaning is substantially personal and subjective, and "the meaning I give to your experiences cannot be precisely the same as the meaning you give to them when you proceed to interpret them" (Schutz 1967, 99). During the intersubjective understanding process, both individuals involved are in the same position: while experiencing the other (and, simultaneously, a secondary state that is both new and their own), they can only refer to their own past. In fact, "*your* whole stream of lived experience is *not* open to me" since if

"I could be aware of your whole experience, you and I would be the same person" (Ibid., 106). On the contrary, "*everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experiences*" which are "constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with *your* lived experience, to which they are intentionally related" (Ibid.). Through observation and empathic understanding, it is possible to grasp other's people experiences in their 'continuity', but never in their 'completeness'. That is, the interpretation of other people's acts is an approximate projection of the intended meaning elaborated from what is available within our previously perceived and experienced personal knowledge, since a complete access to foreign minds is precluded. Therefore, the observing individual "knows perfectly well from the total context of his own experience that, corresponding to the outer objective and public meaning which he has just deciphered, there is this other, inner, subjective meaning" (Ibid., 113).

In the definition of the empathic experience, many authors highlight the role of co-presence between observing and observed subject in a shared space. In fact, empathy can be more profoundly experienced if the given content expressed by an individual to another is articulated in a context of proximity, since a consistent part of the meaning transfer takes place through the embodiment (which can assume different forms, from expressive phenomena to more complex behavioural elements) of a specific state. When studies on semiotics and phenomenology began to approach embodiment as a key element of interpersonal comprehension, an actual shift in the understanding of intersubjective empathic experiences took place. Since then, meaning making practices have been addressed with a deeper consciousness of embodied cognition's situated nature, accentuating the role of bodies, their relations, but also the "interaction with the physical and sociocultural environment" (Lindblom and Ziemke 2007, 132).

Starting from the Heideggerian phenomenal dimension of *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger 1962), this newly developed situated approach on the study of physical and performative articulations opens an embodied perspective on the mind ant its capability of interacting with the surrounding environment. "[T]through the history of its phylogenetic and ontogenetic interactions with the environment" (Lindblom and Ziemke 2007, 138), the body develops an autonomous and unique capacity to behave, react and perform what is only mentally and internally experienced. In fact, both as individuals and collective groups, we all develop a personal and shared perception that our particular condition is a constituted set

of skills determined by "by practice [,] without ever having to represent to ourselves our body as an object, our culture as a set of beliefs, or our propensities as situation-action rules" (Dreyfus 1979, 52-52). Thus, we are able to personally disclose mental states expressed in bodily representations, "viewed as based on a correspondence or mapping between elements of the external world and their internal correspondents" (Ibid., 142), which become fundamental in the mental conceptualisation of the relationship between internal and external point of view. The Husserlian (1989) theory on interpersonal understanding "involves processes that happen on the level of bodily sensation" (Gallagher 2007, 286), guaranteeing "access to others that predates or prefigures anything that would involve inference or analogy" (Ibid.). Husserl describes the way we act and react to different mental and emotional stimuli as 'body-schematic system', which responds to intersubjective interfacing with primary in the understanding process of the other. The bodily appearance of the individual we are empathising with, besides constituting the immediate element coming into sight, completes the system of relations between psychological and mental interior state and the external expression of it. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), embodiment is not only limited to the neural structuring of cognitive processes, but also phenomenological classification of daily bodily schemes, "everything we can be aware of, especially our own mental states, our bodies, our environment and our physical and social interactions", in essence the level we refer to as "the "feel" of experience" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999, 103). This embodied representation is simply a flexible scheme that permits the understanding of organism-environment relations.

In addition, Schutz (1967) describes the foreign body as a *field of expression* (Schutz 1967, 22), considering 'expression' in the way "the external behaviour of the other person functions as an *indication* of his inner subjective experience" (Ibid.), or as an intentionally deliberated physical manifestation of a voluntary expression. While I don't consciously perceive my body as an active entity, a much more pragmatic intentionality can be grasped about the subject performing a certain action. Hence, "detailed aspects of movement […], even if we are not aware of them (even if they are not *explicitly* intentional), are intentional insofar as they are part of a longer intentional action" (Gallagher 2007, 277). In particular, because of the peculiarity of some of bodily features, such as physical manifestations and facial expressions, empathy is often addressed as a pre-conceptual form of understanding,

relying on ontogenetic[8] mechanisms. In this context, ontogenesis is addressed referring to a developmental anthropology-based approach, according to which every human being embodies the manifestation of his or her personal historical and experiential making in his or her corporeal expressivity (Toren 2002, 188). However, the experienced consciousness about actions and movements is the first way to understand bodies and their performatively expressed meanings. Before the observed object can be rationalised and developed as a mentally defined notion, emotions, feelings and ideas are conveyed in many different forms, among which bodily expression is one of the most essential one. The first provided possibility of understanding others through empathy is guaranteed from our "access to their embodied actions and the rich worldly contexts within which they act" (Gallagher 2002, 377).

In fact, as claimed by Schutz (1967), movements of foreign bodies are not only seen as "physical events but also as a sign that the other person is having certain lived experiences which he is expressing through those movements" (Schutz 1967, 101). Signs that we are able to perceive form another subject's behaviour depend for the observer on a certain codification, charged with a personally developed level of indexicality. Our perception has the ability to interpret specific foreign states only when expressed through bodily features, and they begin to be addressed as signs in the moment in which they are embodied and ultimately accessible for being grasped (Sonesson 2010, 149). From the observer's perspective, bodily actions in all forms bring to light both traces of the lived experiences and elements of conceived meaning. In fact, Schutz (1967) continues, "the man in the natural attitude perceives changes in that external object which is known to him as the other's body" and he "interprets these changes just as he interprets changes in inanimate objects, namely, by interpretation of his own lived experiences of the events and processes in question" (Schutz 1967, 108). The construction of meaning concerning what is bodily performed requires the (at times spontaneous) semiotic deciphering of physical expressions, through a system of signs that is interpreted and employed following a personal and socially shared set of meanings. In fact, throughout both collective and individual evolution it becomes spontaneously possible as individuals to decipher all those corporeal mimetic symbols which immediately recall to both mental and emotional specific expressions.

[8] Referring to behavioural or anatomical features of a subject.

Making sense of other people's actions and mental states requires these to be framed at the "most appropriate pragmatic level possible", since "we see actions as meaningful in the context of the physical and intersubjective environment" (Gallagher and Hutto 2008, 24). First medium of expression of each individual, the body of the other person is "[t]he very first of all cultural objects, and the one by which all the rest exist, […] as the vehicle of a form of behaviour" (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 406), and the embodied simulation constitutes the primordial key access to the observed mental state (Gallese 2003, 525). In fact, according to Merleau-Ponty, the body's role is not only relevant in its way of being present in the experience of the other, but it is precisely the tool which shapes the experience itself in its way of participating in the space of action. The body is both subject (the observer) and object (the observed individual) of perception, and it constitutes the key situated element which actively take part in the empathic process. While for the observed subject the core content (or the origin from which a behaviour results) of an action is separated and independent from its expression, in the eyes of the observer these two elements are not disconnected, but mutually influenced and equally essential for the purpose of understanding. After observing the manifested behaviour of another subject, we position it within a wider context of meaning, psychophysically given through the recollection of previously experienced schemata. Phenomenologically, we make sense of those experiences through sequential self-interpretative processes, which are constituted by the understanding of what has been lived in the past "from the point of view of a new lived experience" (Schutz 1967, 78). This complex and articulated set of formerly developed interpretative contexts is a necessary condition upon which what is in question and every lately shaped meaning rest. In this context, namely the one which is available for the observer, self-experience functions as a model for oneself, as long as understanding is accomplished through the projection of those pre-experienced paths into the other. Comprehension, as intended and explained by Gallese, stands on the individuals' natural tendency of matching what is observed with a set of behaviours and reactions that the observer could perform, in conformity with consolidated personal patterns.

Moreover, Gallese (2003) explains that empathy resides in the understanding of other people's feelings, "be it a particular *emotion* or *sensory state*" (Gallese 2003, 517). This particular scenario of comprehension takes place in an intersubjectively shared framework, in which meaning is grasped thanks to the openness and availability of personal states on

display. The actions of people around us detain an '*expressive* power', allowing empathy to take place in the establishment of "an affective meaningful interpersonal link" (Ibid., 519). If empathy (considering its *Einfühlung* conception, namely the experience of *feeling into* and understanding other subjects' psychophysical states) is intended as an 'inner imitation' and not an inferential condition, a shared space is necessary for the expressive power to perform embodied signs of the state experienced by the observed subject. As explained by Gallagher (2007), "I *perceive* the emotions and the intentions of the other person in their bodily movements and gestural expressions, and in doing so, my own embodiment acts as template for understanding" (Gallagher 2007, 288). In fact, "in everyday life we are able to 'decode' the *quality* of the sensations or emotions embedded in the witnessed behaviour of others without the need to exert any conscious cognitive effort" (Ibid.). The lack of cognitive efforts that we experience in everyday empathic simulation process does not depend on conscious and intended actions, which on the contrary are pre-reflexive and spontaneous. The establishment and development of cognitive interpersonal relations is supported, according to Gallese (2003), by the formulation of a common range of similarities, including a 'shared manifold', in the context of which "we recognize other human beings as similar to us that intersubjective communication, social imitation, and the ascription of intentions become possible" (Gallese 2003, 524)[9]. That is, Gallese highlights the relevance of common grounds and similarities, acknowledging that "[a]ctions, emotions, and sensations experienced by others become meaningful to us because we can *share* their underlying basic format with others" (Ibid., 525).

The phenomenologically perceived sense of similarity among past and present experiences is projected on a functional level, developing and defining original models of 'simulation routines'. Also, collective understanding of perpetuated typical subjects' behaviours has a fundamental impact on recalling similar paths to shape the comprehension of empathised subjects. In this way, those schemata are comprehended and validated by collectively and individually consolidated mechanisms of sense-making, among which

[9] Gallese (2003) defines empathic shared manifold on three different levels. First, the *phenomenological level* "is responsible for the sense of similarity, of being individuals within a larger social community of people like us, which we experience whenever we confront other human beings" (Gallese 2003, 525). Second, the *functional level* is grounded on embodied simulation habits, allowing *as if* based interpersonal connections to take place. Last, the *sub-personal* level admits, on the contrary, the constitution of shared spaces that allow to appreciate, experience and understand the actions we observe, the emotions and the sensations we take others to experience. On these levels, embodied simulation comprises the elementary structure constituting an effective space for the development of interpersonal understanding mechanisms.

mutual influence shapes and affects singular processes of understanding. Hence, even when deeply rooted cultural habits and social praxis are strongly present and ingrained, the perception of the other in itself is sufficient for the sense-making process to produce new knowledge about another's mental state, often following unprecedented patterns. Moreover, comprehending others through empathy does not only allow us to increment our understanding of the outer world, but it is also a constitutional segment of an exhaustive knowledge on ourselves, in both the roles of subjects and objects. The empathic experience allows a reciprocal uncovering of hidden elements pertaining to different individualities, which are able to emerge thanks to the acquisition of new tools for sense-making.

Hence, Stein (1989) maps the steps that empathy follows from the observation of another individual to the brain-based concept formation. The philosopher explains that empathy evolves throughout three levels, from the incidental intersubjective interaction to the conscious development of new forms of meaning. As she illustrates, in the first place the experience 'emerges', whether oriented toward a stranger or somebody we are familiar with. At the end of the empathic process's entire duration, the 'fulfilling explication' is achieved, as result of the acquisition of new forms of understanding. Lastly, the experience is 'comprehensively objectified', with a conscious acknowledgment of new meanings derived from it (Stein 1989, xviii). If taking a cognitive approach toward the phenomenon, empathy can also be defined a "as the *understanding* of the other's emotions, thoughts, states, desires, and preferences" (Breithaupt 2019, 23).

This second section of the first chapter addressed the role of empathy in sense-making. The way meaning is structured by individuals' perception has been discussed following all those elements that comprise empathic participation: embodiment, social and cultural symbolic codes as well as emotional involvement. The process of empathy, grounded on the mediation role of the body to the counter-subjectivity (Makkreel 2010, 202) of the empathised other, leads to the understanding of external individuals and his or her experienced states. In fact, empathy allows the re-experience of external realities, which are understood through the complexity of acquired structures of experience. This shared condition, in light of what grasped about the other, personal recollection and the confrontation between the two, supports understanding through the participation of the self in the other individuals' states. As shown, the process of empathic understanding relies on different levels of comprehension. The physical manifestation, as external expression of the

experienced state, is implemented by those mimetic symbols that can be deciphered by personal and collective experience. To conclude, the next and last subchapter tackles how intersubjective experiences and empathic comprehension are decoded and clarified on a both personal and narrative level.

1.3. Domains of Experience and Hermeneutic Backgrounds in Narrative

In the work *The Architecture of Semantic Domains* (2004), Brandt highlights the relevance of context in the process of meaning making. In fact, he claims, what is "meaningful is meaningful in a 'context'; contexts supply relevant frames for the contents of our consciousness, and they thereby allow us to draw inferences form these contents" (Brandt 2004, 30). The single empathic experience is effective only if a broader understanding takes place, besides the comprehensive grasp of a single psychophysical state. As claimed by Stueber (2006), the knowledge of a larger whole is necessary to appreciate an isolated element, but the entirety of certain circumstances makes complete sense only "in light of the overall consistency of its parts" (Stueber 2006, 12). In the same way, "in order to understand the significance of a particular act of an individual I must inherently grasp the context to which that act belongs, as well as how it fits into this context and vice versa" (Ibid.). Elementary contexts of meaning are essential for the observing subject to trace and construct the primary sense of what is observed. All the contexts that each subject involves in the understanding process are organised upon semantic domains, based on 'bodily experience', intended as both proper physical motion and "stable articulation of our life-world as an experienceable whole" (Ibid.). As product of our actions and interactions with both human and non-human subjects which are part of our environment (more in general, the totality of the fields of interplay that we develop in different environments of the outer world), bodily experience allows abstract concepts to be linked in broader domains. Since "understanding takes place in terms of entire domains of experience and not in terms of isolated concepts" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 117), elementary domains in their entirety constitute a structured whole that allows experience to get organised and grouped according to areas of meaning. However, the role of bodily experiences is not only fundamental in the formation of personal and shared domains: those same domains are in return essential to decipher latest bodily perceived scenarios. As claimed by Turner (1996), and explained by

Brandt (2004), "our understanding of social, mental and abstract domains […] is formed on our understanding of spatial and bodily stories onto social, mental and abstract stories" (Brandt 2004, 33).

Furthermore, these semantic domains, or domains of experience, are constant references for our mind to schematically make sense of new experienced realities. In fact, "metaphors allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another", and the situations we experience in our everyday life "are then conceptualized and defined in terms of other basic domains of experience" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 117). Moreover, they emphasise that "[e]ach such domain is a structured whole within our experience that is conceptualized as what we have called an experimental gestalt" and it is able to characterise a "structured whole within recurrent human experiences" (Ibid.). Their approach, in short, underlines the essential role of metaphors in understanding human experiences, making them coherent "in terms of such multidimensional gestalts" (Ibid., 81). In fact, the symbolic transposition of reality is fundamental to classify categories of experience that allow us to elaborate newly perceived meaning of foreign mental, emotional and psychological states. The symbols that we collect throughout the participation in different experiences, intended as an index of signifiers and signified, essentially constitute icons that authentically represent "internalized imitations" (Zlatev 2008, 323). Specifically, these agreed and shared links to mentally assimilated concepts are characterised by an experiential nature, since they are phenomenologically accessible to observers' consciousness, and their representational pre-reflexive way of symbolising the state they stand for. Individually, we tend to express in a personal and unique position an individual state, which in most cases matches with a conventionally agreed significance, immediately perceived as positioned on top of the meanings' hierarchy.

Domains of experience and semantic metaphors are crucial for empathy in a narratological way. As suggested by Breithaupt (2011), empathy plays a key role in influencing and shaping sense-making processes "producing a narrative order" (Breithaupt 2011, 5). In general terms, narrative should not be conceived here as a pre-structured regulated sequence, but precisely as the path that we shape when empathising with other subjects. For this reason, individual comprehension follows the causal and spatiotemporal model that empathically conceived narratives attribute to actions and intentions. On the one hand, when we perceive foreign psychophysical individuals' states, as outlined in the

previous section, we rely on the categories developed from personal experiences, namely subjective domains, to make sense of what observed. On the other hand, semantic domains gain sense in each individual's mind only if continuously confirmed by personal (interactions with subjects pertaining to the outer world) and collective (cultural practicalities, what we generally define as common knowledge or common ground, social and political structures, or linguistic habits) experiences. Semantic memory, as illustrated by Donald (1991), is constituted by a multiplicity of units which, combined and ordered in diverse sequences, can construct a variety of narratives, from personal practices of representing reality to shared mythological repertories. In fact, the evolutionary psychologist claims that what distinguishes human subjects from other mammals is precisely the secondary usage of episodic memory, namely derived from everyday observation and events, in favour of semantic memory, which depends on the structuring of categories of meaning deeply grounded on symbolic deciphering, becoming "the dominant form of memory in human culture" (Donald 1991, 152). It is important (and not contradictory) to highlight the role of both personal and contextual perception in the empathic process, considering subjects, environments and objects are differently approached in the way we learn to understand them. In particular, "[t]he environment, the situation, or the pragmatic context is never perceived neutrally (without meaning), either in regard to our own possible actions, or in regard to the actions and possibilities of others" (Gallagher and Hutto 2008, 24). In fact, human subjects behave and interact in a shared environment that is so dense of cultural features that artificial structures are almost indiscernible and undistinguishable from natural ones (Tomasello 1999, 54). Not considering collective elements in a socially shared context would limit the overall understanding of what is experienced within its boundaries.

Therefore, the process of understanding through empathy, if understood under a simulationist approach, "involves *imagining the experience of a narrative* from that other person's point of view" (Goldie 2000, 178). In case of consistent cultural and social discrepancies, and also considering biographical divergences that can be traced to each individual's background, it is essential not to neglect that understanding cannot always be limited to basic actions and cannot only be attributable to elementary mental states. When making sense of other people and their actions, it is indispensable to acknowledge that "mere biological similarity among humans" is not sufficient to confer "a sufficient degree of psychological or cognitive similarity that would allow us to reenact another person's

thought" (Stueber 2006, 205). The multifaceted complexity of the variety of contexts of meaning, both commonly shared and personal ones, opens a debate on the question of projectionism and its dangers. Considering that the hermeneutic nature of empathy relies on the instant effect of interpretative actions, the structure of knowledge derived from empathic approaches may by essence not be 'self-verifying', but, on the contrary, deeply personal and questionable.

Hence, Stueber continues, "[r]eenacting another person's thoughts requires keeping in mind differences in our central background assumptions, since those background assumptions might influence our inferential behavior, which aspects of a situation we count as salient and relevant to our practical deliberation, and what reaction we would regard as appropriate" (Ibid., 207). Normatively evaluating habits pertain to every subject on the basis of one's social, cultural and personal formation as specifically located individual in a spatiotemporal context. At the same time, also sets of thoughts, emotions, mental states and behaviours that one is spontaneously called to comprehend are products of definite beliefs and perspectives which have a solid impact on the subjective rationality that belongs to not necessarily immediately accessible to the observing subject actions. In this matter, cultural and identitary peculiar features are entitled to model processes and responses, and it is thus crucial for one to recognise "that a difference in evaluative beliefs also concerns a difference in how such beliefs are integrated with our emotional responses" (Ibid., 210). The way we approach others and the outer world follows 'fundamental parameters' to which we are culturally and even sentimentally related. Unconsciously shaping the variety of different narratives that we build about what surrounds us, these parameters affect each individual as both emotionally and analytically active subject, since "reenactment is essential for understanding intentional agency because it is only in this manner that we are able to conceive of agents as situated in certain environments and as responding in a rational manner to the demands of this environment" (Ibid., 216).

Moreover, narratives are important in the way they allow the observer to position different objects of empathy within the most suitable domain of experience to make sense of what newly grasped. And, conversely, everything grasped throughout multiple experiences permits all of us to shape narratives increasingly comprehensive and more and more accurate. As suggested by Gallagher and Hutto (2008), "the pervasive presence of narrative in our daily lives, and the development of specific kinds of narrative competency,

can provide a more parsimonious alternative to theory or simulation approaches, and a better way to account for the more nuanced understandings […] we have of others" (Gallagher and Hutto 2008, 28). In this sense, the capacity of building and enriching personal narratives of the outer world is directly associated with the capacity of comprehending others. It is possible to empathise with individuals close to us and others far away, but "only when we know their stories – only when we can frame their behaviour in a narrative that informs us about their history or their situation" (Gallagher 2012, 370). Narrative's role is not only restricted to the purpose of shaping a context to frame what is observed. Most importantly, they provide structures within which it is possible to make sense of other people and outer bodily expressions. As explained by Gallagher, narratives are translated from contexts "that operate to widen or make more specific the meaning/significance of actions and expressive movements" (Ibid., 377).

In the case of empathy, contexts of meaning are necessary for the observing subject to make sense of what is perceived. In *The Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (1957), Weber aims to illustrate the foundations of the contemporary order and highlights the crucial role of contexts of meaning, describing them as "a plurality of elements which form a coherent whole on the level of meaning. There are several possible modes of meaningful relation between such elements, such as logical consistency, the esthetic harmony of a style or the appropriateness of means to an end" (Weber 1957, 95). In the same way, as expressed by Schutz (1967), in order to understand actions, intentions, and whys of other subjects, observation of embodied peculiarities (behaviours, facial expressions, movements, …) is not sufficient. Reversely, for our mind it is indispensable to structure an exhaustively detailed context of meaning capable of making sense of what is examined. In fact, the sphere of perception of an individual is operative in a 'perceptual field', a specific setting, "and the way it is given to us is influenced by what is co-given with it" (Zahavi 2010, 19). Fragmented and discontinuous elements come together into every subject's mind to constitute individually shaped meaning contexts, or *configurations of meaning*. In order to ensure the effectiveness of these configurations, it is essential to consider that "our lived experiences […] stand in a meaning-context if and only if, once they have been lived through in separate steps, they are then constituted into a synthesis of a higher order, becoming thereby unified objects of monothetic attention" (Schutz 1967, 75).

