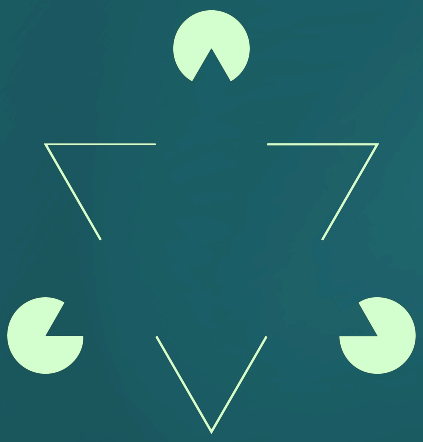
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO BICOCCA
DIPARTIMENTO DI PSICOLOGIA

International Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications

23rd GTA Conference

Scientific Conference of the Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications (GTA)



Mind
Perception
Reality

Milan, September 25-27, 2024

Book of Abstracts

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NETWORK FOR GESTALT THEORY AND EXPERIMENTAL PHENOMENOLOGY
Associazione Italiana di Psicologia

Wednesday afternoon, September 25

Keynote lecture

Sacrestia del Bramante, Santa Maria delle Grazie – 15:30

Walter Gerbino
University of Trieste

Approximation in perceptual completion

Normally, the perception of complete visual shapes given incomplete sensory evidence can be explained by interpolation; i.e., by the smooth monotonic connection of literally represented contour stimuli. However, in limiting conditions (e.g., the Gerbino illusion pattern), such a connection is impossible, forcing the system to either violate smoothness and monotonicity constraints or relax the literal representation assumption. I will review evidence that figural completion may involve visual approximation rather than interpolation and discuss the implications of such a view for perceptual theory.

Thursday morning, September 26

Talks

Gestalt Theory – History and Legacy

Tellus Building (U4), Aula Sironi, Room U4-8 – Chair Fiorenza Toccafondi – 09:00-12:00

Federico Fantelli
University of Antwerp

Figures, grouping principles, passive syntheses

What is the general structure of a visual sense unit? What are the conditions for its appearing? Rubin's analyses of the figure-ground organization can be used to address the first question. A figure is defined by its having a contour that separates it from the ground. Figure and ground have different phenomenological properties; a list of cues can be given for predicting which area in one's visual field will appear as figure and which as ground. However, Rubin's analyses do not tell us how a visual unit can emerge in one's field of regard. How is a figure constituted? It may be tempting to account for the appearing of a figure by calling on Gestalt principles of grouping, that is, those laws (proximity, similarity, continuity, etc.) used to describe the formation of wholes in our perceptual field. However, principles of grouping presuppose the appearing of a figure. This can be shown from a logical and phenomenological point of view. A more promising path is investigating the phenomenological conditions for the formation of cohesive visual units. I propose that the phenomena of fusion and contrast described by Husserl in his analysis of passive syntheses capture these conditions. Of the four types of fusion identified by Husserl fusion at-closeproximity turns out to be the simplest instance of visual unit – as simple as a black dot on a white surface. The phenomena of fusion and contrast ground the appearing of all visual units.

Christian Vagnoni
University of Bologna

The passive genesis of phenomenal reality. A cross-disciplinary approach to the study of perception between Husserl's phenomenology and Gestalt theory

In the years between 1920 and 1926 Husserl dedicated three university courses to the analysis of the passive structuring of experience, therefore to those syntheses between the contents of perception that are constituted before spontaneity and any categorical operation of the subject. The fundamental idea that emerges from the "Lessons on passive synthesis" (*Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*) is that of the presence of an internal normativity to the contents of experience which is not actively imposed on the latter by the subject but which shines through *a priori* and in a completely passive way from those same contents. The forms found on the level of thought and judgment can already be found – precategorially – on the ground of empirical experience. These therefore need nothing but getting 'explicited', going back genetically from those pre-categorial processes of passive 'constitution' of the perceptive sphere to the higher cognitive-categorical operations that are typically found in discursive and scientific thought (categorization, interpretation, production of inferences, predication ecc.). In other words, for Husserl, there is a 'logic of experience', transcendental and trans-subjective, which would act as a starting point for the autonomous structuring of the subject's cognitive processes and therefore, in a broad sense, of his experience of the world. In the present intervention I therefore propose to briefly retrace some of the main theoretical points of these husserlian courses with the aim of showing, in particular, how the notion of 'passive genesis' of experience, as it emerges from these Lessons, is essentially compatible with the Gestalt one of «perceptual organization». Similarly to

what Husserl claimed, for Gestalt psychologists perception is configured as a mechanism of "dynamic self-distribution" of segmentation processes of the perceptual field that obey precise "factors" or "laws" ("Gestalt laws"). These laws are, such as I will try to demonstrate, *a priori* and immanent to the very domain of perceptual experience.

Elisabetta Onori
University of Florence

The Ego, the world, and others

Through the analysis of some chapters of Wolfgang Köhler's *Gestalt Psychology*, in my talk I will try to approach the topic of perception from a dual point of view: that of a self that observes external reality and that of a self-observing an extraneous individual and its behavior. The one proposed by Köhler is a path that, starting from a reinterpretation of terms such as "reality", "experience", and "subjectivity", comes to confront the deeper meaning of concepts such as "behavior" and "social behavior". These topics will then be used to answer an underlying question, "what does experience look like to us?" The exposition will attempt to account for Köhler's theoretical and methodological approach in analysing the topics addressed. In this framework, the chapters of Gestalt Psychology to which particular attention will be devoted will be the first (A Discussion of Behaviorism), the Third (A Criticism of Introspection), the Fifth (Sensory Organization), and the Seventh (Behavior).

Riccardo Manzotti
IULM University, Milan

Beyond phenomenology: The mind-object identity (MOI)

This presentation introduces the Mind-Object Identity (MOI) theory, a groundbreaking approach to consciousness that integrates phenomenological insights with contemporary philosophy of mind. Traditional models of consciousness often position the mind as an internal construct, isolated within the neural mechanisms of the brain. MOI challenges this paradigm by proposing that conscious experience is not confined to the brain but it is identical to the external objects and events our body interacts with.

MOI posits that the mind and its contents are identical to the physical objects and processes in the environment, getting rid of an intentional or phenomenal level. The key notion is that of relative existence which aligns with phenomenological perspectives that emphasize the direct, lived experience of being-in-the-world. By rejecting representationalism and antireductionist phenomenology, MOI argues that our perceptual experiences are not mediated by internal models but are the way in which the relative existence of the physical world unfolds.

Here I will outline the implications of MOI for understanding perception, intentionality, and various cases of allegedly autonomous phenomenal characters – such as illusions, hallucinations and dreams – in terms of identity with external physical objects. Moreover, I will discuss how MOI resonates with phenomenological notions of intentionality and the embodied mind, offering a fresh perspective on the unity of experience.

By bridging phenomenology and contemporary philosophy of mind, MOI provides a compelling framework for rethinking the nature of consciousness, emphasizing the identity between mind and world, and challenging the entrenched dichotomies of internal versus external, subjective versus objective.

Maria Sinatra
University of Bari / Institute of Design, Matera

The play of *Prägnanz* dynamics in memory traces: Friedrich Wulf's interpretation

A century ago, Gestalt psychologists postulated the law of *Prägnanz.* Although commonly referred to the "goodness" of a perceptual organization, the concept was understood in different ways, such as when linked with memory or, more specifically, with "memory traces". In that case Kurt Koffka used the term *engram* proposed by the evolutionary biologist Richard W. Semon.

The current research focuses on one of Koffka's assistant in Gießen, Friedrich Wulf, whose research is still very little known, despite some of his concepts, like *leveling* and *sharpening* (in German *Nivellierung* and *Präzisierung*, respectively) have been considered as influential on Arnheim's perspective on perception, as underlined by I. Verstegen. Indeed, Wulf attempted to prove the applicability of the law of *Prägnanz* to memory even before Max Wertheimer's work. His various experiments carried out in 1922 showed how the memory trace tended to organize spontaneously with the passage of time in the direction of the simplest, singular forms. Consequently, the engram became more *prägnant*, that is, stronger rather than weaker. This could not simply explained with the laws of association, attention or sensation of empirists: hence, the controversy against the unidirectional, linear-minded perspective held by Georg Elias Müller, who inherited the topic from Hermann Ebbinghaus. Moreover, Wulf observed that participants often modified the shown figure to bring it closer to a known structure – a process that he defined normalization. To this purpose, he divided the subjects into global and analytical, as Vittorio Benussi had done fifteen years before. Findings showed that both types tended to improve the figures: cognitive styles only determined how this tendency was expressed.

In this research, particular attention will be given to the controversy Wulf-Müller and to Benussi and Wulf's conceptualization of cognitive styles.