In other words, these configurations of meaning are essentially schemes elaborated from situations that individuals have formerly faced, enhanced contexts aimed to understand new elements that differ from what is already known. They are built following a rigorous sequential order, namely the "temporal dimension in narrative" (Lamarque 2004, 394) structured along a chronological relation between events, "even if just that of simultaneity" (Ibid.). The collection of knowledge and experiences organised in narrative sequences allows each individual to develop a personal judgment not only in the comprehension of other people's actions, but also the perceptive capacity to foresee what to expect from themselves and others in similar to previously encountered situations. In their composition, narratives include a multiplicity of different narratives that gain sense and effectiveness consolidating through repetition and similarity.

As highlighted by Schutz (1967), a "scheme of experience is a meaning context which is a configuration of our past experiences embracing conceptually the experiential objects to be found in the latter" (Schutz 1967, 82). This process of making order of lived experiences through synthetic schemes according to means complements a proper "interpretation of the lived experience" (Ibid., 84). Nevertheless, since our experience is multiple and diverse, it becomes fundamental to select a specific scheme out of the interpretative combinations available in our brain. To make narratively sense of what is empathically grasped, it is necessary to already dispose of relatable possibilities which we can access with cognitive immediacy. However, individuals do not carry with themselves contexts of meaning that are only individually developed: as regarding experiential metaphors and settings, we dispose and address a consistent number of elements that comprises historically and culturally shared components, and which pertain to every individual as material of belonging to a certain collective group of people. To every temporal fragment specifically located in a (not only geographical but also social) context a particular selection of narratives, synthesis, and relevant elements of agency that are significant on a spatiotemporal frame applies (which we can individually dispose in an almost automatic and non-inferential way).

This is precisely the role of narratives: it is through narratives that we learn how to give shape to knowledge concerning the other. As suggested by Bruner and Kalmar (1998),

narratives contribute to the sense-making process with a solid 'hermeneutical background'[10], which "consists of a learned set of skills and practical knowledge concerning what to expect from people, and how to deal with them" (Gallagher 2012, 371). At the same time, as claimed by Sternberg (1990), narratological structures are produced and constantly systematised in their organisation by the wholeness of sense-making process that we continuously face during our experiences.

Notwithstanding, as indicated before, each individual's background plays an essential role in shaping narratives to understand other people. A specific mental state experienced and performed in a certain situation can be differently perceived and interpreted by different subjects who dispose of different interpretative tools. Or, as defined by Zeman (2016), different perspectives, described by the author as the unique "relation between an evaluating eye, bound to an origo[11], and an object focused on" (Zeman 2016, 18). Perspective is fundamental, Zeman clarifies, because every act of evaluation and understanding is bond to a subjective 'here and now", which was necessarily shaped by a definite personal path constituted by individually framed segments that led to that singular 'here and now' perspective. In fact, in the event that a personal perspective is subject to change, "the perceived aspects in focus can be considered a consequence of the observer's spatio-temporal viewpoint" (Ibid., 19). Conceivably, there are as many perspectives available as individuals observing a specific frame (equal in moment place), and many others pertaining the same subject but different in time (Zunshine 2006, 17).

The involvement of perspective-taking in empathy allows a definite separation between subject and object, in the context of which the observer is able to project himself or herself in the situation in which the observed individual stands (Preston and de Waal 2002, 18). The key role of perspective allows each of us to consciously separate what pertains to our personal sphere and what is external to our individual dimension, projecting comparable circumstances on the other to understand what he or she is experiencing in a specific frame (Zlatev 2008, 225).

---

[10] In this context, hermeneutics is intended as the discipline concerning "interpretation and understanding, theory that tries to determine the manner in which we grasp and explicate the meaning of another person's utterances" (Stueber 2006, 9).

[11] The term 'origo' refers to the point of origin, namely the source, from which a diegetic relation is started. It can relate to the speaker, the observer or, more in general, the perspective from which the point of view derives.

Oriented to intersubjective understanding, empathy is not limited to routine circumstances within the frame of our immediate circle. Narrative schemes, contexts of experiences and hermeneutical backgrounds, as presented in the sections before, effectively adhere to many more frameworks with effective interpretative tools. Cultural and artistic products are among them. This first chapter of the dissertation addressed empathy in its intersubjective nature. Discussed as a cognitive sense-making process between individuals, this phenomenon was deployed highlighting the essential peculiarities of empathy: embodiment and simulation, but also the fundamental role of semantic domains, narrative and personal experience. The next chapter deals with the modalities with which empathy constitutes a crucial tool in meaning making when discussing artistic comprehension, focusing on the peculiarities of performed narratives and the forms and mechanisms the characters-audience relationship can assume.

2. Aesthetic Empathy and Artistic Understanding

2.1. An Empathy-Based Approach on Aesthetic Perception and Appreciation

Addressed in the first chapter of this dissertation for its significant role in intersubjective understanding, empathy represents a powerful and effective mechanism of both intentional and involuntary reciprocal comprehension. As claimed by Stueber (2006), "[e]mpathy's emergence as one of the primary concepts for solving the problem of other minds and as a central concept in the discussion about the foundation of the human sciences is best understood as a convergence of two rather independent philosophical traditions or discourses at the beginning of the twentieth century: the hermeneutic tradition of the 'philological sciences' (Boeckh 1886), which focussed predominantly on the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*), and the discussion within philosophical aesthetics, which was responsible for introducing the concept of empathy (*Einfühlung*)" (Stueber 2006, 5). In this context, the author refers to the primary relevance of Theodor Lipps' forerunner work (1907), which bridges empathic understanding and aesthetic perception as problems fundamentally related. In fact, Stueber continues, "[s]ince both traditions took themselves to be addressing the peculiarity of our grasp of phenomena whose external appearance 'expresses' in some sense an inner mental or 'spiritual' reality in bodily acts, artefacts, texts, or social institutions, it is perhaps not surprising that at times understanding and empathy have been seen as nearly identical" (Stueber 2006, 6). In other words, Stueber suggests that empathy, pervasively addressed as a central solution for the other minds' problem, deeply depends on the observation and comprehension of other subjects' external manifestations in the same way aesthetic perception allows us to predict and enhance our consciousness on the elements pertaining to the social and cultural environment which surrounds us. For this reason, aesthetic perception deeply relies on physical and mental interaction, and it is possible to analyse this specific form of appreciation along the cognitive mechanisms proper to empathy.

Up to this point, empathy was addressed and discussed as an intersubjective practice involving individuals and the comprehension of their psycho-physical states. However, the concept of *Einfühlung* as previously described, suggests "a common psychological mechanism supposed to underline both aesthetic and interpersonal "empathy"" (Ganczarek,

Hünefeldt and Olivetti Belardinelli 2018, 141) in its perception and definition. If to this extent empathic sense-making was only considered in its interpersonal exception, it is still fundamental to acknowledge that our common *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger 1962) condition is also affected by the constant presence of non-human elements surrounding us, including art. While on the one hand life constitutes an individual and immediate experience, and most of all unrepeatable in the way it is constantly subject to growth and evolution, on the other hand artistic works, even if faithful representation of observed realities, are characterised by their fixed and outward (and even public) nature. Living contexts, intended as domestic and familial environments, are privileged milieu for effective sense-making, since they contribute to make communicative codes and social structures recognisable to the observing subjects. Indeed, "empathy is instead an inexhaustible subject for the practices of contemplation, exploration, and creation" (Jurecic 2011, 24), in contexts in which the role of culture is essential for cognition. In this framework, artistic products can be assimilated in other cultural and physical (spontaneous and intentional) expressions of human nature, which require empathy to be fully grasped. In fact, "[a]esthetic and interpersonal "empathy" therefore differs mainly in that interpersonal "empathy" concerns other human beings, whereas aesthetic "empathy" concern human artefacts, especially those representing human beings or human environments" (Ganczarek, Hünefeldt and Olivetti Belardinelli 2018, 142). First coined by Vischer (1994), the concept of *Einfühlung* was originally employed exclusively in the context of aesthetic reflection, addressing the experience of *feeling into* a figurative representation external to the observing individual. The term was only later used to address intersubjective experiences and the psychophysical share of someone else's state. In short, what distinguishes intersubjective empathy from aesthetic empathy is the directness with which human states are experienced by the observed individual, in the first case. On the contrary, in the second case, the human element is only represented. For this reason, conceiving artificial objects and creative production at first as human artefacts is essential in order to claim the relevance of empathy in understanding them. Also, each artistic work, alongside its specific (creative and material) source of production, is geographically and historically located in a cultural and social environment which could not possibly be ignored in its reception. The evaluation of artistic objects is facilitated by normatively established rules of judgement, providing contextual and historical keys to identify the generally accepted sense of what is observed. Artistic expertise, as well as continuous training, affect

the perceptual systems and allow the construction and selection of better organised categories of understanding. However, fundamental cognitive mechanisms of empathy, as highlighted in the previous chapter, develop throughout the different stages of each individual's life, and the elaboration and awareness of our daily perception is only partially shaped and affected by the context we are living in, the interactions we experience and the cultural and social environment that influences us.

Together with this framing process, aesthetic empathy presupposes the conscious notion that artistic objects are first and foremost physical implementation of human ideas and mental states, mirroring expressions of personal conditions. In his work, Clifford (1968) highlights the deep relation between meaning and sensations when it comes to appreciate aesthetic features of an object. In fact, as with interpersonal understanding, when trying to decipher a reaction or an emotion evoked by a work of art, we rely on the comparative similarities that we had the opportunity to grasp from previously acknowledged states. These recognised similarities are fundamental for sense-making, since they have already been processed and accepted, and they belong to the experiential schemata followed by our mind. In this context, on the basis of collected practices, the mind organises familiar emotions depending upon segments ordered by contexts of experience and analogies of sense, which in turn shape the mind as a product of former understandings.

Embodiment, as relevant as for intersubjective comprehension, plays a key role when it comes to aesthetic perception. As suggested by Plantinga (2009), the spectator is addressed as a hypothetical entity that can be abstracted in his or her mental position, from which specific reactions or ideal responses are expected by specifically set categories (demographic positioning, social background or geographical affiliation) of belonging.

Starting from the concept of embodied simulation in its most basic appreciation, the empathic sense-making processes also comprises aesthetic perception, since the sensorimotor synchrony allowed by experiential proximity permits perception and comprehension. In this circumstance, "viewers reinterpret a component of their own bodies to serve as a correlate […] for something outside of the self, specifically, some quality of an art work or its production" (Ganczarek, Hünefeldt and Olivetti Belardinelli 2018, 144). Visual perception can be enlarged if some perceptive senses, for instance touch and proprioception12, have the opportunity to rely on detailed insights of sensorial notions such

---

12 The kinaesthetic sense of individual bodily position and corporeal self-movement in the surrounding space.

as materiality, dimension, and position, for example. Once a specific object is observed and comprehensively grasped, the result of its perception starts to influence how we shape the idea of the object itself in the frame of our experiential consciousness, and its nature and image are impacted and designed by our emotionally charged knowledge. Trying to mentally eliminate uncertainty on a personal level, the mind produces schemes of meaning following a structural repetition-oriented perspective: the dynamics of the past are conceived as susceptible to recur in the future. Cause-effect common patterns are characterised by standardised criteria that allow us to survive every day: the logic we establish while experiencing situations and objects in our daily life functions as a guide to our sensory apparatus to approach and grasp what is upcoming.

For this reason, when it comes to artistic practices and creations, even if the artist first shapes with his or her vision the product of his or her work, the spectator is entitled to mentally mould in a coherent idea what is being observed. In essence, while the attributes that pertain to the artistic object shape its physical appearance, the entirety of its perception and singular construction belongs to the emotional and mental cognition of the observing one. The process of conceptualisation, implementation and physical creation done by the artist needs to be completed by the cognitive experience of the observer, who constructs through recollection the newly perceived object's meaning. Following a radical structuralist approach, this perspective has gone as far as to believe that it would be possible to categorise art as only defined by its observer's perspective and respective categories. First introduced at the end on the 1960s and strongly supported by the sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1973), this reception-based approach stresses the relevance and validity of each individual perception and reception. In the definition of reception theory, Hall claims that the modality "with which the viewer decodes the signs" (Hall 1973, 11) is a constitutive and essential step in the process of production and conceptualisation of the object itself. Despite "suggesting that aesthetic appreciation is experienced as belonging to the work of art rather than to the observer" (Hagtvedt, Reidar and Patrick 2008, 200), the entire setting of experienced psychophysical states and emotions which belong to the spectator have a solid impact on shaping the artistic cognition and subjective value of the object.

As for intersubjective contexts, cognitive processes in aesthetic appreciation are oriented to sense-making practices. In fact, when it comes to artistic perception, dimensional

and bodily features are crucial to the orientation of our sensitivity and cognitive mechanisms of understanding.

Therefore, "artworks may be identified as works perceived as embodying human expression, where a perceived main feature of the work is the manner of its creation and/or execution rather than just a concept, idea, or message underlying it or conveyed by it, and where this manner is not primarily driven by any other contrived function or utility" (Ibid., 199). In fact, even if it would be impossible to claim that the cognitive grasping of a certain artistic object depends only on the emotional reaction to it, it is also essential to acknowledge its influence on the judgement. For this reason, it is crucial to understand which cognitive and emotional components are involved in artistic perception and to which extent they impact understanding. In this frame, perceptive understanding "affects the supervenience base of aesthetic reaction by affecting […] phenomenal content" (Stokes 2014, 24). All experiences collected through time make us develop a conscious expertise to such an extent that "knowledge about art changes how one aesthetically evaluates artwork" (Ibid., 1). In this respect, "[d]ifferences in aesthetic evaluation may follow, either because high-level aesthetic properties can be perceptually represented or because they causally depend on low-level perceptible properties" (Ibid.). Since cognition is deeply influenced by our background, knowledge, beliefs and traditional habits profoundly affect appreciation, including when it comes to approaching artworks.

Specifically, in the context of aesthetic comprehension, knowledge cannot be limited to the learning process around a certain subject or matter related to the object itself, but it also includes the combination of all "accurate unbiased information about the world" that "perception must provide" (Ibid., 3). In fact, the observation of artistic objects cannot be conceived as independent and autonomous, since "perception of works is sometimes affected by beliefs, concepts and other cognitive states about art and artworks, *and* this may sometimes be out of the perceiver's control" (Ibid., 31). In this context, it is essential to discern and unambiguously separate the level of perception to the culturally shaped judgemental one. In fact, aesthetic perception is inherently rooted in the interaction with the object of observation which entails a range of potential emotional reactions that directly depend on empathy. The repetition of this perceptive activity, which enables each individual to shape a significant pattern of experience, has to be distinguished from the conscious

evaluation of what grasped, which only constitutes a successive step and follows culturally and educationally assimilated schemata.

This conception of aesthetic understanding comes from a conscious shift in the study of aesthetics. As claimed by Francès (1976), the peculiarities attributed to an artwork are divided in intrafigural information (namely all the elements that pertain to the object itself) and intraserial information (in essence the complexity of characterisation derived from the observer's past experience evoked by the contemplation of the work). The most traditional approach to understand artistic products, formalism, "claims that works are to be appreciated and valued merely on the basis of their perceptible properties" (Stokes 2014, 7). The formalist perspective on aesthetics finds the meaning of objects within them. Bringing into focus the object per se, formalism positions the value on the analysed work, whether in its significant form (Bell 1914, 6-7) which belongs to only particular objects (and detectable only by few observers) or in the aesthetic dimension that follows the canons of a social environment in a certain historical period (Marcuse 1978, ix). In essence, the formalist approach attributes a higher relevance to the work itself, highlighting its features and the role of the artist's abilities applied to the artefact. On the other hand, the relativist school put more emphasis on intraserial information, arguing that each collected meaning attributed to a certain object creates a valid and unique sense about the piece of art. According to relativism, meaning as a unique and fixed interpretation is put into discussion, and the idea of critically discussion of the possibility of defining an absolute truth is completely abandoned in favour of perceptive analytical discrepancies (Hume 2007, 158). Assuming a relativist approach would mean exclusively privileging the observer's perspective and judgement about the questioned object.

While it would be an incomplete position to stand with only one of the two approaches, empathy represents an effective way to bridge the two elements involved in the process of sense-making with regards to cognitive paths for understanding that are addressed in this research. Essential paths to understand artistic works are based on cognitive processes more than mere physical attributes, and for this reason in the aesthetic scenario it is important to not isolate the viewer or the object in themselves, pondering instead the human discourse derived from the relation between the two. In defining human discourse as the sequence of

signs that, however expressed13, composes the variety of forms of communication, it is crucial to inscribe artistic expressions as cognitively intelligible symbols which sustain the interaction between delivering subject and receptor. In this context, artistic works stimulate a spontaneous reaction in the observing subject who, cognitively stimulated, is able to empathically engage in the process of understanding. In this frame, empathy is essential for subjects to respond to external stimuli which are able to internally evoke aesthetic response. However, it is essential to claim that, even if the physical observation of an aesthetic object could be neutrally experienced in an identical fashion by everyone, the empathic stimulus also involves an experience-based response that makes the aesthetic perception individual. For this reason, it is possible and not contradictory to claim that aesthetic perception is concurrently both personal and universal. Since "differences in the perceptual experience of a work can make for differences in aesthetic reaction to the work" (Stokes 2014, 8), it is essential to recognise that this perception "can be profoundly affected by the category under which the work is perceived" (Ibid.). These categories, specifically artistic ones, are constructed along practices that cannot be isolated or considered a-contextual, but they evolve through the composition of visual experiences. In this context, "[t]he work as a visual stimulus and the qualities of the artist and the culture that contributed to its particular form function as two distinct yet intertwined points of attentional focus between the viewer must move" (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990, 135). In other words, the definition of aesthetic perception and its spontaneous cognitive nature raises the question about the possible impact of other elements to culturally, contextually or artistically influence the cognition of the observed object. However, what is central in aesthetic perception is that, given the unidirectional and non-reciprocal nature of the observative act, the unfolding role of empathy permits the aesthetic experience to lean on the primal and emerging psychophysical reception of the object under attention. In fact, the empathic response to artistic stimuli takes place on this unconscious and elementary level of aesthetic perception. Often, artistic products represent elements of the real world as seen, studied and reshaped through a specific perspective. Interpretative judgement and subjectively grounded context of meaning (Schutz 1967, 86), as well as more general knowledge of the social world, influence aesthetic appreciation. Along with a more personal perspective on artistic

---

13 Human discourse involves a consistent range of forms of communication, including verbal, written and figurative expressions.

practices, the "perceptual field" (Zahavi 2010, 19) in which items are located contributes with the co-given peculiarities of the setting to the characterisation of the objects implicated in action.

After focusing on the main features of perception and its embodied nature, the next subchapter addresses aesthetic appreciation on a visual level as the immediate form of understanding for a viewer. In particular, an approach to aesthetic perception of visual works is adopted in relation to artistic observation and representation. The role of empathy in this framework is closely tied to those mechanisms that have been addressed in the first chapter, related to intersubjective contexts of experience. In fact, aesthetic perception is not exclusively grounded on the represented object within the limits of the portrayed signified, but also on agency, considering artistic works as most importantly human products. Abstract elements of representation, such as rhythm in music or the composition of lines in abstract painting, evoke movements and configuration reflecting authorial intentionality. Following this approach, the next section addresses representation, its perception and response in the context of artistic expression.

2.1.1. Artistic Representation and Visual Perception

The peculiar ability of understanding inanimate objects without the necessity of linguistic or psycho-physical exchanges is fundamental for the aesthetic evaluation of artefacts. The capacity of looking at specific items and being able to associate them to ideas, concepts and experienced meanings ensures that the sensorial and especially mental predisposition of seeing constitutes a remarkable evolutionary breakthrough (Campbell 1976, 413). In the specific context of visual understanding and artistic practices, "[t]he aesthetic experience occurs when information coming from the artwork interacts with information already stored in the viewer's mind. […] The information in the work of art fuses with information in the viewer's memory – followed by the expansion of the viewer's consciousness. This process of fusion we will refer to as the structure of the aesthetic experience" (Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990, 18). This experience does not pertain only to the observer-object relationship, but it is also deeply interpersonal in the way the authorship and manual production of the item confers to the spectator some level of "realization that humanity is communicating with humanity" (Ibid., 132). For this reason,

there cannot be a notion of art as mere representation of nature, as claimed by Gettings (1982, 85), primarily for the complexity and unknown variable of the outer world, and then for the non-negligible presence of the artist in the conception and creation of his or her work. However, as claimed by Brandt (2004), different domains of experience exist along with different categories of meaning. Together with the natural and cultural domains, which involve the biological, geological, collective and symbolic elements of the perceptual environment, the semiotician includes the category of spiritual domains, which comprises "the sphere of direct interaction with other minds by expressive contact, allowing for the sharing of thoughts and feelings with individuals" (Brandt 2004, 19). Also, no art per se is solely conceived and created with pure representational intentions. Artworks are mimetic depictions of perceived scenarios, symbols, expressions and even diegetic portraits of experienced objects, people, contexts and situations. As Gibbs explains, since visuality is both a perceptive and social process, mimesis appears "as the primary mode of apprehension utilized by the body [… and] the affective basis for ethical dealings with others" (Gibbs 2010, 202).

In this frame, aesthetic perception involves empathy in the process of assimilation and meaning making. Or, more accurately, "in the interplay of author, performer and audience, empathetic participation is the common ground from which all arts - including the art of understanding - spring" (Morrison 1988, xxiii). When it comes to observing the product of artistic practices, Morrison introduces the concept of hermeneutic gap, as the ensemble of assumptions and information that are necessary to "complete the pattern emerging before him" (Ibid., 34). To accomplish understanding (but even to finalise a miscalculated judgement) about what is expressed or, rather, to conclude the conjoint expression of artistic practices, the spectator needs to find a path to bridge this gap. Through perception, consideration and intuition, the observer is able to understand the object thanks to association and recollection. Empathy is thus essential in aesthetic perception in all those domains of experience to which we refer in sense-making processes. In particular, it is crucial to consider that figurative abstraction and non-realistic representation is not excluded from those mental categories to which we refer in the context of empathic comprehension. In fact, even the de-contextualisation from realistic representation of geometric shapes and colours still pertain to the natural and cultural world in which they are depicted, not only in their actual resemblance to specific objects but also according to the human imaginary from

which they are portrayed. Despite being separated from the context of belonging, geometries and their combinations are deeply natural, as well as the mechanical forces that are implied to create them and the mental conceptualisation behind their implementation. Every artistic object, Morrison follows, disposes of a certain degree of emptiness, which the spectator is supposed to fill. Moreover, since the viewer's role in sense formation is essential, the process of meaning shaping shall take into consideration that elements of misstructuring or even misunderstanding may be present, especially when facing the aesthetic unknown. In fact, "art is contingent, occasionally accidental; and works of art express an isolated, or alien, self-consciousness. For this reason, art, as a speculative (or theoretical) enterprise, is dependent upon the cognitive strategies of language to record, explain, and interpret what words cannot express" (Morrison 1988, 273). In other words, art is grasped not only in its form of expression, but also according to all those domains of experience that are involved in its interpretation, essentially depending on those mental codes and ideas that we employ to decipher what we observe.

The visual representation of existing scenarios through aesthetic symbols allows the spectator to experience in a mediated form the depiction of something else, phenomenon which, as claimed before, implicates an empathic relation between the observing subject and the addressed object. Morrison classifies this contribution as a discernment process of what is invisible in the arts, a deciphering procedure of the visual codes implemented by the artist. These figurative metaphors are not explained in the moment they are conceived or designed, and not even in the moment they are observed: these codes can be fully grasped only at the time when they are deeply felt and personally translated. The fallacies of meaning which belong to aesthetic products can be empathically overcome when "the viewer eliminates barriers between himself and the thing symbolized […] and finally becomes one with it" (Ibid., 279). The aesthetic bond generated between the observing subject and the object of scrutiny requires an affective contemplation to be sustained. Verbal, bodily or visual representations need a cognitive intervention in order to disclose the latent meaning behind the hermeneutic gap. In fact, Morrison continues, this particular form of affective, decipherment-oriented bonding belongs exclusively to the observer-object encounter. This required dimension does not specify any feature of the spatial context in which this encounter must occur, but classifies the personal, intimate aspects that characterise each individual cognitive experience. What starts as a mere action of observation becomes a sensorial action

that every individual can reproduce in a personal but also collective form14. The caused reaction consists in an emotional response, a "feeling, that is, an emotion with a virtual action tendency, because the action repertoire is essentially empty" (Tan 2000, 6). The generation of meaning is displaced from a physically exact transposition of the representative features of the object of observation to an emotional conception of comprehension. The emotional dimension of this hermeneutic gap allows an "affective participation between the viewer (including the artist as a viewer) and the subject that escaped the finitude of time" (Morrison 1988, 334). As for interpersonal relations, also visual comprehension moves around representations that can be ascribed in specific semantic domains, since the way artefacts are grasped and fully understood depends on the constant reference to their experiential meaning present in one's mind. In fact, mental and visual codes are different symbols of the same repertories which together compose the representative totality of the outer world.

In conclusion, both contexts of cognitive and cultural studies address how understanding occurs in the case of visual work, considering the role of perception more and more central. In particular, the tendency of analysis shifted its focus on the signifying expression and its visual structure and composition. Representation started being perceived more than a mere portrayal standing for something else, but each medium gained relevance in itself. For this reason, when a semiotics-based approach is adopted in aesthetic analysis, the act of seeing is per se the way understanding has to be addressed, since an object's features can only be acknowledged in the moment they are perceived. The act of seeing, its perspective and positioning, as was discussed is this section, do not only shape the singular act of perceiving but, on a larger scale, forms of collective and cultural definition of the object in question. The role of experience and semantic domains in the process of aesthetic perception and comprehension is addressed in the next subchapter.

2.1.2. Semantic Domains and Experiential Knowledge

In the creation of artistic products, the presence of peculiar themes has been recurrent throughout history. In particular, many artists have been employing specific *leitmotifs* which

---

14 The collective sensorial action can be both experienced in a simultaneous form, which is the case of a theatrical performance, or in an asynchronous dimension, like the perception of a painting by a multiplicity of visitors in a museum.

rely on "materials available in the physical and cultural world that have an emotion potential, that are already on people's minds, ready as it were to be launched wrapped up in some representation" (Tan 2000, 7). Either because they are based on traditional myths and beliefs or commonly shared emotions, these patterns are frequently involved in artistic metaphors to consolidate the conceptualisation and production of works. All these domains share "a potential of eliciting emotion, because they can be hypothesized to touch on *basic concerns* and contain *core components of emotional meaning*" (Ibid., 8). Experiential knowledge about these recurrent themes may permit a more efficient process of appraisal, to shape a better comprehension of artistic intentions, aesthetic works and specific evoked emotions in the spectator. Detecting and analysing the various cultural and social-related elements that successfully evoke personally grounded emotional reactions is fundamental to recognise and evaluate the impact of art. In this context, the role of repetition and familiarity comes into play. Through the action of genres, intended as fixed forms of structuring artistic expression in recognisable ways for the observer, styles and techniques, the recurrence of specific archetypes allows bindings to get more solid, not only between individuals and works but also among individuals and within different works. For instance, in Tan's critical approach style "is shown to interact with theme and cultural context in shaping the aesthetic emotion" (Ibid., 13).

While individually based artistic production has the power to create and develop particular and personal variations in the unitary ensemble of its category, the presence of frequent themes and common modalities of expression allows the public to trace mental paths that facilitate cognitive comprehension and empathic involvement. The way ideas are represented, mediated and conveyed, along with the codes which relate to the specific symbols employed in certain aesthetic depictions, allows the viewer to grasp not only the object under observation but also to easily decode the superstructures that pertain to the artistic medium through which it is expressed.

As for intersubjective empathic relations, not all forms of expression are equally effective for all the possible spectators. Represented contexts, cultural references and personal experiences affect the way specific stimuli are more or less effective in provoking a reaction in the public. In this way, the emotional significance of a certain piece is malleable in its reception, which does not mean that an object is supposed to realistically resemble a represented reality, but that the evoked emotions can be spontaneously associated to familiar

ones. The value of reality does not pertain only to the realistic authenticity of the appearance's features but to the accuracy of the stimulus. For empathy to take place the visual experience needs to respond to the viewer's domains of experience. Art tends to represent conventions, Tan continues, which need to be previously internalised by the observing subjects in order to efficiently decode a certain symbology. In this context, domains of experience are related to conventions in the way they consistently shape communicative patterns in artistic expressions. The mapping of these conventions, through repetition, shapes one's domains of experience, which are continuously influenced by recently acquired experiential knowledge. To this realistic side, a more imaginary one follows: art holds a dimension of make-believe (Walton 1990, 34) which can reach a dimension so vivid to become a new reality for the observer. Empathic feelings are so strong that "imagining is not always a deliberate choice, [and] the beholder cannot help but engage in it" (Tan 2000, 15). In fact, this stimulated imaginative act permits to suspend the dimension of reality during the time of perception, while the empathic process of sense-making still follows its actual mechanisms as experienced in everyday circumstances. In this context, the observed object serves as representation in the process of deciphering its meaning, in which the comprehension of the aesthetic emotions needs the complete understanding of possible variants that different forms of communication can assume. Meaning and its vehicle need to interface in order to be empathically comprehensible to the observer, who is entitled to explore meanings from its repertoire of experiences to individually translate the conceived message.

Emotional responses always involve a certain degree of understanding, empathic reaction to artistic work none the less. In fact, this form of perception following its spontaneous nature leads to the comprehensive understanding of the observed object. In particular, "discovering the meaning of art works is, as a cognitively complex and variable process, subject to influences from other beholders […], as the pleasure of experiencing art is in larger part discovering meanings, and the humanist's view implies that an exchange of ideas is an essential part of the appraisal process, if only because polyvalence and multiple interpretation is in the humanist's view the hallmark of all art" (Tan 2000, 22). In other words, the process of comprehension in artistic observation is grounded on cognitive perception which, according to Tan, is deeply subjective in the way it processes evaluation

and judgement. For this reason, the exchange of ideas and interpretations is the most effective path to a complete and shared comprehension.

So far, empathy has been addressed as essential in aesthetic perception. Specifically, its crucial action lies in the cognitive bridging of meaning and its embodied form of expression, a process which is achieved in the procedural combination of artistic representation, observation and experiential knowledge. This section addressed the emotional potential in reaction to aesthetic stimuli, and the central role in understanding of recurrent patterns in the conceptualisation and production of artistic works. Commonly shared myths and beliefs, as well as the involved emotional charge, in combination with individual experiences shape those domains of experiential knowledge that are personally grounded in each subject. These paths are essential in the way they facilitate empathic involvement and comprehension, contributing through similarities and repetitions to the deciphering of the observed object, both in its medium of expression and conveyed meaning, shaping and internalising the experience of new realities.

The following sections will focus on specific art forms, namely performative representations implemented by actors, which find particular expression in theatre and cinema. These forms of aesthetic expressions are particularly relevant examples of the role of empathy especially for two reasons. On the one hand, empathy is central in the context in which audience observes unfolding human emotions, whether directly expressed or projected on a screen. In fact, the conception of the empathy as a process of *feeling into* allows the spectator to emotionally and cognitively share the portrayed subjects' states. For this reason, even if spectators and actors are not directly involved in an intersubjective relation, the empathic connection remains a shared dimension between human subjects. On the other hand, these representations tend to involve anthropological forms of expression. Gestural manifestations and languages, but also represented contexts and depicted relational structures are easily recognisable as emotional and mental forms of expression. For this reason, this dimension facilitates an immediately addressable stimulus to be empathically addressed. That is, the represented other, characterised by his or her own consciousness, expressivity and a structured psychophysical persona, is addressed and recognised by the public as the originary source of an experience that can be empathically grasped and shared in its non-originary form.

2.2. Empathy and the Intangible in Performative Arts

As the impact of empathy on aesthetic understanding has been considered fundamental, its role is also extremely relevant when art tends to reproduce human and social systems, contexts and behaviours. In particular, it is the case of performed representations of realities such as theatre and cinema, in which intersubjective relations are depicted in their narratives in a verisimilar way, namely the social, cultural or historical context in which the represented reality is set is plausibly portrayed, within the framework of imaginary or plausible worlds. These two forms of artistic practices present some similarities, related especially to their performative nature. In particular, they share the involvement of actors personifying specific characters, the often central role of dialogues and the temporary engagement of the audience in the represented story. However, they also present some peculiar differences. First, the suspension of the spectator's reality (Tan 2000, 15) is more challenging in theatre, in which the simulation of an authentical actuality presents more difficulties than in film. Lacking the complexity of contextual details and the possibility of nearer or further framing typical of films, the theatrical acting has to compensate in vocal and bodily expressivity the impossibility of such wider changes in audience's perspective. At the same time, the physical proximity of actors in the theatre hall makes the characters' presence significant for the audience which is collectively experiencing an unrepeatable shared moment. On the other hand, the cinematic experience, whether individual or collective, still represents a significant object of study on aesthetic perception, since the possibility of identically reproduce the same work makes the analysis of the object of observation more comparable. In fact, different subjects in different moments and contexts have the opportunity to experience the reproduction of the same movie. The verisimilitude employed in the conception and realisation of cinematic representations allows empathy to be triggered in numerous spectators, whether they are sharing the experience in the same instant or distant in space and time. For this reason, "empathy has special significance for the study of cinema as a narrative art form because, from its inception, empathy has been seen as an integral aspect of how people engage with art and come to understand the inner life and emotions of others" (Stadler 2017, 1).

Central in performative representations, empathy is essential to grasp the psychophysical characters that are involved in fictional stories. Following the sensorial

process that characterises aesthetic perception, the spectator has to observe, imagine and discern other people's actions (under the guise of impersonated protagonists' movements) to be able to indirectly experience what is shared and depicted by the artistic product. As seen in the previous section, the importance of empathy can be extended to the peculiar artistic forms of theatre and cinema, without strictly relying only on the aesthetic perception of the object itself, but rather in relation to spectatorship, intended as the contemplative positioning of the public towards the work. In fact, as Lipps (1903) claims, when I contemplate an aesthetic object "I become progressively less aware of muscular tensions or of sense-feelings in general" (Lipps 1903, 376). In this suspended frame the spectator is able to directly access to the artistic work, through the involuntary empathic projection into the portrayed reality.

As claimed before, performed situations, whether fictional or real, are expressions of mediated subjectivity. In fact, the medium functions as a vehicle establishing a relation between the conveyed object, its intentions of representation and the observing audience. In fact, according to Gallese and Guerra (2012), "to grasp our primordial contact with the film […w]e should thus get back to the brain-body" (Gallese and Guerra 2012, 187). Embodied perception and cognition are essential in the way we sense our understanding of the reality of everyday life in both intersubjective and artistic experiences. The importance of the body in both contexts, Gallese and Guerra follow, is to shape the spatial definition of the context of observation, including objects and persons, whether they are real, impersonated or fictional. When part of the audience, the spectator immediately and involuntary participates to the action in a physical and emotional way, before engaging in the mental elaboration of what is observed. In the same way that "[i]ntersubjectivity should thus be viewed first and foremost as intercorporeality" (Ibid., 193), the empathic reaction to aesthetic perception leads the spectator to respond to the visually represented bodily stimuli. That is, the relevance of bodily expressivity in the context of aesthetic perception is as primal as in actual interpersonal contexts. In fact, the sharing relation between audience and represented environment of thoughts, emotions and intentions is deeply physical in its implications and responses. Since audience and protagonists are separated in their contexts of actions, the role of direction and staging is to spatially mediate and regulate relations and interactions. Hence, to empirically examine the psychophysical states of the explored characters, but also receptive general meaning and creative processes, "people re-use their own mental states or

processes represented within a bodily format in functionally attributing them to others" (Ibid., 206).

Highlighting the function of the body and corporeal expression in aesthetic perception and comprehension, it is essential to consider body's situatedness and spatial dimension both from the perspectives of the spectatorial observing position and the space as actual frame for artistic representation. In this context, D'Aloia (2012b) emphasises the function of spatiality when understanding an environment we are not part of, as in the case of spectators assisting a performed representation. For instance, in the context of theatre the construction of this dimension necessitates to integrate the depicted world and the one of reality in co-existing grounds of interaction. According to D'Aloia, "the spectator experiences a *tangible* relationship" (D'Aloia 2012b, 220) with all those subjects, milieus and objects *en scène*. In fact, the author claims that the observer's body, while watching a character bodily facing the portrayed experience, is able to perceptually interpret it thanks to a reflexive reading of the performed action. In particular, the audience's sensorimotor reaction as highlighted by Gallese and Guerra (2012) is essential "to sense a *contact*" with the depicted world and "act *through* the character" (D'Aloia 2012b, 222). This harmonisation of emotional and physical reactions ensures that the visually experienced information compensates its discontinuity with the tactile experience. In this context, the perceived optical information does not correspond with what can be experienced to the touch. However, D'Aloia claims that the mediated experience of aesthetic observation and the viewer's simulative participation allow the object of observation to gain tangibility. The represented reality, within its spatial frame, constitutes an integrated dimension which can be explored as if it were corporeally reachable, through the vicarious action of characters and their perspectives in context. As proper instruments of facilitation, media, supported by the simulation tendencies of the audience, succeed in turning what is intangible in something perceivable. In sum, D'Aloia concludes, the spatial dimension in artistic contemplation is crucial in the way its perception is experienced is new forms. The physical tangibility and its corporeal references are temporarily suspended in favour of a new substitutive dimension which orients the viewer into the artistic depicted reality.

This section addressed the perception of depicted representations adopting as perspective of analysis the observational position of the audience. In particular, in the relation between spectators and portrayed fictional characters the action of embodied

cognition and the context of observation with the spatial dimension of the artistic object and its represented reality (and the way they relate in different aspects of location, positioning and tangibility) permit the stimulation of an observative empathic reaction. The next subchapter tackles narrative and its essential role in the empathic response to aesthetic perception.

2.2.1. Narrative, Mimicry and the Embodied Response to the Medium

Discussing aesthetic perception and empathic response requires a specific focus on narrative. In a broad sense, narrative is the presentation of events, characters, contexts and their expressions as constructed in a semantic relation between each other, with the aim of being conveyed to an audience. The role of narrative is essential in embodied simulation, given that it is able to shape the perception process affecting the traits of narrative empathy. In aesthetic perception, empathy is influenced by the trajectory of narrative both on a temporal and order level. In particular, "temporal progression and suggested causality" as well as "narrative calculations that causally connect events and intentions" (Breithaupt 2011, 6) influence the way spectators direct perspective-taking and emotional partaking. In particular, given the fundamental function of motor mimicry, narrative stimuli work in a continuum with gained experience, shaping both protagonists' and situational features. Narrative shapes the path to understanding, allowing the audience to address contexts and situations different from its own. In fact, if we consider aesthetic perception as a simulative form of cognition, it is important to comprehend empathy as bound to specific features that are provided by narrative.

Since the construction of performative stories relies on how spectators are able to respond with personal assumptions, it is essential to comprehend the ability of fictional representation to simulate mental and emotional processes. This mechanism functions as a sensory stimulus: our perceptual impression brings to light segments of our consciousness that are necessary to frame what is observed. Through time, we develop the ability of cognitively deciphering increasingly complex narratives, capacity which plays a consistent role in understanding. The relationship created with the fictional story implies empathy to address the "the conditions of reproduction" which "serve in some way to mold the object" (Arnheim 1933, 60) and to make it resemble to familiarly recognisable realities. This form

of simulating ordinary perceptual experiences is essential for the viewer, who unconsciously operates a proper decoding process acknowledging semiotic meaning of represented symbols. This practice is constructed as a projection of the self: if the collection of symbols through time has the power to shape who we are and how we make sense of what surrounds us, it is precisely this composed form of the self that we project in symbolic transposition. On the other hand, the grasped reality is grounded on personal experience and acquires meaning from it, but it is also able to provide an original element suitable to being added to the spectator's personal reservoir. Freed from spatial and subjective constraints, empathy permits the observer to expand his or her sensorial and emotional perspective towards new directions, both suggested and emphasised by the media's intermediary role. In fact, the spectator employing "real-world knowledge and awareness of narrative conventions" (Bordwell 2013, 49) is consequently capable of establishing effective suppositions, inferential observations and successful interpretations. In fact, D'Aloia (2012b) argues that narrative "often negotiates the conflict between loss of position and proprioceptive sensibility on behalf of the spectator, embodying in its stylistic and formal solutions the spectator's natural tendency towards psychophysical equilibrium" (D'Aloia 2012b, 234). In other words, narrative plays a crucial mediation role between the reality from which the public is experiencing aesthetic perception and the new position it assumes into the portrayed environment, orienting the observing subjects on matters of intentionality, sensitivity and direction.

In the context of fictional representation, Plantinga (2013) addresses film as "a particularly sensual medium with the capacity to affect spectators in direct ways through the perceptual qualities of images and sounds (Plantinga 2013, 94). These suggestions of direction, provided by the elements which contribute to the structure of the work (director, photography, light, …), orient the spectator to a specific embodied response, a supposed emotional reaction to the newly created reality. In fact, Plantinga continues, "[w]atching and hearing movies is a sensual, visceral experience, and from this characteristic stems much of their affective power" (Ibid., 99). However, emotions are universally presented, to make intuitions accessible in the same way to everyone in the audience. Even if personal knowledge is an essential pre-assumption to unconscious responsiveness, "viewers have different life experiences, levels of maturity, and degree of patience" and narratives must be interesting, accessible, exaggerated and compact" (Ibid., 106). Different personal and

cultural backgrounds would eventually apply a variety of diverse interpretations to what experienced, but a deep involvement and concern at a general basic level is automatically shared.

According to the literary scholar Marie-Laure Ryan (2004), the medium of expression affects narratives in the way they are structured and implemented. Central in a cultural studies-based approach, Ryan associates with narrativity the capability of evoking mental images, going beyond the limit of linguistic medium. Approaching the medium as material vehicles of communication, Ryan takes a departure to from the lexical composition of narratives highlighting the relevance of cognition and interaction. In the case of represented stories and realities, the narrative structure and its development are supported by the medium of expression together with the strategies adopted to represent them. Audio-visual tools and linguistic devices are employed in combined paths to convey messages and intentions. As suggested by Tan (1996) the emotional involvement constitutes the most elementary and common mental state among the public. Thus, the perceptual experience of performative arts is at the same time an individual and collective practice. In fact, the experience of empathy towards commonly perceived objects allows a crowd of people to respond at the same time to the same emotional stimulus. The deployment of the medium and narrative construction permit the audience to access the story and decipher its elements and meaning. Hence, Plantinga (2013, 100) claims that the interaction audience-object of contemplation is both bottom up, depending on individual interpretations and interpretative judgments, and top down, deeply influenced by the schemes attributed to the narrative for its comprehension to be specifically directed.

Moreover, narrative intentions of the represented reality are often conveyed through the bodily and emotional expression of the individual and intersubjective dimension of the states experienced by portrayed characters. In fact, emotional signals permit the spectators to perceive how the portrayed character is making sense of the events he or she is experiencing and the spontaneous or intentional reaction to them. Claimed at first by Lipps (1907), mimicry is deeply related to emotional contagion and is a form of embodied communication, serving as functional stimulator of empathy. At the same time, mimicry "primarily functions to regulate social affiliation" (Hess, Houde and Fischer 2014, 104): its ability of stimulating empathy also depends on the reciprocal contagion between the member of the audience, encouraging a collective emotional experience.

In addition, Tan (2013) investigates to which extent spectators experience empathy as a conscious effort or it mainly represents an involuntary state. In fact, while "emotional contagion and mimicry […] lack of any significant appraisal" (Tan 2013, 339), empathy necessarily implicates a degree of comprehension of the observed character's mind. This knowledge is structured in the frame of narrative, involved to guide the audience in understanding. Throughout the story, appraisal is designed with different expedients, for instance privileging certain perspectives instead of others or providing an incongruence between the variety of information delivered to the public and the one available to each character. Alternatively, in the case of films, the repetitive shifting of contexts, situations and actions, Tan explains, makes spectators' perspective multifaceted and far wider than any of the characters. The way in which the observing experience is synchronised within the members of the audience "reflects similarity of processes for all viewers in principle, and thus […] controls responses of individual viewers" (Ibid., 346). In this suspended dimension of performative representation, empathy is continuously stimulated and balanced through narrative expedients.

Grounding the aesthetic practice on the spectator is essential on a phenomenological level. Embodiment, emotions, and their perception are deeply rooted on a personal positioning, and the communication of those states in both theatrical and cinematic context relies on the basis of interpersonal structures. Optical, emotional and even hearing perspectives are destined to an audience subjectively deployed, and they are designed to meet individual imageries able to complete contexts and characters' portrayals, as well as internal ideas and emotions. Embodied simulation is relevant in spectators' empathic experience as an inner form of response. At the mind level, embodied simulation "does not entail inference of […] imaginative substitution [… , r]ather, it is pre-logical and pre-reflexive, rooted at the sensory-motor and neurophysiological level" (D'Aloia 2015, 190-91). On the contrary, emotional and sensorial mimicry is induced by visual, linguistic, acoustic, expressive and gestural elements that depict different characters in their expressive identity. These mechanisms of interpersonal understanding in fictional contexts can be explored and understood starting from general notions on intersubjective empathy, but they can also be employed as models to deepen everyday situations. In essence, the fictional bodily and expressional portrayals to which spectators assist are grounded on the representation of the same mechanisms upon which intersubjective empathy relies. Those

corporeal and emotional manifestations that shape the observed characters, their actions and psychophysical states are addressed thanks to the experiential knowledge of the audience, but they also reinforce such experience with further aesthetic involvement. Intersubjective and aesthetic forms of perception mutually affect and strengthen the experiential knowledge we detain about the outer world.