Lucia Monacis
University of Foggia

About the neglected Liebmann effect

In 1923, the Gestaltists Adhémar Gelb and Ragnar Granit, using a method of adjustment for a small colored light, found lower thresholds for the target when presented on the ground region of an image than on an adjacent figural region. In the same year, Kurt Koffka provided the experimental proof that achromatic (black-white) color contrast does not depend on the absolute amount of available light, but on the "stimulus gradients", as he defined them. In 1927, Susanne Liebmann carried out experiments on this issue by relating chromatic colors (for example, a red rectangle on a green surround) with the principles of organisation, specifically with Edgar Rubin's figure-ground phenomenon, as well as with luminance.

The current research focuses on the pioneering Gestalt work of Liebmann on the nature of perception in the *critical zone*, that is, the region near equal luminance, where all appeared soft, jellylike, colloidal, "ghostly", as she wrote, giving rise to the so-called *Liebmann effect*. In doing that, she used stimulus shapes cut out of colored papers and lights controlled by filters and rheostats to obtain equiluminance. On the basis of equiluminance Liebmann set up a remarkable series of experimental settings configured for each subject in order to review the various explanations given to some geometrical illusions, such as the Münsterberg and Zöllner figures, by Vittorio Benussi and Wilhelmine von Liel, Wanda von Lempicka, Alfred Lehmann, etc. Findings revealed that color alone was not a field force as powerful as lighting, today known as luminance.

In 1935 Koffka took up the Liebmann effect by applying it to those he defined hard and soft colors. Thus, the relevance of Liebmann's Gestalt assumptions was demonstrated.

Symposium
What is needed for a proper "science of art"?

Tellus Building (U4), Room U4-1 – Chair Daniele Zavagno – 09:00-12:00

Organized by Daniele Zavagno[1] and Thiago Costa[2]
[1]University of Milano-Bicocca / [2]University of Verona

In his book *L'Osteria dei dadi truccati* (Loaded Dice Tavern), Massironi (2000) claims that all psychologist interested in art tend to study it from the theoretical perspective that characterizes their work and beliefs. This, of course, is quite normal. The question, however, is whether such a pulverized approach is fruitful in addressing the complexity of Art as a phenomenon.

From another perspective, Zeki, the father of neuroaesthetics, attempted to address relevant questions, such as the very nature of art and why it is so significant to us. According to Zeki, the only way to properly address those important issues is through a neuroscientific approach. However, considering what we know and still don't know about how the brain processes art, are we sure to be on the path to find the answers we are seeking?

There is of course a third path, experimental aesthetics, the goal of which is to study the aesthetic experience. The question one might want to ask is whether all aesthetic experiences are related to art, or even whether the enjoyment of an artwork is always reducible to an aesthetic experience (could there be more than mere preferences and the appraisal of beauty, harmony, etc.?). Finally, would it make sense to combine all possible approaches? Would this allow to achieve a proper *science of art*? Is this even feasible from an epistemological perspective?

The goal of this workshop is to shine a little light upon these topics and to prepare the basis for future meetings, the topics of which would revolve around the feasibility of a science of art and, eventually, its goals, perspectives and methods.

Thiago Costa[1] – Daniele Zavagno[2]
[1]University of Verona / [2]University of Milano-Bicocca

Artists as scientists: A critique of a popular metaphor

We argue that beyond the banal overlaps between Art and Science – and once a systematic assessment of their ontologies is done – it is not straightforward to find meaningful and relevant commonalities between the two fields. What is then the place of such metaphors in today's Psychology? In the 21st century, the maturation of both Psychology and Art as separate domains has created a complexity incompatible with the blurred borders of the Renaissance years. Modern art and its contemporary ripples challenge the protagonism of concepts like "beautiful", "pleasant" or "skillful" while remaining ever more stable conceptually and as a school of thought in academia. In parallel, the accumulation of knowledge from different branches of Psychology has matured to the point where physiology and phenomenology start to be integrated in increasingly elucidating ways. But this scenario does come with many challenges and traps, some of them as old as science itself (e.g., reductionism). We recapitulate some of these tensions, identify a few fallacies and make a point on why such exercise is relevant for the maturing of the fields of Neuroaesthetics, Experimental aesthetics and Psychology of Art. Lastly, we give a hint of advice on how to build a safer road forward.