However, a complete control on empathy by the medium is not conceivable. While a stimulus can be perfectly designed and calculated, expectations about the spectator's response, depending on private background and experiences, can only be putative. The way in which each one mentally investigates explanations and meaning production is deeply personal. For instance, the construction of characters' modes of experiencing the outer world is necessarily influenced by the subjective approach of the audience while analysing them. Narrative and aesthetic endeavours play an essential role in structuring sense and empathic response, but a personal approach is essential in "resolving uncertainty, ambiguity, or other lack of information in a stimulus" (Tan 2013, 360).

In the field of cognitive narratology, Balázs (1952) focuses on the role of embodied response to emotions experienced and expressed by actors. The development and characterisation of performed states does not require a completely exhaustive explanation: all the personally recollected elements induce the spectator to fully understand "happenings, characters, emotions, moods […] without the need for many words" (Balázs 1952, 41). In fact, following this perspective, Ward (2015) sustains that the audience experiences the emotions suggested on stage (or on screen) through embodied cognition, since the way we imagine, elaborate and conceptualise our thinking and meaning construction depends on the sensorimotor interactions with the reality around us. For this reason, the perceived content is grounded on "our body's innate capacity for 'feeling into' another's affective state, offering an embodied and noncognitive route to empathy, even if that other is fictional" (Ward 2015, 185). All the features attributed to the represented characters and their forms of action shape the central object of the spectators' attention, which is able to focus on the emotions experienced in the context of the portrayed scenario. For this reason, empathy is not only essential when it comes to other subjects: its role is crucial also in relation to a wide range of inanimate elements, such as objects, environments and components peculiarly attributed to specific social structures and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the two levels of embodiment involved, the artist thoughtful presence in the object and the meaning itself when embodied in modes of expression (cinema and theatre, in this case), necessitate of mental mapping to reason about emotional paths when approaching them in bodily forms. Likewise, embodied simulation requires mimetic consciousness to be fully grasped and interpreted. As already claimed, the abstract dimension of concepts and symbols needs to be sustained by something less arbitrary to make sense for the observer. For this reason, the cultural dimension of embodiment ensures that "[i]mage schemas […] are grounded in human, sensory-motor experience" (Hampe 2005, 1). What we tend to mentally develop in metaphoric forms is physically grounded in everyday experiences, since what we learn from bodily perception constitutes the base to abstract reasoning. In fact, the way meaning is organised in artistic expressions follows the same embodied structure of intersubjective comprehension. For this reason, embodied simulation is essential also when related to performative arts: since every form of expression deals with a process of re-conceptualisation in the way we tend to phrase it in our mind, the performative medium presupposes its bodily supported codes to be deciphered and mentally assimilated. In particular, in the performative framework, bodily expressions need to appear as similar to reality as possible to be fully understandable. However, it does not mean that representations have to be figuratively realistic and strictly conforming to the portrayed object. On the contrary, our wealth of experiences enables us to recognise shapes and their related significance, conceptual configurations and the modalities in which the repetition of patterns formulates the general conveyed meaning in different combination. Approaching the mediated meaning through represented emotions and actions, "[v]iewers are able to connect up with the expressive acts of others […], because simulations mechanisms in the human brain allow for such connections" (Ibid., 7).

As shown, "the structures used to put together our conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience and make sense in terms of it" since "the core of our conceptual system is directly grounded in perception, bodily movements, and experience of a physical and social character" (Lakoff 1987, xiv). As for everyday intersubjective contexts, the same structure of sense-making applies to fictional characters and impersonated protagonists. Like Gallese and Wojciehowski (2011) state, "[w]hen we see someone acting or expressing a given emotional or somatosensory state, we can directly grasp its content without the need to reason explicitly about it" (Gallese and Wojciehowski 2011, 14). Precisely in this frame,

empathy needs to be related to cognitive mechanisms across different forms of expressions to claim its significance in aesthetic perception, despite the way of representing and implementing the conveyed narrative. For instance, in the particular case of theatrical representation, the multiple forms of narratives involved (dialogues and corporeal gestures, but also scenography and music) are able to deliver meaning to the spectators through a variety of systems of expression.

This second section of the chapter tackled the peculiarities of fictional representations with their specificities in cinematic and theatrical expressions. In particular, addressing empathy and its key role in aesthetic perception, narrative, embodiment and mimicry where discussed and emphasised as essential in comprehension. In their depicted narratives, performed representations depend on empathy to succeed in the portrayals of psychophysical characters and their actions, intentions, and intersubjective relations. Embodied cognition allows simple contemplation to arise an empathic reaction in the spectator, grounded on spatiality, corporeal manifestation and emotional signals. Following, the next section will analyse the audience-actors relationship, as a fundamental tool to further investigate empathic understanding in the context of performativity and aesthetic appreciation.

2.3. Embodiment and Perspective Taking: The Audience and the Character

Even if mostly oriented to affective and communicative states, when related to performative genres empathy has a fundamental role in expanding one's social interactions "extending the range of people, experiences, and cultures that an individual may have occasion to empathize with" (Stadler 2013, 31). Specifically, the role of empathy in sense-making related to performative genres is deeply rooted in the perception of the protagonists and their actions.

In performative contexts, intercorporeal empathy is replaced by an extended and mediated version, which "is directed to imagined or completely fictious persons" (Fuchs 2014, 152). Fuchs addresses qualities of expression, intentionality and interactions as examples of circumstances able to awake fictional empathy. Representational media assume a catalyst role accompanying and stimulating the *as if* model of consciousness, which applies to a virtual-based form of intersubjectivity, evidencing that empathy is not directly anchored

in physical relations, despite its deeply bodily features. In fact, our mind can, consciously and unconsciously, grasp and make sense of information even when mental or emotional states are produced by subjects who do not exist in real life or are simply unrelated to our personal environment. This natural human ability derives from the predisposition of each individual's imagination to envision and construct both non-present and non-existent objects, persons, and even contexts and worlds. Considering that everything we observe and experience is subsequently projected into ideas by our brain (Zeki 2009, 1-2, as addressed in the first chapter), the involvement of subjective schemata mentally simulated can be equally applied to physically performed circumstances or only mentally grasped ones. Our indistinct inclination to fully perceive both tangible and fictious individuals suggests that "empathy and social understanding are regarded as projections onto others of inner representations or models" (Fuchs 2014, 155). This hypothesis on inner mental reproduction implies that "the person who perceives the other is not actually interacting with him, but rather with his own internal models or simulations of the other's actions" (Ibid.). In other words, the models of interactions that we dispose are so influential and embedded in our mind that even when focusing on fictional characters and environments we are able to recognise the domains of experience implied. In fact, the direct interaction with the outer world primarily evokes the models of comprehension upon which we rely to decipher external objects and intersubjective contexts.

In order for understanding to be effective, the forms and means of representation are fundamental. On the one hand, as languages of communication, performative media intervene between the audience and the represented scenario, positioning themselves as tools for interceding realities. In fact, representation has the power to bridge mental conception (namely, one's mind reality) with the physical outside world, intervening as a support in its unfolding. On the other hand, they are also instruments of understanding, in the way they portray subjects and contexts as entities to be deconstructed and comprehended. Ways of depiction transcend, even if they support, intersubjective relations in a narrowest sense, and provide in their integrity a range of elements that reinforce cognition and emotional subjectivity (and its understanding). This means that the form of representation is not influenced by the way it serves intersubjective communication, but on the contrary it affects the entire process of perception and comprehension stimulating empathy and emotional reaction.

In the context of fictional representation, fiction allows the spectator to suspend his or her relationship with reality and fully connect with the represented dimension. However, as for the *as if* experience of foreign states belonging to subjects near to us, empathy implies by its nature a certain degree of imagination. If in intersubjective relations we tend to envision mental and emotional states as if they were ours, when it comes to fictional characters and contexts the entire experience is set on a virtual level. For this reason, media provide effective cognitive support to expand the viewer's possibilities of perception.

In the case of theatrical representation, the actions on stage are essential in shaping the emotional content of the play, in a way that our empathic resonance depends on the previous experience of our body moving and acting in association with particular emotional state. In particular, this experience follows the typical mechanisms of empathy, process during which "we rely on mediation by the representation of the actions associated with the emotions we are witnessing and on a brain network that includes structures supporting communication between action representation circuits and circuits dedicated to emotional processing" (Iacoboni 2005, 98-99). In the specific frame of theatre, the spectator's mind is led to respond to the actor's presence, movements and bodily manifestations. On the other side, actors play embodying those physical expression immediately recognisable by the present audience (Blair 2009, 102), with the goal of empathically evoking the feeling experienced by the characters on stage. The empathic imagination of the spectator into the characters on stage is essential not only in the understanding within the limits of the action, but also to foresee what the protagonist might feel and how he or she might act in the following scenes. In fact, characters and their development deeply rely on the analogy that the audience is able to recollect with previous experiences (among which also earlier attended plays) about analogous stories, other people and characters. Performers on stage act seeking to stimulate an emotional reaction, evoke and regulate empathy through the plausibility of the represented reality.

On the contrary, when approaching the cinematic representation of a story actors do not only impersonate characters, but their performance is shaped to construct a specific *mise-en-scène* able to modify the expression and perception of actions and intersubjective exchanges (Donaldson 2012, 159). In particular, Donaldson suggests that our access to the mental and emotional state of a character in films depends on the possibility to access to him or her, which "concerns how much we see and hear of a performance: the spatial position of

the camera in relation to the performer and how close it is to them, expressivity of voice or expression" (Ibid., 161). In this frame, the spatial context of the experience as well as the emotional and physical involvement are affected by the medium (movements of the camera, proximity to the characters' expressivity, accentuation of kinaesthetic attention and information) in the way they are perceived by the audience. The use of camera and filmic techniques plays a role as essential as the acting one, revealing particular aspects of psychophysical expression. The relationship between bodies takes place on multiple levels (between characters and between characters and spectators), and this connection can be understood "as a response directed by the complexities of filmed performance: the quality of movement and characteristics of different efforts understood by it and our spatial access and physical alignment to the performer" (Ibid., 171). For this reason, the connection between realisation and perception in the cinematic experience is empathically grounded on embodied expression and its understanding.

Moreover, D'Aloia (2012a) claims that the audio-visual experience of the audience during films leads to both an external perception of the characters' bodies and an inner feeling supported by what observed. Cinematic empathy is, according to D'Aloia, grounded on this dichotomy, an "ontological separation that, nonetheless, represents the constitutive act of the film experience as a paradoxical 'proximity at a distance'". (D'Aloia 2012a, 106). In fact, between separation and proximity, the spectator-character empathic relation is described by D'Aloia "as the primordial experience (in the spectator's lived-body) of non-primordial movements and emotions (those that are performed and felt by the character's *quasi*-body)" (Ibid., 100).

When empathy is extended to imaginative contexts, whether real or fictive, "employing some form of […] *perspective taking* or *imaginative transposition* […,] I imagine then how *I* would feel and react if in the same situation" (Fuchs 2014, 158). This particular form of *as if* scenario transcends a strict adhesion to the mere physical level, and it requires envisioning a distant situation experienced by somebody else. Non-personal and fictional agents are still perceived as real, as if they were part the observing individual's personal world of experience. This contextual difference is irrelevant on a symbolic level, in which while being aware of what is real and what is not, one is simultaneously fully conscious of the existence of these two realities. Even if "*fictional* consciousness posits the other as *not actually being given* […,] this so-called 'paradox of fiction' is not based on an

irrational attitude or on any sort of illusion, rather on the peculiarity of fictional consciousness to oscillate with split awareness between both conceptions of the perceived character or event" (Ibid. 161-62). In other words, even if a form of disembodiment is involved since the physical experience is reduced to the minimum, a fictional form of bodily mirroring is present in the portrayed experience of the represented others. In this context, empathy and its spontaneous mechanisms of action do not approach fiction as not credible if the subjects shaped by it come close enough to reality to substitute it for a short period of time. Perceiving what is represented on stage (or on screen), our mind tends to minimise its opposition to these narrative media as mere artificial and artistic construction and the emotional encounter starts being experienced placing more emphasis to the human nature of the characters, emotions and contexts of action. As suggested by Fuchs, the figure of the other, present or not, is so powerful for our consciousness to transcend the necessity of being physically given. In fact, empathy continues to play a key role in the understanding of external subjects, even if not directly given, mediated or fictious.

When empathising with a character, both during a play or on screen, each spectator is able to encounter some peculiarities that match with his or her personal states. Whether in an identitary (sex, origin, social condition) or experiential (the fact of having lived certain situations and contexts more than others) way, matching to some degree with the psychophysical characterisation of a depicted personality helps the audience to share and understand the observed portrayal. However, what helps in the process of sense-making is the way characters and their states are *underdescribed* (McFee 2011) in the narrative evolution. In fact, since emotional and mental states attributed to represented characters are ascribed in the construction and combination of selected passages of the storyline, the perspective oriented development of narratives (and narration itself) is essential in creating a path aimed to reveal specific assumptions, adopt certain positions and ultimately share the portrayed states. These intentional guidelines are concerned with shaping in a narrow time frame a simplified but convincing character's psychology, as well as "how the 'other' understands his life" (McFee 2011, 202).

The structuring of audience's empathic response to represented characters take place though diverse modalities. First, to intensify the process of spectator-character identification, a "range of different emotive relations between audiences and fictional characters" (Carroll 2011, 165) is configured with the aim of spreading within the audience what is portrayed as

experienced. This identification does not directly involve another subject as in interpersonal relations, but the other is mediated to the ones observing through the construction of effective narratives. In other words, the members of the audience are "in the emotional state in question *because* that is the state they think that the characters are in" (Ibid., 167). However, the depicted states do not always coincide with spectators. Often, in fact, there is a solid divergence between a character's emotional portrait and what the audience is experiencing, and the main reason behind this discrepancy is the different amount of information at disposal of each character and the audience. Even if "our emotional states have different causes and take different objects than the putative mental states of the protagonists" (Ibid., 168) it does not mean that empathy cannot take place. On the contrary, to fully understand, and therefore empathise, with the observed characters it is essential to complete the knowledge that the time of narration would provide if the time of experience and the one of representation would coincide. For the purpose of experiencing through empathy the same state of a portrayed protagonist, we do not only need to fully grasp the unchanged path that led the character to that same state, but the fact of him or her being in that specific condition is the ultimate but essential requirement to experience the same. For this very reason, the audience-character relationship is an empathic one. Despite the potential variety of spectators, "the fiction, by means of either visual depiction, enactment, and/or verbal description, organizes or filters the situations and events it presents in such a way that […] our states are in broad categorical agreement and we are in that vectorially converging state with the state of the characters" (Ibid., 169-172). Among these expedient, embodied simulation plays an essential role also in aesthetic empathy, including all the elements that contribute to 'mirror reflexes' (Wispé 1991), for instance postures and facial reaction and expressions. In fact, these reflexes are significant because they manage to "supply us with clues to the way in which we should size-up the situation in which characters find themselves" (Carroll 2011, 179).

In brief, the body plays an essential part in the empathic process between audience and characters, both in the theatrical context, in which bodily expression shapes the emotional content of the story as the main access for the public to the represented reality, and in cinematic expression, in which the characters' bodies contribute to the constitution of the filmic portrait in its form. In particular, expanding the interactions of the spectators with performed protagonists, empathy is stimulated by the means of representation that are

employed to convey stories, allowing the amplification of perspective taking and thus the comprehension of the aesthetic experience. In addition, metaphors are also central for the empathic process to take place, and they will be addressed, along with embodied simulation, in the next section.

2.3.1. Metaphors and Simulation in Represented Realities

In the relationship between spectator and played character/actor, a form of ethical understanding is fundamental "to bridge the distance between self and other" (Stadler 2013, 27). Defined by Stadler as compassionate gaze, the audience's involvement consists of a cognitively and affectively perceptual embodied experience. This shift from individual subjectivity to a position of comprehending another's situation requires a shared perspective taking. Both aesthetic and narrative elements are employed by the medium of expression to nourish an intersubjective gaze within the audience. Mirroring an emotional resonance of the observed subjects, empathy allows the spectator to embody different individuals' states, becoming a 'surrogate body' (Voss 2011, 145) of non-existing and impersonated characters. As an other-oriented experience, empathy and its related emotions depend on our ability to imagine which beliefs, intentions and feelings are at the foundations of the grasped states. In the case of fictious characters, it is necessary to 'borrow' a significant amount of our personal background to construct a meaningful reaction. Empathy functions, Krueger (2009) explains, as "a kind of extended bodily-perceptual process", in which "certain aspects of the mind […] are present […] via the expressive dynamics of the social body" (Krueger 2009, 676-683). Since a wide range of emotional and mental elements is not directly available to the audience, Krueger follows, the external and physical appearance of the experienced states is essential in performative contexts, supported by both cognitive perception and a sort of involuntary (and even pre-cognitive) mimic response.

Embodied simulation is an essential element in the attribution of subjective states to portrayed characters. The representations grounded in fictional portraits are embodied "in such a way as to activate the viewers' own sensory-motor experience world" (Coëgnarts 2017, 8). Characters in fiction present their own individual complexity as concerns personality, mind, emotional sphere and life, more in general. The construction of these characters' subjectivity depends on the viewers' capacity to attribute them specific mental

states. For this reason, it is necessary to understand physical forms of perception, spatial interactions, mental constructions and all the other essential elements which are considered essential to define one's psychophysical states.

Moreover, since the formation of concepts relies on conceptual metaphors (namely abstractions grounded on embodied experience), addressing mental comprehension also implies the analysis of such perceptual domains. The cognitive role of metaphors was first suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), who claim a departure from a mere linguistic notion of metaphors and instead propose that metaphor is first and foremost a conceptual strategy. In the same way, metaphors are implied in artistic objects to support, through the employment of a more familiar conceptual domain, the understanding of the represented content. In fact, even if the bodily and experiential common core that human beings share is relevant in understanding what is observed, metaphors have the ability of enlarge the field of comprehension towards new perspectives, even if never experienced before. Metaphors do not limit their role of carriers of meaning, but they also imply a performative dimension, for instance when modelling the expressed meaning under different domains of experience, and thus reconceptualising both what is metaphorically explained and the shape of the evoked experience itself. In addition, metaphors are, according to Tseng (2010), involved in shaping the collective, since the communal process of meaning making "depends on shared assumptions and a common fund of knowledge between two persons, among a small group, among a speech community, or among users of the same language who might be from different cultural backgrounds" (Tseng 2010, 122). Metaphors are also fundamental in the construction and constant support of the represented world, whether real or fictional, contributing to mimetically shape new symbolic orders. In the discussed cases of cinematic and theatrical representations, metaphors gain a performative role in the way they are embodied and addressed to an observing audience. In this way, metaphors are profoundly experiential, giving a new shape to the semantic domains to which the audience refers and gaining an intersubjective role of expression. In brief, metaphors guide perception and understanding following both cognitive and intersubjective mechanisms of comprehension, gaining in this frame particular relevance on a physical and mental level.

However, Coëgnarts (2017), focusing on the specific features of audience perception, claims that there is "a crucial difference between the mapping of image schemas onto perception […] and the mapping of perception onto higher aspects of character continuity"

(Coëgnarts 2017, 10). In fact, he follows, in the latter context "we have to rely on knowledge that was already stored in working memory" (Ibid.). On a receptive level of analysis, we rely on two layers of bodily conveyed representation: the actors performing and the direction of the fictional story (filmic techniques or creative direction of the actors on stage). Following the intentions attributed to the object, we tend to qualify the character "with general emotional labels […] to specific physiological and expressive responses" (Ibid.). Once again, this process of ascription is grounded on the correspondence with viewers' experiences and characters' embodied states, both in their acting and in the representative features of the work in its entirety. In the mental formation of concepts, language, whether verbal or symbolical, is an essential support in identification and comprehension. All these elements are fundamental for the spectators to simulate characters' mental state, implementing a relatable setting in the context of which it is possible to empathise from different perspectives, to the point where "we cannot help but lose ourselves in a character" (Tan 2013, 337).

As approached in the entirety of this chapter, artistic understanding works as "a special kind of experiential understanding […] knowledge by acquaintance" (Zahavi 2014, 151). In fact, relational approaches, both personal and towards fictional characters, are first and foremost bodily grounded, depending on "a mandatory, pre-rational, non-introspective process" (Gallese and Wojciehowski 2011, 16). However, when it comes to specific narrative forms, "our embodied simulation becomes *liberated*" (Ibid., 19) and empathy allows an actual suspension of the world of reality to focus perception to aesthetic appreciation. Even if not real, whether fictional or not, representations are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the world we live in, as well as of ourselves.

This chapter moved from a strictly intersubjective context of understanding to address the processes involved in aesthetic perception. In particular, the analysis of this section discussed the relation between cognition and response in the relation established between artist and viewer, mediated by the actual artistic object. The perspective of the audience has been claimed as central in both individual and collective experience, evoking the centrality of embodiment and domains of experience, but also stating the crucial role of narrative and metaphors. These mechanisms of perception, analysis and ultimately comprehension have been particularly oriented to the context of fictional stories and their deployment. Specifically, this is also the case of tragic representation. Born to be

experienced in the theatrical space, tragedy, and the specific case of Medea's myth and portrayals, will be addressed in the next chapter in its literary depiction by Euripides (431 BC) and Pier Paolo Pasolini's film adaptation (1969).

3. Empathy and Tragedy: A Mimetic Experience

3.1. Mimesis and the *As If* Representation on the Tragic Stage

Approaching the performative genre in Western culture, it would be incomplete not to give enough emphasis to tragedy. Model of writing and performing on stage, this form of aesthetic depiction has been continuously represented from its peak in 5th century BC Athens to contemporary days. A complex and at times enigmatic genre, many angles could be adopted "in order to find our way through what we are bound to describe as the labyrinth of the *origin of Greek tragedy*" (Nietzsche 1999, 36).

This third chapter will address spectatorship and its perception in relation to the tragic genre and the active participation in its performative expression through empathic observation. In particular, the focus will be oriented to those cognitive processes that, involving embodied simulation, domains of experience and narrative mechanisms, allow comprehension of the observed object. Bodily and mental aspects of perception, as they have been theoretically described in the preceding chapters, will be directed here to the specificities of this particular literary form designed to be performed on stage. Metaphors, domains of experience and semantic categories will be analysed with respect to those peculiarities that make the understanding of tragedy possible. In particular, special attention will be given to Medea, the protagonist of the homonymous dramatic work by Euripides (431 BC), in both her poetic portrayal and in the 1969 cinematic adaptation by Pier Paolo Pasolini. As suggested by the philosophy scholar Tobón (2019), a cognitive perspective on artistic perception and comprehension "encouraged the revitalization of empathy-research in aesthetics, giving it a new conceptual framework and a new understanding of its processes and objects, for simulation can be directed to any aspect of other people's mental life, not only emotions and affects but also thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, desires, decisions, and so on" (Tobón 2019, 875-876).

In his work *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (1999), Nietzsche approaches this dramatic genre in relation to its central object of representation: the human condition. Conceived as a mimetic representation of humankind, and of the Athenian context in particular, this artistic expression is ontologically regarded as a human and social portrait of

great relevance. Recalling Aristotle's *Eudemos*[15], the philosopher explains that the origin of tragic representation can only be explained as reflecting on the most representative and all-encompassing human particularity: suffering. In the dialogue Silenus is reported to be the bearer of great knowledge about life and happiness, which King Midas is eager to hear about. After being chased and caught by Midas, Silenus is asked what the greatest thing is that a human being could aspire to. In reply, according to the Greek myth and as reported by Nietzsche, the daemon tells the King: "[w]retched, ephemeral race, children of chance and tribulation, why do you force me to tell you the very thing which it would be most profitable for you not to hear? The very best thing is utterly beyond your reach not to have been born, not to be, to be nothing. However, the second best thing for you is: to die soon" (as cited in Nietzsche 1999, 23).

Mirroring the Hellenic civilisation, the essence of tragedy bears on the dichotomous tension, which makes up every individual. Similar to the human inner condition shared by the members of the audience, tragedy is balanced between the Dionysian spirit, freedom in form, inebriated creation and painful destruction, and the Apollonian side, ordered shape, proficient reasonableness and rational competence. Simultaneously universal and individual, tragedy stages a collective conflict able to disrupt differences and harmonise humanity under the unity of a human portrait. As a communal genre, tragedy has "the enormous power […] to stimulate, purify, and discharge the entire life of the people" (Ibid., 99), with a solid salvific role in its social implication. In fact, suffering is perceived in tragedy as a form of atonement, which is achieved through the personal and collective participation to the most faithful representation of the human experience of grief.

Following tragedy as a genre, it tends toward a performed representation of human vicissitudes. In fact, its mimetic essence is oriented to reproducing reality on a staged performance. On the other hand, while being a verisimilarly depiction, mimesis is also aesthetic creation, appearing as if present reality to the audience (Halliwell 2002, 310-12): the story embodied by actors on stage during the *mise en scène* continues to be illusory and artificially manipulated. The discovery through tragedy of the nihilistic human condition is, according to Anderson (1939, 35-36), a veritable cathartic epiphany. This dualist

---

[15] This dialogue, of which only few fragments survive today, deals with the Platonic conception of the soul and the impossibility of experiencing happiness, since life consists in a permanent state of imprisonment inside one's own body. Death, as a final departure from this constriction, represents the only possibility of freedom.

psychophysical state between the detached awareness of attending to a fictional representation and the responsive attraction facing a human dramatic experience balances the audience in front of an enticing scenario. In particular, the audience is oriented to seek emotions and perceive foreign mental states (Lucas 1927, 23) which, in the specific case of tragedy, takes the dramatic form of the inevitable human fate. Once again, the spectator, as in intersubjective contexts, tends to experience fictional scenarios *as if* they were his or her own.

To better understand tragedy and the cognitive underpinnings in its reception, it is fundamental to acknowledge that besides being a literary form aimed to be performed on stage, it depicts potentially realistic human scenarios, with protagonists characterised by plausible peculiarities involved in verisimilar contexts of action. In the frame of these 'kinds of reality' (Brandt 2004, 34), characterised by social references, habits and beliefs, spectators have the power to attribute meaning to imaginative schemes evoked by fiction. Individual and collective practices and experiences are essential also in tragic contexts, instrumental to the act of decoding representations and relations of social and cultural structures. Thanks to the constant reference to human reality, or at least a possible one, tragic plausibility of suffering and misfortune appears authentic in both an individual and an intersubjective way, in such a way that what is portrayed on stage assumes the characteristics of just a particular possibility of the ordinary reality. These deviations, guided by narrative structures and storyline resolutions, scrupulously enhance audience to a more profound cognitive and empathic involvement with the observed scenario.

The distinctive structure of tragedy, centred on the alternance of the succession of a section to be sung (in lyric meters, interpreted by the chorus) and discursive dialogues (in iambic trimeter, based on a twelve-syllable scheme and recited by the actors on stage), presents a recurrent narrative configuration, which renders it familiar to the audience. In its general structure, the tragic play begins with the prologue[16], in the context of which a minor protagonist, secondary to the vicissitudes of the main characters or an observing god generally delivers an introduction to the story, addressing, directly or indirectly, the audience. In a second moment, during the parodos[17], the chorus makes its appearance on stage to convey its first song, followed by the side-entrance of the different protagonists of

16 Πρόλογος (*pro-lógos*, preliminary speech).
17 Πάροδος (entrance).

the tragedy. The core corpus of the play comprises various episodes[18] (three or more) during which the sequence of plot's events takes place. They are generally interspersed with stasima[19], choral interludes aiming to comment on characters' feelings and choices of action, while developing more thoroughly some sections of the story. After the conclusion of the final stasimon, the drama culminates with the exodos[20], the tragic conclusive epilogue.

The repetitive structure of the tragic scheme is significant and plays a crucial role in the sense-making process: spectators, familiarised with the singularly emblematic configuration of this genre, are especially inclined to focus recollection on emotions pertaining to personal experience. As suggested by Hanenberg and Brandt (2010, 182), representations' perception is hardly dissociable from everyday involvement, and for this reason it is fundamental to address structural repetitions as "ways of worldmaking" (Neumann and Nünning 2007, 6). From their approach, Neumann and Nünning claim that it is impossible to actually perceive any world or even be aware of its existence in a single form. As human beings we are capable of grasping world versions, which can be symbolically depicted in different forms and by different media. In the specific case of tragedy, thanks to the fixed structure of the genre and its ease of access, different ways of experiencing and understanding the depicted vicissitudes are developed by different spectators. In each story, as in the case of *Medea* which will be addressed later in the chapter, the repeated structure of tragedy supports the vicissitudes of a world whose dimension and meaning can be constructed and deconstructed by the audience. For this reason, the world represented, in this case, by tragedy is not antithetical from, for example, the scientific one, but it is just another symbolic variant of it. While the latter relies on a biological and numeric description, the tragic world is grounded on the expression of words and their representation on stage.

The way in which we are used to perceive the actual world in which we live functions as a reference to decipher fictional ones, which, as any other, are human-based in both their conception and reception. The mimetic configuration of the tragic world and the recurrence of typical canons allow the audience to follow formulaic patterns, upon which spectators are able to make sense of the story through the interpretation of previously gathered knowledge following spontaneous deciphering mechanisms. In fact, the experience of recognised states,

---

[18] Ἐπεισόδια (episodes).
[19] Στάσιμον (stationary).
[20] Ἔξοδος (departure).

actions and emotions causes in the public an automatic sharing reaction with the characters, leading to wider and deeper understanding. Tragedy is constructed as a mimetic representation which goes beyond the individuality of each spectator's experience and it repetitively summons the variety of present perceptions into a comprehensive possibility which encompasses any other. In other words, tragedy, through common patterns of understanding, is intersubjectively objective.

Furthermore, according to Stamatopoulou (2007), "tragedies can become a symbolic vehicle of experiential learning and empathic morality" (Stamatopoulou 2007, 173). In fact, the scholar traces a cognition-based interpretation of the mimetic quality of tragedy, equating the dramatic performances' contemplation with the meaning making process. Starting from Aristotle's *On Poetics*, Stamatopoulou highlights the essential role of empathy, simulation and recollection in the comprehension of the tragic encounter, which, according to her, consists in the ability to appreciate characters' emotional states (negative ones, in the case of tragedy). Moreover, she claims that this process allows at first the shift of perspective in the cognitive elaboration of the aesthetic perception and then the stimulation of experiential learning about the inner self. However, Stamatopoulou insists, the experience of spectatorship is not confined to one of these facets. On the contrary, their joint response in the audience-play interaction permits to fully live and make sense of what is practiced.

As for intersubjective empathy, the function of self-projection is crucial, since "mimesis may stand as the "bridge" from embodied simulation to mental simulation" (Ibid., 181): in other words, from the reaction to an elementary attentional stimulus to the deciphering of a symbolic meaning. For this reason, Stamatopoulou claims, mimesis is ambivalently essential for the understanding of what is staged and as "invitation of entertaining a creative constructive process of image-schematic becoming representations […] that we use to formulate and organize our experience" (Ibid., 182), helping to symbolically transform our knowledge.

In addition, while the object of tragedy mimetically reproduces life, the suffering portrayal of misery takes the form of a plot-myth detached from personally privileged contexts and references. The archetypical representations of its characters, symbolic depictions of typified figured rather than simplistic stereotypes, embody the tragic conflict before the audience. During the aesthetic experience, the spectator mainly responds, prior to empathising with singular characters, to narrative feelings shaping the contextual world

depicted by the myth. In this context, the *feeling into* enacting process involves the expressive and embodied mimetic reproduction of reality. The diversified range of emotions, for entity and quality, is strictly connected to mechanisms grounded on the attentional intensity: in essence, the higher the degree of experiential similitude, the deeper the psychophysical reaction is. The construction of mimetic narratives arouses empathic feelings in shared understanding-oriented mechanisms, entailing "metaphoric […] identification through mimesis as an imaginative act – expressive/embodied enactment" (Ibid., 185).

In this frame, the situated position of the audience implies a central role of embodiment, as a physical response to the dynamic traits of the performative space and the actors involved in it, since the tension implicated in the dramatic experience is enhanced by physiognomic expressivity in the staging of dramatic tension. In the particular circumstances of audience perspective, the affective perception invites the observing subject to share the emotional implication of the heinous tragic conflict. The recollective filtering of spectators' experience, guided by the alternance of universal and individual emotions-based action outlined by the poet, consents mimesis to become empathically plausible. Implementing the complexity of performed actions, the embodied imaginary produces a simultaneously complex and clarifying scheme able to amplify and expound the mimetic effect and its meaning.

Shifting the perspective of the public, the tragic experience draws attention to the synthetic interpretation of the outer world, through its characters and their intentions, the myth and the flexible self-identification and the reflections on embodied imaginaries that it invites. As claimed by Stamatopoulou, "a transitional in-between space of shared emotion co-regulation, and co-articulation is generated activating a merging of action […] that creates the possibility of detached awareness, where even negative feelings […] can be experienced for the long-term benefits of the expressive/communicative quality of the interaction", in a context in which "self-focused emotion experience, can be imaginatively transformed in a wider context, so that the concerns of the self can be relocated and contextualized in a wider perspective which allows analogic comparisons, abstractions and emotion thoughts to be made" (Ibid., 191).

Traditionally, mimesis is opposed to diegesis as forms of literary representation. While mimesis shows and imitates what pertains to the world of reality, diegesis presupposes an element of narration of a story. In his *Republic* (373 BC), Plato provides as mimetic

examples tragedy and comedy, while epic poetry represents a case of diegetic narration. The main difference between these two forms of poetic expression is that the telling of the story by its author represents a narrative level other than the one of the story itself (namely, the diegesis). On the contrary, in the writing of a mimetic work, the author is called to show the vicissitudes of the characters without making his or her voice directly present. However, the relationship between mimesis and diegesis should not be seen as inflexible in their contents, and there is no rigorous line between the two concepts as the one separating non-fiction from fiction. The mimetic function of literary works, and specifically tragedy, does not preclude the depicted story to be fictious just because it imitates the physical world, which is precisely what Sukenick (1985) claims while introducing the concept of mimetic fiction. The literary theorist suggests that "[t]he key idea is verisimilitude: one can make an image of the real thing which, though not real, is such a persuasive likeness that it can represent our control over reality" (Sukenick 1985, 4). In fact, although such "illusions are fostered by concepts of imitation, one cannot have control "over" that of which one is part, or even formulate it completely - one can only participate more deeply in it" (Ibid.).

The power of mimetic fiction has always been central in the process of emotionally inducing empathic commitment, "[p]erhaps because in aesthetic experience we can temporarily suspend our grip on the world of our daily occupations" (Gallese and Wojciehowski 2011, 19). The pause from the reality of the world we live in allows the public to fully immerse in the portrayed reality, as well as to evoke those mental domains which are essential in understanding. This freedom of thought and inner analysis takes place through the access to a vivid represented dimension, which we are able to empathically grasp through our sensorimotor system. In brief, tragic human portraits and misfortunes are positioned in a mimetic and fictional frame, distant to their audience as a work of art but close enough to possibly be part of our physical reality.

3.1.1. The Tragic Space: Audience Response and Embodied Simulation

As the role of embodiment in empathy was acknowledged, behavioural tendencies are associated with explicit staged actions also in tragedy, as bodily expressions of performed thoughts. In particular, as resulted during studies in cognitive response to dramatic stimuli, while "positive emotional experience may somehow be less fundamental

and more subject to intellectual manipulations and cognitive control" (Davis, Hull, Young and Warren 1987, 132), negative emotions are more inclined to provoke "emotional reaction […] heavily influenced by emotional empathy" (Ibid., 126). In fact, the study conducted by the four neuroscientists demonstrates emotional variable in empathic perception to be dominant while observing negative affective states, while cognitive empathy is dominant in positive emotional contexts. These findings contribute to understand that, while in the case of positive emotions the process of understanding what is being experienced is first cognitively grasped, when people face the depictions of negative states, as in the case of tragedy, emotional involvement and perspective taking become central. In the second case, the observer is led to imagine himself or herself in the position of the empathised character rather than to only make sense of the emotions experienced by others. Thus, negative emotional states are less open to mental manipulation but more susceptible to emotional reactivity.

In the case of tragedy, the similarities with personal experiences allow the rise of empathic imagination through the association of physiognomic enactment on stage. The revealing evolution of the represented myth allows a progressive deepening in individual contemplation, since "*in art, holistically perceived or imagined fear, embodying a common "action" background of motor-affective cues becomes a conditioned psychological space that allows reflective imaginative acts, compassion-witnessing emotions and contemplative thoughts to unfold*" (Stamatopoulou 2007, 197, emphasis in the original).

The communicative capacity of the tragic genre relies on the verisimilitude with imaginary acts in their embodied reproduction, which arouses the engagement of the audience in the awakening of emotional response. The deeply relational nature of spectatorial emotions is rooted in the questioning of the sense of self trough *as if* perceptions, in which familiar psychophysical states are re-experienced thanks to the bodily simulation of tragic protagonists' condition.

Moreover, the relevance of pity and fear, as suggested by Aristotle, presupposes a path to understanding that is profoundly dependent on empathy. More than the mere evolvement of the plot, tragedy deploys physical actions to disclose the myth and its structures of meaning. In fact, "tragedy is an imitation, not of human beings, but of actions and of life. Both happiness and wretchedness depend on action, and the end is an action, not a quality. But human beings […] do not act in order to imitate characters, but they include

characters because of actions" (Aristotle, *On Poetics*, 1450a16-22). Precisely in these actions, perceived by the audience as patterns of experience, the empathic *as if* position can be assumed by the present audience. The self is involved in its entirety in the observation and discernment of these actions, since, as Aristotle suggests, the spectator senses resemble not necessarily only the hero's portrayed individual peculiarities, but the actions and states implicated in the unfolding of his or her character. In fact, the mimetic nature of tragic embodied acts intrinsically shapes the genre's praxis from its origin, as the affective synchrony with the object of perception has enabled to "feel into" characters' representations and their reactions to the dramatic situation they face on stage. Specifically, Hoffman (1990) claims that the experience of empathy is intensified, like in the case of tragedy, when in the process of outer states' perception we distinguish "a sense of injustice, including a motivational disposition to right the wrong - so that it could be said that empathic distress may be transformed by the lack of reciprocity [...] between the character and the outcome into a feeling of injustice" (Hoffman 1990, 159). In particular, the psychophysical domain of emotions covered by tragedy allows the radical transformation of abstract problematic matters into empathy-worthy ones.

Furthermore, Cairns (2017) highlights the role of embodiment in tragedy. In this dramatic frame, the author substantively expresses tragic embodiment with the concept of *phrikē*[21], namely a proper bodily experience of shuddering, involving an involuntary physical response to an observed dreadful stimulation which needs to be interpreted at both the level of mental evaluation and corporeal reaction. In fact, "[w]hether we ourselves see the play in the theatre or merely in our mind's eye as we read, the response of this internal audience is, at least in this instance, a guide to our own" (Cairns 2017, 55). Cairns claims that the physical response to tragic stimuli is so immediate that it provokes a full-fledged somatic reaction to the experienced emotion, despite the differences between collective and individual experience previously tackled. Precisely, this pre-conscious answer, in the guise of corporal drive, constitutes a sort of unaware action of regulative response by the observing audience. Instead, the role of consciousness in empathy, involved only at a later stage, lies on the spectators' phenomenological awareness and refers to the vividness and acknowledgement of experiencing a personal process.

---

[21] Φρίκη (shivering).

Most importantly, the presence "of emotional symptoms in the construction of emotional concepts underlines the fundamental importance of physical embodiment in the concept of emotion itself" (Ibid., 57). The embodied appearance of performed states is not just a symbolic expression of one's state (mainly the tragic hero's condition), but an intentionally employed medium of tragic narrative communication. The cohesion between the bodily resemblance of individual states and the mental conceptualisation of equivalent feelings leans on unitary cultural categories which comprehend both experiential sides of emotions. Actually, the physical image of the expressed state, vividly described in textual and performed form, allows the audience to fully perceive how the experience takes place. In fact, "it is impossible for the fearful and the pitiable to come to be from *opsis*, [… f]or the story must have been put together in such a way that, even without seeing, he who hears the events as they come to be shudders and pities from what occurs" (Aristotle, *On Poetics*, 1453b1-7). The stimulated continuity between visuality and poetic narrative emphasises the essential role of corporal action to provoke immediate emotional reaction within the audience, which is significant in invigorating spectators' imaginative capacities. Moreover, "the emotional response in question may have a pronounced somatic aspect that underlines the phenomenological continuity between narrative representations, dramatic representations, and the emotion-eliciting scenarios of everyday life" (Cairns 2017, 64). Thanks to these narrative tools and the physicality of emotional expressivity, empathy becomes possible in the tragic context.

Moreover, it would be possible to assert that "tragedy is a praxial-in-structure synthesis of the interactions of people in their predicaments so that the deep structure of selfhood and social interaction becomes clearer, since we do not only experience the emotions and hence the urgency of the human vicissitudes (incidents) and dilemmas-conflicts that cause them, but we are enabled to reflect on them in such a way as to create deeper level abstractions of ourselves and others" (Stamatopoulou 2007, 211). The empathic responsiveness in tragic sense-making process, in combination with the mental and physical state of feeling into the observed protagonists "and the shaping of our experience in the pursuit of knowledge by means of affectively/expressively [… ,] creates a shift from the local features to their joint meeting" (Ibid., 212). Suffering in tragedy is oriented to learning, and understanding is a precondition for knowledge. The vicarious experience of sorrow through empathy permits the undergoing of vulnerable distress via heroes' portrayed

emotions which, as claimed by Lévinas (1969) guarantee through empathy a comprehensive vision on vulnerability, but also the opportunity of appreciating the worth of being and empathic perception in tragedy. This experience takes place in tragedy, according to Ellis (2000), when empathising with the protagonists on stage, as a vicarious participation of somebody else's state. In fact, "[t]ragedy makes possible the direct experience of that which is intrinsically valuable in an ontologically embattled, irreplaceable conscious being, and then magnifies the intensity of this direct experience of intrinsic value by continually twisting the knife of that very embattlement" (Ellis 2000, 66).

In conclusion, this first section introduced tragedy and its peculiarities, both structural and historical, giving particular relevance to its mimetic nature in relation with audience and perception. Specifically, emotional empathy was addressed as central in the way it allows the tragic experience of bodily expressed states to take place. In fact, the tragic depiction of the human nature through the characters on stage finds in personal experience its prerequisite of understanding. The next section of this chapter will investigate the modalities according to which empathy takes place in tragedy towards the heroes on stage.

3.2. Tragic Characters and Dramatic Embodiment

Bridging intersubjective empathy and the aesthetic experience presupposes the acknowledgment of perceptive distance that distinguishes spectatorship from the object of observation. However, as peculiarly distinctive in empathy, "my aesthetic feeling not only is objective but is referentially the *same* feeling that exists in the object" (Depew 2005, 103). In the case of tragedy, empathy demands its audience to feel *with* its heroes, instead of experiencing a sympathetic drive *for* them. In fact, audience members' empathic involvement allows spectators to put themselves in the observed characters' position. In particular, Depew (2005) claims that the aesthetic object does not subsist as a representation of a psychophysical ground, but it must be an *expression* of it, meaning that there is no such figurative divergence between the object of empathy and its depiction. On the contrary, they correspond. This section will focus on the tragic hero and his or her symbolic value in human expression. In particular, the essential mimetic features relevant in the empathic experience will be explored and elucidated, maintaining the spectator-protagonist relation as the crucial and central perspective of analysis.

The relevance of empathy in the experience of fictional characters is premised upon a "specific and modular system of understanding that would connect our body with other bodies through an internal and automatic imitation of what they do and feel, in such a way that it would allow us to feel the phenomenological tone of their experience" (Tobón 2019, 870-871). In this case, empathy is specifically crucial in the audience-tragic hero relation, in particular because through his or her actions, choices and experiences the hero personifies the human condition and destiny as conceived by the tragic tradition. However, the empathic approach does not exclusively rely on the emotional expression communicated by the actors on stage through language and bodily manifestation, but the entirety of tragic narrative is fundamental for the implementation of this model. The participative guiding action of the chorus, in combination with the observation of the tragic hero and his or her vicissitudes, is in fact essential in bringing spectators close to the dramatic act performed on stage. Returning to the Nietzschean symbolic analysis of tragedy, the philosopher claims that the annihilation of the tragic hero is not only a possibility of the protagonist's fate, but also the complete accomplishment of the human condition. However, "because our primary identification is with 'the one living being', we see not only that our 'true', Dionysian self is immune to the annihilation that is the fate of every individual, that it is 'indestructible and eternal', but also that the destruction of individuals is 'necessary', that is to say, justified […] on account of the primordial unity's 'exuberant' creative 'fertility' and because one cannot create without destroying" (Young 2013, 179). Empathy is, according to this philosophical interpretation, essential to accomplish the profound spirit of this performed genre, because only through the emotional share is it possible to fully grasp the mimetic representation leading to spectators' catharsis. This section will investigate the mechanisms behind the empathic bond between tragic heroes and their audience.