Alessandro Soranzo
University of Calabria

Mona Lisa's smile: A phenomenological interpretation based on perceptual organization principles

This talk explores the relationship between neurophysiology and phenomenology in the context of ambiguous expressions. It first discusses the limitations of a single-disciplinary approach and

cautions against relying only on physiological explanations for perceptions. A sole reliance on physiological explanations can lead to stimulus and experience errors, as well as to the development of an unfounded mind-body dualism. Then it advances a novel interpretation of Mona Lisa's ambiguous expression grounded in the psychological theory of perceptual organisation. By means of carefully crafted artwork and systematic manipulations of Mona Lisa reproductions, it is shown how alterations in the perceptual relationships of part of the portrait yield enchanting shifts in perceived expression, explaining why Mona Lisa's appearance changes and under which conditions these changes occur.

Ian Verstegen
University of Pennsylvania

Why is so much neuroaesthetics bad? The need for a reificatory function

Neuroscientific approaches to aesthetics have been almost uniformly disappointing. They are either shallow, unconvincing, or merely addenda to our knowledge of traditional psychology. Because the nature of the endeavor is to go beyond phenomenology, their weakness is evidenced in their tacit epistemology. They either presume some naïve realism with neural "tuning" or else a kind of parallelism where the nature of interaction is never explained. Most damningly such approaches can never explain the profundity of art. Just as a neuroscience requires a reification function, where holistic brain processes can genetically cause our perceptions, so too in neuroaesthetics we need a reification function. The benefit for art is that, as Arnheim outlined already in 1949, percept formation already explains expression and symbolism. Using examples, I will show how a neuroaesthetics has to go "all in" if it wishes to provide important insights into art.

Stefano Mastandrea
Roma Tre University

Empirical aesthetics and its contribution to understand the aesthetic experience

Starting from Massironi's challenge (2000) about the pulverised approach to the study of art, the field of study and research currently known as Empirical Aesthetics, far from finding the magic formula of aesthetic experience, can facilitate the dialogue among the contribution of various disciplines involved, in particular psychology and cognitive neuroscience. It is necessary to consider different perspectives with the common goal of advancing hypotheses, providing interpretations, constructing models, and formulating theories on all the different components at play, artist-artwork-observer. Chatterjee and Vartanian (2014) stated that, in general, the numerous experiments conducted in the field of cognitive neuroscience of art have focused on the properties and interactions of three fundamental systems which the authors define the "aesthetic triad": this triad consists of the sensorimotor system (sensation, perception, motor component), the system responsible for emotional evaluation (pleasure, emotions, reward), and the system related to the knowledge and attribution of meaning to the artwork (experience, context, culture). The issues regarding the understanding and appreciation of artworks derives from how the observer acquires, represents, and evaluates the information rooted in the formal and compositional structures of the artwork. Most of the studies that deal with these topics are conducted in laboratories, but if we want to better understand the aesthetic experience it is necessary to consider and conduct research and studies also in contexts where the aesthetic experience can take place, the museums.

Workshop
Gestalt theory as the basis of a psychotherapy theory

Bios Building (U3), Room U3-5 – Chair Thomas Fuchs – 09:00-12:00

Organized by Thomas Fuchs
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy (GTP) is an experience-orientated, depth-psychological, holistic and system-theoretical approach that is derived from the Gestalt psychology of the Berlin School and is based on a humanistic perspective. The term Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy refers to the scientific foundation of the method as psychotherapy based on Gestalt theory, but in no way implies a one-sided theoretical orientation of the method or therapy training. The practice-oriented relationship to theory in the method and training can perhaps best be characterised by Kurt Lewin's famous saying: 'Nothing is as practical as a good theory.' Despite the similarity in name and some further similarities, Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy is not a variation of Gestalt therapy, but an independent direction within the spectrum of psychotherapeutic schools.

The aim of the workshop is therefore to convey the special nature of GTP as a method based on Gestalt theory principles and thus to enable GTP to be categorised within the field of psychotherapy.

Doris Beneder
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

The development of Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy and its position within the psychotherapy landscape

As in many other European countries, a new psychotherapy law based on the Bologna architecture has been passed in Austria and will come into force in January 2025 and specific parts of education in October 2026. After a polyvalent bachelor's degree (psychology and other health professions, as well as other human science studies), a psychotherapy-specific master's degree can be completed. Finally, postgraduate training in the methods recognized by the Federal Ministry of Health is followed by extensive practical training under supervision. The 23 methods approved in Austria have each been assigned to a psychotherapeutic orientation (cluster). Comparable to Italy, these are the psychodynamic-depth psychological cluster, behavioral therapies, systemic therapy and humanistic therapy. Gestalt theoretical psychotherapy (GTP) will in future be in the humanistic therapies cluster. Whether the GTP will also cooperate with a university is still being discussed. In this lecture, I will also discuss the significance of the GTA for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy in Austria and trace the development of Gestalt Theory Psychotherapy. Finally, the most important differences to Gestalt therapy, as it is also represented in Italy, will be discussed.