3.2.1. Masks, *pathos* and the Chorus: Theatrical Devices in Tragic Narratives

Traditionally, the tragic hero should be one "who is neither distinguished by virtue and justice nor changing to bad fortune on account of vice and wickedness […], but one who changes on account of some mistake and is one of those in great repute and of good fortune" (Aristotle, *On Poetics*, 1453a 7-11). The tragic protagonist is neither morally superior to his or her audience, as in the case of traditional epic poems (e.g. Omer's Iliad characters), nor

somehow ethically inferior as typical comic figures. In particular, tragic heroes need to act within the same moral frame and according to similar ethical codes of the present spectators in order to be fully understood and empathically addressed. As Hegel (1975b, 1194-5) suggests, the hero corresponds to a personification of a specific dialectic aspect of tragic narrative. Defined by Hegel as proper human sculptures, tragic heroes embodied values, roles and typified personas able to represent and bring together the depicted society and its members. Usually, each hero goes through his or her misfortunes impersonating a specific trait which is employed and conceived as a key element in the development of the plot, able to recollect its experiential charge within the audience.

In fact, as envisioned by Hegel, the exemplification of virtues is essential in tragedy. Specifically, "[c]lassical tragic heroes are, as it were, adamantine embodiments of an *idée fixe* [… ; t]he ethical powers that animate classical tragic heroes are, Hegel insists, not 'passions', for passions are liable to be both transitory and things that one 'suffers', things one is overcome by rather than endorsing with one's whole being" (Young 2013, 116). And, Young continues, the way in which the tragic hero impersonates the virtue results in "a commitment so powerful and all-consuming that the destruction of the commitment can come about only through the destruction of the hero, for the hero simply *is* the pathos" (Ibid., 116-117). The juxtaposition of heroes and statues is elucidated by Hegel affirming that, in the time of the story, there is not enough room for the protagonists to be sufficiently characterised as real-world persons. On the contrary, the heroic tragic figure stands between the archetype and the fully featured individual: the ensemble of his or her traits shall not exceed in order not to excessively personalise the heroes' narrative features (as in the case of epic heroes), but the subjectivity of tragic protagonists still needs to figure an entity in its wholeness.

Even if it is essential to acknowledge the profound ethical bond between tragic characters and Greek social and moral code, heroes always distinguish themselves for fighting till the end of the piece for a deeply personal cause. The traits attributed to these heroes are on many levels common to any observer's experiential attributes and mental process, easily accessible to every member of the public. As the audience attends the tragic performance "if the exaltation of tragic action were truly a property of the high-bred character alone, it is inconceivable that the mass of mankind should cherish tragedy above all other forms, let alone be capable of understanding it" (Miller 1978, 3).

The various peculiarities previously envisioned suggest the qualities that are typically attributed to the tragic hero and which make possible an empathic response in the audience. Traditionally, tragic actors habitually wear masks when impersonating their roles on stage. In fact, the different personalities performing the dramatic plot embody individuals with no clear identity. Typically, masks do not feature clear anthropomorphic qualities, leaving the present audience free to imagine itself as one of the malleable and anonymous characters present on stage. The realities represented are shaped to be verisimilar to any possible spectator in a limb between fiction and actual plausibility. Also, following the pathetic theory proposed by Hegel (1975a) according to which every tragic hero impersonates a specific *pathos*, in traditional Greek tragic representations masks assume exaggerated appearances in order to directly transmit the intended emotion that stands for the singular character. Besides having a voice amplifying role, masks embodied in a handcrafted way the essence of each character, whose actor must implement with extremely explicit corporal gestures, not only mirroring the mask's expressivity, but adapting movements and gesticulations to different vicissitudes and stages of the plot. Embodiment is essential in empathic relations, and, in particular in the context of mythic stories and their representations, "[s]torytelling is an act of imagination and remembrance which does not separate out the religious from the philosophical, the aesthetic from the moral, the mythic from the historical, the practical from the theoretical. […] Even so, they embody the memory and wisdom of a people, and are so understood, as crucial to the survival and well being of the community" (Kimmel 2000, 11). Tragic theatre can be described as a social mirror, which, through the constant guidance of the chorus, allows the audience to feel into the protagonists of the staged drama. The performed realism of human misfortunes brings the enactment on a shared level of experience, in which the emotional, behavioural and decisional familiarity allows the audience to completely comprehend the poetic portrayal it is assisting to.

The presence of masks on stage could be addressed as an eventual limit for embodied expression and the possibility of an empathic response from the audience. However, the centrality of masks in the tragic ritual and spectatorial experience is worth mentioning. Besides being mimetic representations of the *ethos* of the characters, masks, as recurrent symbolic figurations in the traditional portrayal of Dionysus, determine an immediate sense of theatricality, highlighting the separation between aesthetic representation and the actual

experience of the physical world and qualifying the actors on stage as *dramatis personae*. As claimed by the classics scholar Meineck (2011), "in an open-air space that allowed the external environment to inform the aesthetic experience of watching drama, the mask provides a visual focus for emotional communication, and is able to stimulate a deeply personal response from the spectators. The mask demands to be *watched*" (Meineck 2011, 121). In particular, mask demands to be watched from afar: the voluminous shapes of its facial traits compose a cohesive expression, which is meant to be grasped from distant observation. Also, masks play a central role in gender identification. While all the actors on stage are male, the characteristics of the impersonated protagonist are attributed by the features depicted on the mask.

Moreover, mirror neurons are stimulated within the tragic public through the manipulation of the expressivity of the mask. In fact, the facial features represented on the mask are malleable according to the angles from which they are observed, and several qualities of the depicted expression would change assuming different inclinations depending on the function in the development of the plot. In addition, Meineck suggests that "[t]his effect may also be linked to our cognitive prowess at recognizing faces, in that we store thousands of physiognomies in our memories and match them to the holistic configuration of the face before us" (Ibid., 132). This also means that the spectator plays a crucial role in situating the expressions observed on the mask and shaping the symbolic sense of it according to the development of the plot and the evolution of the character in the story. Besides, experiential cognition is not limited to facial expression. Empathy functions also on the level of motion, as performed by actors in representation of those collectively acknowledged movements which detain a strongly manifest symbolic meaning. As a society profoundly accustomed to attend dance performances in both scared rites and contexts of leisure, corporeal expression is deeply present in ancient Greek performative traditions. For these reasons, masks are not barriers but the actual focus for the spectators to emotionally and visually follow staged tragedies.

Likewise, the action of the chorus is particularly essential in this frame. In opposition to other characters, the members of the chorus are not individualised in their peculiarities (both in body and personality), but they function as a singular voice in the development of the plot. The central role of the chorus is multifaceted and covers different aspects of understanding. One of its essential action is to complete the information given by the

performance, both on the evolution of the vicissitudes of the story and on the psychophysical states of the characters. The chorus actively helps interspersing the voice of emotion with a reasoning one or accentuating the emotional charge in certain circumstances. Also, the chorus plays a key role in suggesting alternatives to the characters (and indirectly to the spectators), shifting perspective or expressing particular judgements on events or characters on stage.

However, the specific role of the chorus in the empathic process is precisely to depict the ideal spectator (Schlegel 1846), manifesting through bodily gestures, music and expressed opinions the emotions its members are experiencing during the tragic events. This constant presence permits the spectators to persistently refer to the chorus which, giving an interpretative commentary on the story, helps creating a deeper connection between the audience and the heroes and supporting the empathic process. Delaying the tempo of the story or accelerating the tension to the climax are just some examples of the different tools employed by the chorus. Impersonating for the most part common members of the society depicted on stage, the audience easily mirrors the chorus in its actions and reactions.

The theatrical devices employed in structuring and performing tragic narratives addressed in this section are essential for the performance of tragedy itself and the engagement of the audience. While the emphasis in the characterisation of the protagonists is stressed by the shape and handling of the masks, the chorus guides both the heroes on stage and the spectators in the development of the story and its decipherment. The next section addresses the relation between empathy and catharsis, highlighting the essential role of the empathic process in the act of purification represented by the tragic experience.

3.2.2. Empathy and Purification in the Cathartic Process

The experience of feeling into tragic characters constitutes an essential step for catharsis to take place. Act of purification and individual freedom, catharsis is the "experience of seeing oneself transformed before one's eyes and acting as if one had really entered another body, another character" (Nietzsche 1999, 43). Also, catharsis is first and foremost an act of liberation, which successfully takes place through mimetic projection and identification with experiences that commonly affect the entirety of the human genre (Alessandrelli 2008, 5). The audience is aware of the artificial nature of the staged plot, but

the deep experience of empathy opens a possibility of awareness and understanding. However, before the act of purification can take place, catharsis implicates an emotional involvement. The emotions portrayed are the ones of a shared existence, which is tragically lived on stage and indirectly by the audience. The metaphoric representation as discovered in tragedy is essential for understanding not only the staged emotions but the human experience at large: as proposed by Iacono (2010, 84), the spectator, when exploring a fictional world or artistic representation, is able to naturalise the characters involved. In this frame, the audience participates in an intermediate dimension between the consciousness of being mere presence facing a predetermined scenario and recognizing the truthfulness of the staged world's possibility.

Furthermore, as the chorus develop the myth and its plot throughout the tragic chronicle, the empathic relation established with the represented heroes consolidates the immersion and personal understanding of the entire staged narrative. In fact, "it is often noted that without an extreme depth of empathy […], the tragic effect fails to be achieved; thus we feel no catharsis" (Ellis 2000, 64). Empathy is therefore essential not only to achieve a full comprehension of the attended performance, but it is necessary for the tragic effect to entirely succeed. The presence of perseverance, vulnerability and exasperation in the psychophysical portrays of tragic heroes accomplishes in making empathy pervasively possible. In particular, the pronounced expressivity of human corporal expression "form[s] a pre-conscious we-relationship that is characterized by lived-body communalizations" (Backhaus 2000, 187) of experiencing and having experienced a commonly shared system of mental and bodily states. In fact, [w]ithin each body schema as its own field of expression, the Other is already present" (Ibid.). The representation of personal states through physical actions is essential also in the context of fictional transpositions, in which corporeal movements and expressions permit neural associations with familiar bodily manifestations acquired through experience. Since tragedy is structured as a mimetic representation of reality, empathy can be addressed in this framework as a further step in the simulation of a depicted world, which relies on a multi-level imitative *consecutio*.

The following section of this chapter will investigate the myth of Medea to comprehend the role and modalities of action of empathy in a specific tragic context. In particular, the action of embodied simulation, domains of experience and emotional contagion, between intersubjective understanding and aesthetic appreciation, will be

addressed with the aim of implementing a meaningful example of their crucial role in the process of tragedy and tragic heroes' comprehension. Specifically, the story of Medea is addressed following the words of Euripides (431 BC) and the structure of his literary work, and secondly the film adaptation directed by Pasolini (*Medea*, 1969).

3.3. The Myth of Medea and Its Depiction: A Cognitive Perspective

Portrayed by Greek tradition as the daughter of Aeëtes, King of Colchis and granddaughter of Helios, the sun god, the myth concerning Medea's story and her dreadful relationship with Jason has been narrated, and continues to be, in innumerable ways. Medea's vicissitudes were first known from their literary version composed by Apollonius Rhodius in the *Argonautica* (3rd century BC). However, the myth has been replicated till nowadays by many different authors with the support of diverse media. Ovid (1st century BC), Pindar (462 BC), and Seneca (1st century) are just some of the authors who write about Medea's misfortunes in ancient times. Most recently, one of the most acknowledged perspectives concentrating on the myth is *Medea*, the cinematographic work by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969). The case study of the dissertation is oriented to the understanding of those mental, corporeal and psychological traits that make *Medea* a suitable subject for an empathy-based sense-making process of its audience.

3.3.1. Staging Empathy: Literary and Performative Devices in Euripides' *Medea*

One of the most excruciating tragic stories, Medea's misfortunes are deeply interconnected with other character's vicissitudes and choices, in an often unbalanced dimension between power and subjugation. After betraying her father and killing her brother to help Jason steal the Golden Fleece, Medea finds herself abandoned by her husband and decides to kill her sons as an act of vengeance. The figure of Medea is particularly representative of the limb between the normal and the extraordinary that renders tragedies simultaneously human stories and mythic scenarios. This unique fashion of dramatic staging, which finds a perfect example in the Euripidean work, "is self-consciously made of the juxtaposition of two kinds of lives. On the one hand heroes cross the boundaries, whether geographical (like Jason), social (like Helen and Medea), anthropological (like Heracles), or

sexual (like Oedipus) and on the other ordinary husbands, fathers, and citizens (like Jason in Corinth, like Heracles, Oedipus, Agamemnon at home), wives and mothers (like Medea, Helen, and Clytemnestra) try to live human lives" (Luschnig 2007, 1). In fact, as central in archaic and contemporary times, familial dynamics are the most recurrent representational theme in Greek tragedy, able to depict affection and crime, romance and heinous revenge in such accessible terms that have allowed the genre to survive for thousand years.

In the particular case of Medea, she is in the first place daughter and sister, after having betrayed her father and brother for Jason. She is then a wife and mother, sacrificing her lineage bonds for the love of a man. However, she is also wise, powerful and ultimately independent; she is admired for her power and fortitude, but also feared and distrusted for her way to both fight for and against the traditional family values that should represent a woman in ancient Greek society. In fact, Medea "is able to be the many things a human being is capable of, good and evil and much that is in between; weak and powerful; loving and hating; rational and passionate; rock, lion, god, all of these and none of these" (Ibid., 2).

The different stages that the character of Medea assumes throughout the plot's development are essential for the empathic process of sense-making by the audience of the tragedy. First of all, the evolution of the tragic hero affects the myth construction, making Medea, a character with supernatural capacities, a woman who follows the canons of every subject's life evolution. In particular, the variety of present spectators has the opportunity to experientially identify with a specific step of the character's development which predominantly matches the featured state brought into observation. Secondly, Medea's individual transformation as human subject and protagonist is functional for the aesthetic understanding of the tragic story in its entirety. In fact, the empathic possibility of experiencing Medea's psychophysical states in their constant transformation supports the plot implementation, which has to be immediately and entirely understandable in the short time of performative representation. As suggested by Gellie (1988), "Medea seems to turn into whatever will ensure that the next thing will happen" (Gellie 1988, 17). In the deployment of her personal life, and secondarily in Jason's one, the plot grows and gains sense, since "this is a drama taking place and not just being told, the story is their lives" (Luschnig 2007, 3).

The play starts *in medias res*, suggesting the familiarity of the spectators with the myth, with a monologue of the nurse, who announces that "Medea, in despair, rejected by

her husband" (Euripides, *Medea*, 19) is expected to channel her rage towards her children, in an act of revenge against Jason. The prologue starts, in this way, creating a tense atmosphere, in which the nurse initiates the audience to the themes of revenge and passion. However, Euripides separates from the beginning the figure of Medea as the betrayed and Jason as the betrayer, since he "has cast aside his children and my mistress, and now goes to bed in a royal marriage with the daughter of Creon who governs this land" (Ibid., 16-18). The decision to react is thus depicted as an urge for Medea to execute her revenge: the tragic essence of the myth is now unfolded starting with the justification of Medea's subsequent actions.

Later, in the parodos, after Medea's entrance on stage, she starts mourning her misfortunes and invoking gods' help to do justice. From its external perspective, the chorus immediately takes Medea's side, giving a rational support to her desperate voice. Euripides plays on two different ways to direct the emotional focus of the audience on the characters of Medea. On the one hand, he represents her in a desperate emotional state: her scream is heard before her appearance on the scene, when she exclaims, "I hate my life! How can I put an end to it?" (Ibid., 96-7). Immediately, the chorus, stimulating the audience to take a position in the conflict, tries to reassure Medea that she will get justice soon. In fact, the chorus tries to comfort her with soothing words, "I felt sorry for the troubles of the family, since it is dear to me. […] Zeus will set this right" (Ibid., 135-57).

Furthermore, the first episode is particularly relevant because Euripides takes advantage of the conversation between Creon and Medea to clarify not only her position, but the condition of women in ancient Greek society22. After expressing her sorrow and rage,

---

22 "Of all creatures that have life and reason we women are the sorriest lot […] we must at a great expenditure of money buy a husband and even take on a master over our body […]. Besides, divorce is unsavory for a woman and it is not possible to say no to one's husband. [… A] woman must be a prophet of what she could never learn at home: how best to deal with her marriage partner; and if we get it worked out well and a husband shares our life with us, and he bears the yoke without violence, life is to be envied. […] They say that we live a life free of danger at home while they face battle with the spear. How wrong they are. I would rather stand three times in the line of battle than once bear a child" (Euripides, *Medea*, 229-50). Medea's speech highlights the condition which a woman is forced to live in the ancient world. Jason is addressed as a husband/master who exercises an abusive authority on his wife. In fact, Medea claims that violence is recurrent in her domestic environment and the biggest danger for her cannot be found outside, but at home. In her words it is possible to trace a clear exemplification of the female status and position of the society in which the tragedy is set.

Medea communicates her desire to punish Jason for what he has done and the chorus, directing the public empathic attention from the initial episode, agrees with her, "[i]t is right that your husband should pay" (Ibid., 266). In the following episodes of the tragedy, Jason is introduced as despicable and constantly negatively judged by the chorus. It is evident that throughout the evolution of the plot Euripides directs the empathic drive of the public distant from Jason, repetitively moving the action of the chorus in support of Medea, including through a collective prayer to Aphrodite (second stasimon).

Moreover, the evolution of Medea as a tragic hero and human being follows, even if in a particular and extra-ordinary context, a natural evolution in intentions and actions. The character of Medea develops in a destructive way, discarding behavioural and social schemes attributed to a woman in archaic context. In fact, it is essential to consider Medea in the light of "her failed relationships in her natal and conjugal families, betrayer of her father, killer of her brother, discarded wife, and child-murderer" (Luschnig 2007, 63). At the same time, Medea belongs to a divine lineage with superhuman capacities, and she disposes of powers which cannot be explained under natural laws. For these reasons, Medea is targeted by Jason as barbarian, a sorceress, and he calls her "a lioness, Scylla and worse" (Euripides, *Medea*, 1342-3), since "no Greek woman would have dared this" (Ibid., 1339-40). However, the Corinthian women members of the chorus already started from the very beginning empathising with her. Despite the ferocity and violent actions, her revenge seems to be accepted by others even if derived from uncontrollable grief and source of atrocious pain. In particular the chorus, in its mediating role between actors and audience, demonstrates support to Medea, especially as woman and mother, judging, and therefore suggesting to its audience to do the same, her actions as legitimate and even necessary. In particular, the way she steps out of the traditional female position, through her non-traditional marriage, her skilful use of *pharmaka* and her intelligence and independence, places her at distance from the orthodox duties which made her lose, at Jason's eyes, the status of Greek woman.

The last dialogue between the two guides the spectators to bring, as both Medea and Jason are doing, the dispute to an end, shaping a final judgement regarding the previous vicissitudes to highlight vindictive actions and failures, both also justify individual reasons and suffering. In particular, the linguistic register, through the constant repetition of terms

pertaining to the semantic domains of home and family in the last part of the play23, pushes the audience to accept that "her tragedy remains a feminine tragedy, defined by her relation to her house and to children, birth, nurture, and burial" (Segal 1996, 39). However, it is fundamental for understanding, and specifically for empathic understanding, to acknowledge Medea as a female human character, more than a goddess, in the way she is perceived and perceives herself. This is because, despite her supernatural powers, the domain of both her suffering and vengeance is framed within the context of human passions, especially the ones of family, love and private sphere. This framework of commonly shared values makes Medea a more accessible target for audience's empathy. On the one hand, the central role of a female character allows access to the story from a wider range of perspectives. Choosing a protagonist in an underprivileged social position, in particular a woman, is not unusual in tragic narratives (e.g. the story of Antigone). Intensifying the experienced injustice and grief, the misfortunes of Medea are easily relatable for the female members of the audience. On the other hand, the dialogues between the protagonist and both the chorus and Jason explicitly bring into light the condition of unease in which Medea is forced to act in such an extreme way. Thus, with the combination of these multiple devices, Euripides brings to the same level of awareness all the members who form his audience.

After being disempowered and deprived of her opportunities, Medea is only able to stand out and regain her power at a terrible cost. All of a sudden, after all her misfortunes, "although she may be a killer as well as the grandchild of the Sun god, she is genuinely one of us. She immediately becomes a mass of contradictions, a personality and a character full of complexity, a creature of infinite variety. Her grief, her intelligence, her catalogue of emotions ever-present and endless, all of these and more will inform her traffic with us" (Stein 2003, 115).

The decision adopted by Euripides to give voice to a woman only acquires sense if that voice can be heard. In the case of Medea, her position "is a true voice because it includes many voices: a woman as mother, as wife, as bride, as sister, as daughter, as dependent, and

---

23 The use of a continuous lexical reference to the spheres of home and family is employed by both Jason, "[y]ou there, women standing here at the door, is she still in the house" (Euripides, *Medea*, 1292-3), "[y]ou had the heart to take the sword to your own children to whom you gave birth (Ibid., 1324-5)", "I brought you, so hideous a monster, into Greece, from your home and that barbarous land, betrayer of your father and the country that reared you" (Ibid., 1329-31) and Medea, "[y]ou were not going to disrespect your marriage to me and lead a happy life, ridiculing me" (Ibid., 1353-4).

as a free entity. A woman as a hero and as a powerful goddess" (Luschnig 2007, 82). Since it is represented in a tragic context, Medea's experience is hyperbolically extreme on many fronts. Nonetheless, the tragedy truly represents the sense of home, belonging, and loss. It shows fury, jealousy and vengeance. But also, and above all, Luschnig claims that *Medea* is about personal, private and social justice and familial and individual representativeness. In brief, "[t]ragic characters are often people at the edge, but they show us what we are" (Ibid., 83). Medea is one of the tragic victims and one of the tragic subjects most prone to be criticised in her behaviour, but she is also a strong example of personal, female revenge and embodiment of individual resolution, in a constant tension between chaos and justice, blind rage and reason.

This detailed and extensive portrait of Medea's psychological character is necessary to understand on how many levels of identification empathy and particularly the empathic understanding process involves the audience and the tragic stage. The empathic response of the public towards the portrayed characters, or more generally toward Euripides' depiction of human nature, depends, following a cognitive interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, on "the sufferer's deservingness or undeservingness, as well as on the similarity of their situations, since, by attending a tragic performance revealing the fragility of human condition, the spectators fear for themselves" (Karamanou 2014, 44). The comprehensive portrait of Medea displayed throughout the previous paragraphs through a psychological perspective does not strictly follow the same steps when performatively experienced during a staged representation. In fact, "[u]nderstanding, reason, learning, moral discrimination – these things are not […] incompatible with emotion", on the contrary "our emotions in the theatre, far from driving out thought and meaning, are indivisible from them: they are simultaneous and mutually dependent" (Taplin 1978, 170). In fact, the empathic perception, which is essential to fully appreciate the aesthetic experience, allows the involved audience to order and guide emotions, direct intellectual attention and ensure the coherence of a psychophysical response. Moreover, while it would be hard to guarantee a complete overview on the authorial intentions of an ancient work, in this specific case Euripides' ones, the psychophysical reaction's enhancement caused by empathy can be placed "between an appreciation of emotion as shaped exclusively by phylogenetic factors and a view of passions as 'cultural artifacts'" which "can be mediated by the acknowledgment of *both* biology *and* culture as equally important determining factors" (Lada 1994, 95). In fact, given

the non-uniqueness of behavioural complexes in the expression of human emotions and the comparable nonverbal forms of emotional exhibition, the constant and explicit indication of clear psychophysical states given by the author[24] immediately evokes a complete range of foreseeable embodied manifestations of them.

For these reasons, it seems evident that the Euripidean tragedy, which shares many features with other examples of dramatic representations, requires a mental and emotional response of the audience to the theatrical enactment. In particular, the tragic performance and its characters are able to produce a communicative path which heads the audience towards a response of affection to tragic torment[25]. The staged scenario is capable of generating what Greeks defined as *ekplexis*[26], a condition in which "the listener/spectator is captivated, enraptured, bewitched […], meaning that the spectator is temporarily suspended from his everyday reality and imaginatively transposed into the centre of the 'performative' world" (Ibid., 100). This emotional response, already arisen by Aristotle's view on tragedy, evokes the centrality of empathy for tragic spectatorship, which, in the context of aesthetic appreciation, constitutes a mental and physical imaginary identification of the observing self with the multiformity of a depicted other. Here, "'empathy' is the notion of *congruity* between the passions - *whatever* these may be - which qualify the inner life of the object and the emotional response of the experiencing subject" (Ibid., 101). This corresponds to a psychophysical reaction to an incarnated state *as if* the conditions in question were primarily experienced by the members of the audience. Empathic identification shapes the spectator's experience in a way in which "the sort of sympathy which pity entails requires a certain *distance* between pitier and pitied; if this distance is removed, the predominantly altruistic emotion of pity is obliterated by a practically complete affective identification between oneself and the other" (Halliwell 1986, 178). The peculiar form of common intersubjective experience between audience and tragic heroes connects the empathic process on a shared

---

24 E.g., "*aiai* [Oh no!] I am ruined ... desperate! My enemies are unfurling all the sails and there is no clear landing place from ruin" (Euripides, *Medea*, 276-78), "[y]our words are cajoling to my ears, but inside my heart I am afraid you are forming some evil new plan" (Ibid., 315-16), "[u]nhappy woman, *Feu, feu* [Ah, ah] unhappy for your miseries" (Ibid., 356-57).

25 This is mainly evident in the evolution of the position taken by the chorus, which first tries to change Medea's mind on her plans, "[i]s there any way you could get her to come out to see us and hear the sound of our words spoken in comfort? If only she would somehow put aside her deeply felt anger and distemper, I am eager to help those dear to me" (Euripides, *Medea*, 172-177), but later fully supports her in her decision to take action empathizing with her condition, "[i]t is right that your husband should pay, Medea. I am not surprised that you grieve over your loss" (Ibid., 266-67), "[u]nhappy daughter of Creon, done to death, how we pity you for your tragedy, all because of your marriage to Jason" (Ibid., 1232-34).

26 Ἔκπληξις.

field of action, in which "the audience's imaginative projection into the stage-actor's psychological reality [...] fundamentally distinguishes Greek drama as a social institution" (Lada 1994, 102-3).

Tragedy has been, and still represents, one of the most significant genres of performative representation of humankind. The variety of its meaningful elements (e.g. the psychologically complex verisimilitude of the characters, the intensity of the plot's rhythm and the mediation role of the chorus, above all) makes the relationship between audience and tragic protagonists particularly relevant for the accomplishment of its representative dramatic outcome. However, empathy remains central for the dramatic experience to successfully function. The poetic discourse[27] evokes in the observers the possibility to project themselves into a different staged scenario and hence empathically[28] experience the characters' feelings as if they were their own, both in the form of their achievements and misfortunes. In particular, participating in a context of experience in which acting, rhythm and musicality contribute to a full engagement of its audience permits the spectators to self-identify with the performed mental and corporeal states. In fact, it is important to situate the experience of this tragic text imagining as the attendance of a dramatic performance, which "is best exemplified in a theatrical society, for the theatrical *skene* becomes the space *par excellence* where the experience of the 'other' can be conveyed through the tangible reality of body and of flesh" (Ibid., 106). The theatrical context, advantaged frame for emotional engagement, constitutes a perfect example to imagine empathy not only as a dual relationship of intersubjective exchange, but also as a crucial element in audience's perception of artistic works. Feelings, shared states, identities and physical actions and expressions are channelled by the poet and the characters on stage and internalised by the public, reflecting the path suggested and covered by the chorus, which empathically follows heroes' grief and sorrows. Thus, the members of the chorus have often been assimilated to the audience for the position they assume on stage: close observers of the characters, they are not involved in any intimate relationship with the suffering heroes, but they take part in the tragic misfortunes encouraging the public with lamentations to feel the same. In fact, as Aristotle's claims, the member of the audience is not alienated in his or her distant position

27 In this case, discourse refers to the literary and philosophical concept of λόγος.
28 In the literary sense of sharing the same πάθος.

of spectator, rather he or she "suffers along with the pathetic speaker" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1408a23-4).

As for intersubjective experience, social structures, cultural beliefs and traditions have a solid influence also on aesthetic appreciation. Specific systems of relation, affection and mental share are often culturally enforced and modulated in their responsiveness. In particular, the predisposition to empathically face emotions of a susceptible group of observing people also deeply depends on the cultural context of interaction. Since this configuration is both historically and socially conveyed and regulated, it is essential to fully comprehend the "transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973, 89). In this particular context of analysis, the Athenian society, Lada (1994) claims that the "spectator can be regarded as culturally oriented towards empathetic transpositions of the 'self'" thanks to "(a) the Dionysiac nature of the ancient drama, (b) the culturally shaped disposition of the 'self' when confronted with [… the] 'other', and (c) the collective *ethos* of the *polis* in which the performances are held" (Lada 1994, 112). First, the Dionysian element in tragedy, involving rapture and suspension, begins with the actor impersonation of a fictional subject, which serves as a collectively shared model suggesting the path of experience. In essence, actors fill the role that is traditionally served by mythical stories, ritualised ceremonies and even artistic representation. In other words, "[t]he 'Aristotelian' spectator […] becomes participant in a performance whose archetypal symbolic action is to 'step out' of oneself and to relinquish temporarily the safe contours of social identity" (Ibid.). Then, it is essential to acknowledge the context of representation, the social structures and their rules, as well as the imaginary of depicted identities. The staged plot, mirroring its spectators' condition, facilitates the empathic positioning for the member of the audience, making the spectator realise that he or she could be exposed, if has not been yet, to a similar scenario.

The last section addressed the textual mechanisms adopted by Euripides to stimulate empathy and emotional contagion in the audience, following the evolution of the plot, involved characters and sociocultural references. By way of conclusion, the next subchapter will focus on the cinematic transposition of the Euripidean play by Pasolini, with the homonymous title of *Medea* (1969), attributing a specific attention to the cinematic medium

and its visual implications, as well as the contemporary adaptational context realised by the Italian director, writer and intellectual.

3.3.2. Pasolini, Medea, and a Contemporary Audience for the Myth

The structural role played by empathy in tragic sense-making is not limited to the contextual peculiarities of Greek, and particularly Athenian, audience. As proven by contemporary transpositions of the mythical portrait of Medea, tragic enactment is in its essence first and foremost grounded on an all-encompassing conception of the human experience. Considering one of the most well-known contemporary adaptations of the tragedy, *Medea* by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969), it is possible to detect specific representative features that orient cognitive perception and comprehension in an empathic direction.

After having directed *Oedipus Rex* (1967), Pasolini decides to work on the adaptation of another Greek tragedy: the myth of Medea. The interest of the director is aroused by the fascination resulting from the disruptive role of the female hero in breaking the social, cultural and religious patterns of family, loyalty and, most of all, the conception of the sacred in the Athenian society. The myth becomes for Pasolini an allegory for a new reality in which he remarks a continuity with the contemporary society. In this context, the choice of Maria Callas in the role of Medea is not a coincidence. Pasolini insists on having Callas playing the character of Medea (she had already performed the tragic hero on stage several times) as an embodied metaphor of the social shift that Medea represents for the historical context in which Pasolini shapes his work. Coming from a Greek family strongly rooted on rural, religious and military values, she was educated to fit in the bourgeois and scandalous society of the spectacle. For this reason, Pasolini explicitly chooses Maria Callas for her personal and private representation of the complexity of Medea.

The cinematic expression of Pasolini is rooted, according to Dunghe (2012), on an intimate human narrative that through physical and linguistic expressions, as well as cultural, social and even biological structures, operates "as a continuum that links the human subject, both mentally and physically, to humanity's pre-cultural origins in nature" (Dunghe 2012, 582). The atemporal context in which events take place reproduces in Pasolini's *Medea* an archaic world designed in a contemporary frame of filmic and directing fashion, enabling spectators to comprehend the depicted and embodied discourse. Portraying the tragic

moment as a religious one and highlighting the relevance and sacredness of this form of human experience, Pasolini opposes the two main characters as embodied personifications of human traits. On the one hand, Jason represents determination, sagacity, personal and social success obtained through a long-term strategy of conquest. On the other hand, Medea, tragic hero *par excellence*, finds herself between rationality and madness, traditional rules of law and rules of love, nature and supernatural powers. Medea is pre-modern and contemporary at the same time in her irrational and inexplicable capacities of barbarian woman, in her will of destruction, inflicted and self-inflicted pain. The tension between powers, the one desired by Jason and Medea's superhuman one, depicted by Euripides finds in Pasolini's audience a new sense of social integrity and political order. In fact, "[b]y permitting the Medea of Euripides to speak, both verbally and visually, through the free indirect subjectivity of his own Medea, Pasolini merges his own sensibility with an ancient one in a discourse that truly does address the cultural values of our day" (Ibid., 587). In particular, Pasolini opposes the contemporary ruthless exploitation of people and resources for the sake of profit (symbolised by Jason and his thirst for conquest) with those victims that are misused and ruled by hegemonical powers (Medea and her people).

The work completed by Pasolini projects the myth in contemporary times, but it maintains Medea as the vehicular character imagined by Euripides. In fact, "[i]n an attempt to build a cinematic form that could not be reduced to a consumable narrative, Pasolini pushed his images beyond the narrative function, to create excess possibilities of meaning" (Borgerson 2002, 56). The empathic understanding of *Medea* in all its facets preserves the opportunity of questioning and even dismantling ethical structures and social beliefs, something that tragedy has been aiming from the very beginning. The relationship between Medea and Jason in adapted by Pasolini for a contemporary audience, and thus follows different cultural references despite the ancient context in which the movie is set. In particular, Jason, depicted as a rational tactician, impersonates the modern man in opposition to the sacred and at the same time vulnerable figure of Medea. Rejecting the tradition, Jason stands in representation of logic, profit and personal interest. In fact, according to the classics scholar Shapiro (2013), Pasolini's Jason is the symbol of those "[m]odern industrialized societies" which "inhabit a profane or 'desacralized' cosmos; they have abandoned symbolic and mythic modes of thought and have embraced a linear, rational, and historical concept of time" (Shapiro 2013, 100). In opposition, Medea personifies the archaic world which has

been colonised and exploited for Jason's own interest. While achieving personal success, Jason ends up failing in his familial responsibilities towards Medea, which led him to the loss of his children. The love for Jason rips Medea away from her land, family and people, in a sort dimension of sorrow and madness. However, despite the violent nature of her act of revenge and the multiple murders she commits, Medea cannot fail to be perceived as a victim, exploited by masculine oppression and the subjugation of the dominant culture.

For this reason, the danger and suffering represented by Jason becomes more despicable than death. In fact, as claimed by Deuber-Mankowsky (2012), "Pasolini and Callas create a Medea whom we not only comprehend but who leads us to believe that her children are better off as dead corpses fleeing with their mother in her chariot than remaining with their father in Corinth" (Deuber-Mankowsky 2012, 256). Pasolini positions at the centre of his work an intersubjective conflict that transcends historical and contextual collocation but is particularly prone to being accessible for its public. The director makes Maria Callas embody the tragic suffering of Medea, giving a greater relevance to her experience and perspective through the abolition of time and spatial distances and the pragmatic rituality of her gestures. In particular, in the dreamlike repetition of the scene of the murder of the two children, Pasolini points out the only opportunity for Medea to find rest.

The profoundly dramatic performance of Maria Callas and her powerful tragic expressivity reveal from her flight to Greece to the murdering of her children that behind her crimes there is a consuming sense of loss, betrayed love and abandonment. The positioning of Medea's vicissitudes inside the myth makes it possible for Pasolini to abstract her actions in an atemporal context in which the human experience is made absolute in its essence. Representing the myth in contemporary days means reclaiming its actuality (Tuccini 2011, 132), and the way the Aristotelean vision of humanity incarnated by tragedy has survived for thousand years. Mythology becomes for Pasolini a channel to represent a woman able to personify the human conflict in herself. At the same time, the director abandons different peculiar mechanisms of tragedy (the chorus and its role of mediation, the use of masks and the exclusively dialogical structure of Euripides' work) taking advantage of the power of silent images in the cinematic medium. In fact, *Medea* is a deeply visual work, predominantly focused on Callas' gaze and facial expressivity. The alternance of head shots, favouring her profile in ritualistic and hieratic sequences and frontal closeups in her more human, desperate and hopeless moments, entirely directs the attention of the audience on the

embodiment of her emotional growth and inner belonging to the earthly dimension. Despite her divine nature, Medea is physically depicted as a fragile woman, whose body appears to constantly fall under the burden of her grief. Pasolini projects Medea under a contemporary perspective, making her, above all, a mother. Even the extreme act of murdering her children, depicted with the appearance of a constraint ritual gesture, is committed on the verge of tears: Medea is consistently portrayed as a grieving victim of the system that oppresses her, including the sequences in which she is the actual executioner.

In Pasolini's cinematic language empathy represents the emotional response to stimuli not exclusively provoked by human characters. Desolate landscapes, frightening objects and rituals and deafening music are central in creating the context able to guide the emotional contagion which the director aims to arouse. The environment in which Medea finds herself to experience multiple losses is constructed by Pasolini in such an evocative form that it is able to stimulate what Smith defines as "[t]he possibility of understanding 'from the inside' […] human agents in social situations more or less radically different from our own" (Smith 2011, 111). In this frame, the resonance of Medea's psychophysical state is universal in its despair. Isolated from her loved ones and crushed under the weight of her grief, Pasolini's portrait of Medea makes the spectator shift from the mimetic depiction of the hero to the experienced emotions of real life. The stylistic choices featured in the cinema of Pasolini help through different mechanisms (e.g. closeups, frontal shots, intense music and repetitive views of vast and dry landscapes) to construct a specific narrative pattern that, according to Campeggiani (2017), "trains our ability to recognize evaluative properties and respond emotionally to them" (Campeggiani 2017, 41).

Furthermore, despite the absence of the chorus, Pasolini introduces a mediator playing a comparable role. In fact, the centaur, Chiron, more than just raising and educating Jason, which would be his role in the frame of the myth, talks to the audience about the sacredness of nature and the world, soon disillusioned by the ruthless rationality and craving for power of his pupil. However, Chiron does not stand on screen from the perspective of the audience, but he speaks for the director introducing his philosophical thoughts on "the ideological conflict which is at the heart of the entire film" (Dunghe 2012, 585): the vulnerability which, according to Pasolini, characterises every human being once the connection with nature is cracked. Chiron explains to Jason that, while in ancient times myths and sacred rituals were part of the lived reality, contemporary humanity, to which

Jason and each spectator belong, finds in the physical world an exhaustive perfection. This *hubris* will lead everybody, and Jason above all, to mistakes and destruction. The director uses the centaur as an expedient to introduce his audience to both recurrent themes in ancient mythology (e.g. the relationship between human and natural, the sacred) and his position as a multifaceted intellectual. Growing older, Jason acts on behalf of his interests with a rational and desacralised drive, to such an extent that Chiron turns from centaur into a simple man. In this way, from the very beginning of the film Pasolini directs the attention of his audience to the mythological dimension of the narrated story, addressing the sacrality of tragedy and tragic stories. At the same time, the director guides the focus and empathic emotions of his audience to Medea, the only figure that all along the movie escapes the downfall that the world is experiencing. In this way, Chiron substitutes the chorus and its mediation role between the characters of the movie and the audience. Never directly engaging in the plot, he impersonates the thoughts and ideas behind the director's choice to adapt the myth in a new cinematic version, while guiding the emotional attention and empathic urge of the public towards Medea.

Moreover, Pasolini escapes the risk of an obsolete reproduction of tragedy and build a powerful aesthetic object, in which empathy plays a crucial role on an affective level towards the hero and on a comprehensive one towards the tragedy as a whole. Contiguity and rational similarities, as well as poetic and acting involvement, make Medea a peculiarly unique *dramatis persona* who carries poetic intentions, mythic and ritual charge together with human features which bind her to the audience. In particular, referring to the tragic hero, Lada claims that the "spectator for his part can *actually* engage in a rational empathic dialogue with him, for he is culturally conditioned so as to recognise and acknowledge in the fate of the 'other' the potential fate of the 'self'" (Lada 1994, 123). The privileged perspective from which the spectator cognitively elaborates the represented actions experienced by Medea permits to not only *feel for* her (action which would only assume sympathetic modality), but also *feel into* the action comprehensively grasping it, thanks to the contemporary value of an ancient and mythic suffering. Empathy leads, through a first-person immersion, to a fully experienced understanding of ideas, emotions and actions. Assuming another subject's mental and corporal state positions the viewer on a vantage-point of observation which even allows to transcend cultural or social discrepancies. In brief, empathy allows the audience to share and make sense of the blindness of emotions,

irrationality of passion and even the fictional and mythic essence of tragedy in order to fully experience catharsis. In fact, empathic sense-making "as an inextricable compound of intellect and feeling, sheds some light on the way a Greek audience was likely to be disposed towards a theatrical performance and the agents who materialise its action on the on the *skene* of the *polis*" (Ibid., 125).

    In conclusion, this chapter aimed to specifically address the cognitive perspective on aesthetic perception to the specific case of tragedy, in particular to the character of Medea in her Euripidean and Pasolinian portrayals. Central to the analysis was the empathic relation between the audience, reading today the work by Euripides or watching the inspired movie, the tragic hero and her vicissitudes. The examples of the two versions of *Medea* pointed out a variety of mechanisms concerned in this process. While on the one hand Euripides, through specific lexical and expressive choices and the constant mediation of the chorus, constructs a literary figure which embodies the tragic spirit, Pasolini delivers to his audience a contemporary reading of the myth of Medea articulated through a visual language. In both cases, the empathic path to cognitive perception and comprehension is crucial for the spectators to fully participate to the tragic experience.

Conclusion

This research project, focusing on empathy and its role in cognition and processes of sense-making, demonstrated the impact of the empathic process in both intersubjective relations and aesthetic perception. After focusing on interpersonal contexts throughout the first chapter, the artistic dimension of *Einfühlung*, as addressed by Vischer in the first place (1994), has been illustrated on a macro level first, and later following the specific case of tragedy and the myth of Medea in different narrative depictions.

Referring back to the research question behind this study, empathy has been demonstrated essential in aesthetic comprehension. Actually, the emotional contagion empathically experienced has been claimed as the key shift from contemplation to understanding. Even if in everyday life the concept of empathy and its related psychophysical processes are almost exclusively employed to describe the experience of *feeling into* subjects other than us, this research focused on those aspects that have contributed to the formation of aesthetic theories on empathy, which relate empathic cognitive mechanisms to the perception of artistic works and practices. As addressed in general and theoretical terms and then specifically following tragedy as a key case study, the empathic reaction of the viewer was shown to allow the emotional arousal of psychophysical involvement in the subjects contemplating artistic objects.

In this dissertation, acknowledging that artistic works and their production cannot be separated from the human nature of their creation and reception has been central. In fact, the reality constructed in cultural production, besides coming from human minds and skills, subsists in its manifestation according to human languages of expression. The semantic domains evoked by the contemplation of the objects in question allow the observers to fully experience, comprehend and ultimately share the depicted reality represented in artistic form. For this reason, making a sharp distinction between intersubjective and aesthetic experience would not only be incomplete, but also neglect to consider their constant and mutual influence.

Moreover, throughout the analysis and reference to different forms of artistic work (literary texts, visual representations, performed stories in theatre and films) a variety of cognitive mechanisms have been detected as essential for the empathic process to take place. The path to understanding is shaped by narratives, forms of presenting events, characters and environments, but also emotions and intentions that are crucial for comprehension. The

narrative unfolding, in light of individual and collective experience, arouses the emotional contagion at the base of empathy: embodied narratives and perspective taking stimulate the audience to experience what has been observed *as if* it were the individual reality of each member (and all of them as a collective group) of the public.

Furthermore, tragedy and the specific case of the myth of Medea have proved to be significative objects of analysis in the study of the relevance of empathy in artistic perception and comprehension. In particular, the mimetic nature of tragedy allows the observing audience to share the depicted psychophysical states thanks to the emotional and mental awareness provided by the personal, social and cultural reservoir of experience on which we rely. The response of the audience has been proved to be oriented to a condition of emotional share leading to comprehension. Different are the tools implied in the tragic frame to provoke and guide this reaction. While in the case of Euripides' *Medea* (432 BC) literary and theatrical devices are essential in the direction and support of the process of sense-making conducted by the audience (e.g. the mediation role played by of both masks and chorus in supporting the decipherment of the psychophysical states experienced by the characters), the cinematic adaptation of the myth directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1969 employs specific devices of the filmic medium (present in his technique of directing the camera, the choice of Maria Callas as the main protagonist of the movie and the characterisation of environments, music and characters) to trigger empathy towards the portrayed characters.

This dissertation serves different purposes both in the frame of cognitive semiotics and culture studies. Starting with a comprehensive genealogy of the concept of empathy, this work bridged a variety of disciplines (phenomenology, narrative and cognitive psychology) addressing perception and comprehension in intersubjective exchanges and aesthetic appreciation. Considering these two frames throughout the research was essential to acknowledge the continuity of cognition in different aspects of the human experience. In particular, this work highlighted the all-encompassing nature of cognitive processes. In fact, empathy was shown to rely not only on mental stimuli and mechanisms, but also on sensorial operations and embodied emotions, which are necessary to comprehensively grasp the outer world. As anticipated in the introduction, culture and cognition are experiencing increasing contamination and interconnection. For this reason, the study of these macro phenomena needs to be approached complementing one another. The choice of a case study with such a significant relevance in the story of theatre, literature and more generally any form of

representation of the human condition was made with the aim of addressing, in light of recent studies on cognitive processes of sense-making, a form of narrative from ancient times which still influence, more or less directly, contemporary artistic production. The continuous mediation of our cultural context and expression is essential to understand not only how we perceive, but also who we are.

This research was conducted to provide a comprehensive analysis of empathy, its influence in perception and comprehension and its application to the specificities of the case study. However, many questions remain open for future discussion. In particular, while considering here both interpersonal relations and sense-making in artistic contemplation, contemporary ways of interacting, under the influence of an increasingly widespread digitalisation, are characterised by a strong presence of virtual intersubjective exchanges. In fact, the disembodiment that distinguishes digital communication from the contexts that have been addressed throughout this research involves different and multiple levels of reality which intersect and influence each other in the creation of an innovative dimension and requiring further analysis. Involving specific aspects pertaining to both intersubjective exchanges and fictional realities, a new way of creating, communicating and sharing is shaping a context in which encounter, perception and imagination are temporally and spatially disconnected and even suspended, finding a new position in the *présence-absence* spectrum theorized by Lévinas (1979). How will empathy adapt to of the virtual context of experience? Will the role of empathy decline in its relevance or will it increasingly rely on mechanisms experienced in the frame of fictional stories? Our culture and way of communicating are growing in the digital space and further studies on the involved sense-making processes are necessary to understand this new reality.

Bibliography

Alessandrelli, Michele. 2008. "Catarsi Tragica". *Chaos e Kosmos* IX: 1-13. http://www.chaosekosmos.it/pdf/2008_01.pdf.

Anderson, Maxwell. 1939. *The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers*. Washington, DC: Anderson House.

Apollonius Rhodius. 2008. *Argonautica*. Translated by William H. Race. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Aristotle. 2002. *On Poetics*. Translated by Seth Benardete and Michael Davis. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press.

Aristotle. 2010. *Rhetoric*. Translated by W. Rhys Roberts. New York: Cosimo Classics.

Arnheim, Rudolf. 1933. *Film*. Translated by L. Marie Sieveking and Ian F. D. Morrow. London: Faber and Faber.

Assmann, Aleida. 2012. *Introduction to Cultural Studies: Topics, Concepts, Issues*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Avramides, Anita. 2001. *Other Minds: The Problem of Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Backhaus, Gary. 2000. "The Death of a Significant Other". In *Life: Creative Mimesis of Emotion. Form Sorrow to Elation: Elegiac Virtuosity in Literature - Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research* Vol 62, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Springer.

Balázs, Béla. 1952. *Theory of the Film (Character and Growth of a New Art)*. London: Dennis Dobson.

Bell, Clive. 1914. *Art*. London: Chatto.

Blair, Rhonda. 2009. "Cognitive Neuroscience and Acting: Imagination, Conceptual Blending, and Empathy". *TDR: The Drama Review* 53 (4): 92-103.

Boeckh, August. 1886. *Encyklopädie und Methodologie der Philologischen Wissenschaften*. Leipzig: Teubner Verlag.

Bordwell, David. 2013. "The Viewer's Share: Models of Mind in Explaining Film". In *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, edited by Arthur P. Shimamura. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Borgerson, Janet L. 2002. "Managing Desire: Heretical Transformation in Pasolini's Medea". *Consumption Markets & Culture* 5 (1): 55-62.

Brandt, Per Aage. 2004. *Spaces, Domains, and Meanings – Essays in Cognitive Semiotics*. Pieterlen: Peter Lang.

Breithaupt, Fritz. 2011. "The Blocking of Empathy, Narrative Empathy, and a Three-Person Model of Empathy". In *Emotion Review* Vol. XX, No. X: 1-8.

Breithaupt, Fritz. 2019. *The Dark Sides of Empathy*. Translated by Andrew B. B. Hamilton. London: Cornell University Press.

Bruner, Jerome and David A. Kalmar. 1998. "Narrative and metanarrative in the construction of self". In *Self-Awareness: Its Nature and Development*, edited by Michel Ferrari and Robert J. Sternberg. New York: Guilford Press.

Cairns, Douglas. 2017. "Horror, Pity, and the Visual in Ancient Greek Aesthetics". In *Emotions in the Classical World: Methods, Approaches and Directions*, edited by Douglas Cairns and Damien Neils. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Campeggiani, Pia. 2017. "Other Selves in Fiction: *Philia*, *Eleos*, and the Ethics of Narrative". *Maia* 69: 23-46.

Campbell, Donald T. 1976. "Evolutionary Epistemology". In *The philosophy of Karl R. Popper*, edited by Paul A. Schlipp. La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Carroll, Noël. 2011. "On Some Affective Relation between Audiences and the Characters in Popular Fiction". In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Clifford, Derek. 1968. *Art and Understanding: Towards a Humanist Aesthetic*. London: Evelyn, Adams & Mackay.

Coëgnarts, Maarten. 2017. "Cinema and the Embodied Mind: Metaphor and Simulation in Understanding Meaning in Films". *Palgrave Communications*, Vol. 3. http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2017.67.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Rick E. Robinson. 1990. *The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*. Malibu, California: J. Paul Getty Museum.

D'Aloia, Adriano. 2012a. "Cinematic Empathy: Spectator Involvement in the Film Experience". In *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, edited by Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.

D'Aloia, Adriano. 2012b. "The intangible ground: A neurophenomenology of the film experience". *NECSUS European Journal of Media Studies* 1 (2): 219-239.

D'Aloia, Adriano. 2015. "The Character's Body and the Viewer: Cinematic Empathy and Embodied Simulation in the Film Experience". In *Embodied Cognition and Cinema*, edited by Maarten Coëgnarts and Peter Kravanja. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Davis, Mark H., Jay G. Hull, Richard D. Young and Gregory G. Warren. 1987. "Emotional Reactions to Dramatic Film Stimuli: The Influence of Cognitive and Emotional Empathy". *Journal of personality and social psychology* 52: 126-33.

de Vignemont, Frédérique and Tania Singer. 2006. "The empathic brain: How, when and why?". *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 10: 435–441.

Depew, David. 2005. "Empathy, Psychology and Aesthetics: Reflections of a Repair Concept". *Poroi* 4 (1): 99-107.

Deuber-Mankowsky, Astrid. 2012. "Cinematographic Aesthetics as Subversion of Moral Reason in Pasolini's Medea". In *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction: Pasolini's Multistable Subjectivities, Geographies, Traditions*, edited by Luca di Blasi, Manuele Gragnolati and Christoph F. E. Holzhey, Cultural Inquiry, 6. Vienna: Turia + Kant: 255-66.

Donald, Merlin. 1991. *Origins of the Modern Mind. Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Donaldson, Lucy Fife. 2012. "Effort and Empathy: Engaging with Film Performance". In *Kinesthetic Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, edited by Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect.

Dreyfus, Hubert L. 1979. *What Computers Can't Do - a Critique of Artificial Reason.* New York: Harper and Row.

Dunghe, Adelmo P. 2012. "Pasolini's Semiotics of the Sacred". *Italica* Vol. 89 (4): 582-588.

Ellis, Ralph D. 2000. "Tragedy, Finitude, and the Value-Expressive Dimension". In *Life: Creative Mimesis of Emotion. Form Sorrow to Elation: Elegiac Virtuosity in Literature - Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research* Vol 62, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Springer.

Euripides. 1938. *Medea*, edited by Denys L. Page. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Euripides. 2006. *Medea*, translated by Cecelia A. E. Luschnig. http://www.pelister.org/courses/topics/greece/medea.pdf.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. 1992. *The semiotics of theater*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Francès, Robert. 1976. "Comparative Effects of Six Collative Variables on Interest and Preference in Adults of Different Educational Levels". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 33 (1): 62–79.

Fuchs, Thomas. 2014. "The Virtual Other: Emapthy in the Age of Virtuality". *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 21 (5-6): 152-73.

Gallagher, Shaun. 2005. *How the Body Shapes the Mind.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gallagher, Shaun. 2007. "Phenomenological and experimental contributions to understanding embodied experience." In *Body, Language and Mind. Vol 1. Embodiment*, edited by Tom Ziemke, Jordan Zlatev and Roslyn M. Frank. Berlin: Mouton.

Gallagher, Shaun. 2012. "Empathy, Simulation and Narrative". *Science in Context* 25 (03): 355-381.

Gallagher, Shaun and Daniel D. Hutto. 2008. "Understanding others through primary interaction and narrative practice". In *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on intersubjectivity*, edited by Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha and Esa Itkonen. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Gallese, Vitttorio. 2003. "The manifold nature of interpersonal relations: the quest for a common mechanism". *Phil Trans. R. Soc. Lond. B* 358: 517-528.

Gallese, Vittorio and Michele Guerra. 2012. "Embodying Movies: Embodied Simulation and Film Studies". *Cinema: Journal of Philosophy and the Moving Image* 3: 183-210.

Gallese, Vittorio and Hannah Wojciehowski. 2011. "How Stories Make Us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology". *California Italian Studies* 2 (1). http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3jg726c2.

Ganczarek, Joanna, Thomas Hünefeldt and Marta Olivetti Belardinelli. 2018. "From "Einfühlung" to empathy: exploring the relationship between aesthetic and interpersonal experience". *Cognitive Process* 19 (2): 141–145.

Gangopadhyay, Nivedita. 2014. "Introduction: Embodiment and Empathy, Current Debates in Social Cognition". *Topoi* 33: 117-127.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gellie, George. 1988. "The Character of Medea". *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 35 (1): 15-22.

Gettings, Fred. 1982. *Understanding Painting*. London: Orbis Publishing.

Gibbs, Anna. 2010. "After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony and Mimetic Communication". In *The Affect Theory Reader,* edited by Melissa Gregg, Gregory Seigworth, and Sara Ahmed. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Goldie, Peter. 2000. *The emotions: a philosophical exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hagtvedt, Henrik, Hagtvedt Reidar and Vanessa Patrick. 2008. "The Perception and Evaluation of Visual Art". *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 26: 197-218.

Hall, Stuart. 1973. *Encoding and decoding in the television discourse*. Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

Halliwell, Stephen. 1986. *Aristotle's Poetics*. London: Duckworth.

Halliwell, Stephen. 2002. *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hampe, Beate. 2005. "Image schemas in cognitive linguistics: Introduction". In *From Perception to Meaning: Image Schemas in Cognitive Linguistics*, edited by Beate Hampe. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Hanenberg, Peter. 2018. *Cognitive Culture Studies*. Lisbon: Universidade Católica Editora.

Hanenberg, Peter and Per Aage Brandt. 2010. "Strang Loops and a Cognitive Approach to *Genre*". *Cognitive Semiotics* 6 (Spring), 179-192.

Hegel, Georg W. F. 1975a. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* Vol I, translated by Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press

Hegel, Georg W. F. 1975b. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* Vol II, translated by Thomas M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

Hess, Ursula, Stephanie Houde and Aneta Fischer. 2014. "Do we mimic what we see or what we know?". In *Collective Emotions*, edited by Christian von Scheve and Mikko Salmela. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoffman, Martin. 1990. "Empathy and Justice Motivation". *Motivation and Emotion* 14 (2): 151-172.

Hume, David. 2007. *A treatise of Human Nature: Volume 1*. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Husserl, Edmund. 1973. "Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. *Texte aus dem Nachlass. Erster Teil. 1905-1920*". In *Husserliana* Vol. XIII, edited by Iso Kern. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, Edmund. 1982. "Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book. General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology". Translated by Fred Kersten. In *Husserliana* Vol. II, edited by Rudolf Bernet. Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Husserl, Edmund. 1989. "Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book. Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution". Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. In *Husserliana* Vol. III, edited by Rudolf Bernet. Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Husserl, Edmund. 2001. *Logical Investigations*. Translated by John Niemeyer Findlay, edited by Dermot Moran. London and New York: Routledge.

Iacoboni, Marco. 2005. "Understanding Others: Imitation, Language and Empathy". In *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science. Volume 1: Mechanisms of Imitation and Imitation in Animals*, edited by Susan Hurley and Nick Chater. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.

Iacono, Alfonso. 2010. *L'illusione e il sostituto. Riprodurre. imitare, rappresentare*. Milano: Bruno Mondadori Editore.

Jardine, James. 2014. "Husserl and Stein on the Phenomenology of Empathy: Perception and Explication". *Synthesis Philosophica* 29 (2): 273-288.

Jurecic, Ann. 2011. "Empathy and the Critic". *College English* 74, No. 1: 10-27.

Karamanou, Ioanna. 2014. "Otherness and Exile: Euripides' Production of 431 BC". In *Looking at Medea: Essays and translation of Euripides' tragedy*, edited by David Stuttard. London: Bloomsbury.

Kimmel, Lawrence. 2000. "Crossblood: Literature and the Drama of Survival". In *Life: Creative Mimesis of Emotion. Form Sorrow to Elation: Elegiac Virtuosity in Literature - Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research* Vol 62, edited by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Springer.

Krueger, Joel. 2009. "Empathy and the Extended Mind". *Zygon* 44, 3: 675-698.

Lada, Ismene. 1994. "'Empathic understanding': emotion and cognition in classical dramatic audience- response". *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 39: 94-140.

Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind.* Chicago University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1980. *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. 1999. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought.* New York: Basic Books.

Lamarque Peter. 2004. "On not expecting too much from narrative." *Mind and Language* 19: 393–408.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1979. *Le temps et l'autre.* Paris: Fata Morgana.

Lindblom, Jessica and Tom Ziemke. 2007. "Embodiment and social interaction: A cognitive science perspective". In *Body, Language and Mind. Vol 1. Embodiment*, edited by Tom Ziemke, Jordan Zlatev and Roslyn M. Frank. Berlin: Mouton.

Lipps, Theodor. 1903. *Aesthetik*, vol. 1. Hamburg: Voss Verlag.

Lipps, Theodor. 1907. "Das Wissen von fremden Ichen." *Psychologische Untersuchungen* 1: 694-722.

Lucas, Frank Laurence. 1927. *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's* Poetics. London: Hogarth Press.

Luschnig, Cecelia A. E. 2007. *Granddaughter of the Sun: A Study of Euripides' Medea*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Makkreel, Rudolf A. 2010. "How is Empathy Related to Understanding?". In *Issues in Husserl's Ideas II (Contributions to Phenomenology)*, edited by Thomas Nenon and Lester Embree. Dordrecht: Springer.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1978. *The Aesthetic Dimension*. London: Macmillan.

McFee, Graham. 2011. "Empathy: Interpersonal vs Artistic?". In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meineck, Peter. 2011. "The Neuriscience of the Tragic Mask". *Arion* 19 (1): 113-158.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2002. *Phenomenology of perception*. London: Routledge.

Miller, Arthur. 1978. "Tragedy and the Common Man". In *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. New York: Viking Press.

Morrison, Karl Frederick. 1988. "*I Am You*"*: The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Neumann, Birgit, and Ansgar Nünning. 2007. "Einleitung: Probleme, Aufgaben und Perspektiven der Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte". In *Gattungstheorie und Gattungsgeschichte*, edited by Marion Gymnich, Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning, 1-28. Trier: WVT.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1999. *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Translated by Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ovid. 2009. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by A. D. Melville. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pindar. 1997. *Olympian Odes, Pythian Odes*. Translated by William H. Race. Boston, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library.

Plantinga, Carl. 2009. "Spectatorship". In *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film,* edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga. London: Routledge.

Plantinga, Carl. 2013. "The Affective Power of Movies". In *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, edited by Arthur P. Shimamura. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Plato. 1960. *The Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. New York: Anchor Books.

Preston, Stephanie D. and Frans B. M. de Waal. 2002. "Empathy: Its ultimate and proximal bases". *Behavioral and Brain Sciences,* 25: 1–72.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2004. *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.

Saukko, Paula. 2003. *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An introduction to classical and new methodological approaches*. London: SAGE Publications.

Scheler, Max. 1954. *The Nature of Sympathy*. Translated by Peter Heath. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Schlegel, August W. 1846. *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*. Translated by John Black. London: H. G. Bohn.

Scholl, Brian J. and Patrice D. Tremoulet. 2000. "Perceptual causality and animacy." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (8): 299–309.

Schutz, Alfred. 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Translated by George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Segal, Charles. 1996. "Euripides' *Medea*: Vengeance, Reversal, and Closure". *Pallas* 45: 15-44.

Seneca. 1986. *Medea*. Translated by Frederick M. Ahl. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Shapiro, Susan O. 2013. "Pasolini's Medea: A Twentieth-Century Tragedy". In *Ancient Greek Women in Film*, edited by Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, Murray. 2011. "Empathy, Expansionism and the Extended Mind". In *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, edited by Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sonesson, Göran. 2007. "From the meaning of embodiment to the embodiment of meaning: A study on phenomenological semiotics". In *Body, Language and Mind. Vol 1. Embodiment*, edited by Tom Ziemke, Jordan Zlatev and Roslyn M. Frank. Berlin: Mouton.

Sonesson, Göran. 2010. "Semiosis and the elusive final interpretant of understanding". *Semiotica* 179–1/4: 145–258.

Stadler, Jane. 2013. "Cinema's Compassionate Gaze: Empathy, Affect, and Aesthetics in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*". In *Cine-Ethics: Ethical Dimensions of Film Theory, Practice, and Spectatorship*, edited by Jinhee Choi and Mattias Frey. New York, NY: Routledge.

Stadler, Jane. 2017. "Empathy and Film". In *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, edited by Heidi L. Maibom. New York: Routledge.

Stamatopoulou, Despina. 2007. "Mimesis as an embodied imaginative act and the paradox of Tragedy: Implications for the role of negative emotions in art and empathic morality". In *Philosophy and Ethics: New Research*, edited by Laura V. Siegal. New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Stein, Edith. 1989. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltraut Stein. Washington: ICS Publishers.

Stein, Howard. 2003. "A Response to *Medea* and *Antigone*". *Arion* 10 (3): 113-24.

Sternberg, Meir. 1990. "Telling in time (I): Chronology and narrative theory". *Poetics Today* 11: 901–948.

Stokes, Dustin. 2014. "Cognitive Penetration and the Perception of Art". *dialectica* 68 (1): 1-34.

Stueber, Karsten R. 2006. *Rediscovering Empathy: Agency, Folk-Psychology and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Sukenick, Ronald. 1985. *In Form: Digressions on the Act of Fiction*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Tan, Ed S. 1996. *Emotion and the structure of narrative film: Film as an emotion machine*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tan, Ed S. 2000. "Emotion, art and the humanities". In *Handbook of Emotions*, edited by M. Lewis and J. M. Haviland-Jones, 2nd edition: 116-136. New York: Guilford Press.

Tan, Ed S. 2013. "The Empathic Animal Meets the Inquisitive Animal in the Cinema: Notes on a Psychocinematics of Mind Reading". In *Psychocinematics: Exploring Cognition at the Movies*, edited by Arthur P. Shimamura. New York: Oxford University Press.

Taplin, Oliver. 1978. *Greek tragedy in action*. London: Routledge.

Tobón, Daniel. J. 2019. "Empathy and sympathy: Two contemporary models of character engagement". In *The Palgrave handbook of the philosophy of film and motion pictures*, edited by Noël Carroll, Shawn Loht and Laura T. Di Summa-Knoop. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tomasello, Michael. 1999. *The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Toren, Christina. 2002. "Comparison and Ontogeny". In *Anthropology, by Comparison*, edited by Richard G. Fox and Andre Gingrich. London and New York: Routledge.

Tseng, Ming-Yu. 2010. "The performative potential of metaphor". *Semiotica* 180: 115-145.

Tuccini, Giona. 2011. "Maria Callas, regina non vista. Medea e le ombre delle cose future". In *Les corps en scène: Acteurs et personnages pasolinines*, edited by Lisa El Ghaoui. Pisa, Roma: Fabrizio Serra Editore.

Turner, Mark. 1996. *The Literary Mind*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vischer, Robert. 1994. "On the Optical Sense of Form: A Contribution to Aesthetics". In *Empathy, Form, and Space: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893*, edited and

translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou. Los Angeles: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities.

Voss, Christiane. 2011. "Film Experience and the Formation of Illusion: The Spectator as 'Surrogate Body' for the Cinema," *Cinema Journal* 50, 4: 136-150.

Walton, Kendall L. 1990. *Mimesis as Make-believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Ward, Mark. 2015. "Art in Noise: An Embodied Simulation Account of Cinematic Sound Design". In *Embodied Cognition and Cinema*, edited M. Coëgnarts and P. Kravanja. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Weber, Max. 1957. *The Theory of Social and Economical Organisation*. Translated by Archibald Martin Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.

Wispé, Lauren. 1991. The Psychology of Sympathy. New York: Plenum Press.

Young, Julian. 2013. *The Philosophy of Tragedy: From Plato to Žižek*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zahavi, Dan. 2010. Empathy, embodiment and interpersonal understanding: From Lipps to Schutz. *Inquiry* 53 (3): 285-306.

Zahavi, Dan. 2012. "Empathy and mirroring: Husserl and Gallese". *Life, Subjectivity & Art* 20 (X): 217-254.

Zahavi, Dan. 2014. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy and Shame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zeki, Semir. 2009. *Splendors and Miseries of the Brain: Love, Creativity, and the Quest for Human Happiness*. Chicester, United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Zeman, Sonja. 2016. "Perspectivization as a link between narrative micro- and macro-structure". In *Perspectives on Narrativity and Narrative Perspectivization*, edited by Natalia Igl and Sonja Zeman. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Zlatev, Jordan. 2008. "The co-evolution of intersubjectivity and bodily mimesis". In *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on intersubjectivity*, edited by Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha and Esa Itkonen. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Zunshine, Lisa. 2006. *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel.* Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press.

Filmography

Pasolini, Pier Paolo, director. 1967. *Oedipus Rex*. EURO INTERNATIONAL FILM.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo, director. 1969. *Medea*. EURO INTERNATIONAL FILM.