Katharina Sternek
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

Reality of human beings. Critical realism as the epistemological foundation of Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

This lecture deals with the question of human reality, in particular the reality of clients consulting psychotherapy. Although this question is unfortunately rarely dealt with explicitly in psychotherapy and may seem theoretical at first glance, it is of great importance for the psychotherapeutic work. If

we as psychotherapists want to do justice to the reality of our clients' lives and experiences, we have to deal with the question of the preconditions, possibilities and limits of our knowledge of reality.

The presentation of critical realism, the epistemological position of Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy, intends to illustrate how the significance of epistemological concepts can be understood in terms of understanding the therapeutic relationship, the therapeutic process and practical implications. In addition, the contribution also aims to show that psychotherapeutic approaches based on the critical realistic perspective are particularly well suited to meet the demands for respectful recognition of the "subjective" reality of our clients.

Thomas Fuchs
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

Gestalt theory and sexuality

From the perspective of Gestalt theory, sexuality can only be understood if it is embedded in a person's overall life situation. This article attempts to approach the topic from the following selected aspects:

- Sex and relationships/attachment
  How does sexuality affect relationships and vice versa: What kind of relationship affects sexuality and how?
- Biology vs. psychology
  It makes a (theoretical and practical) difference from which epistemological perspective sexuality is viewed. A physiological perspective emphasises what is practically functional, while a more phenomenological view (such as Gestalt theory) embeds sexual experience and behaviour in the broader framework of the entire psychic field.
- The body in sex
  The experienced body (body ego) is distinguished from the physical or anatomical body. The relationship between ego and body plays a particularly important role in sexual behaviour and experience.
- State of consciousness and sex
  Sex generally requires a certain "state of mind". This is defined in more detail using the terms "reference system", "centring", "atmospheric", and "synchronisation".

In the therapeutic context, the topic of "sexuality" takes up different amounts of space depending on the problem. Its special status results not least from the assumption that it is associated with shame – both for patients and therapists.

Bernadette Lindorfer
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

What drives people? Personality theory in Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

What drives people, what determines their behavior and experience, as well as the direction of their life's movement, is a central question for psychotherapy. With regard to the dynamics of human experience and behaviour, Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy is primarily based on Kurt Lewin's dynamic field theory of personality. In GTP, these Lewinian concepts are applied through a re-interpretation of Lewin's theory on basis of critical realism. Human experience and behaviour are understood as functions of both the person and the environment (including other individuals therein) in a psychic field (life space) which encompasses both of these mutually dependent factors. Therefore, the anthropological model of this approach is not monopersonal but inherently relational. It does not focus solely on the 'inner components' of a person, but rather on the interplay between the individual and their environment, which influences both experience and behaviour. After a brief introduction to

the basic concepts, this lecture will specifically address Lewin's concept of tension-systems and its relevance in psychotherapy.

Angelika Boehm
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

The concept of the Dialogic Triad and other practical topics in Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

The concept of the dialogic triad, which was founded by Gerhard Stemberger in the field of Gestalt Theoretical psychotherapy, addresses the interrelationships between the way people talk to themselves "inside", the way they conduct their dialogues and relationships "outside" and, finally, the way they interact with their therapist. In essence, it is assumed that the development and promotion of constructive and objective "inner" dialogues contribute to a differentiated reflection and that, as a result, people learn to increasingly accept themselves, which leads to them being able to shape their interpersonal relationships more satisfactorily.

The relationship between therapist and client is generally accorded high priority in Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy. Beginning with concepts of the therapeutic attitude, some important topics relevant to practice are discussed in order to provide an insight into the practice of Gestalt psychotherapy, which is an integrative approach based consistently on the Gestalt theory of the Berlin School.

Keynote lecture

Tellus Building (U4), Aula Sironi, Room U4-8 – 12:00

Vincenzo Fano
University of Urbino

Köhler's *physische Gestalten* 100 years after

In this neglected book, which appeared in 1919, Köhler proposed: I. There are not only mental Gestalten, but also physical ones; II. In our sensory apparatuses, there are physiological Gestalten that parallel mental Gestalten; III. The just mentioned physiological Gestalten are physical Gestalten. In a sense, all these three theses are wrong. The proposed examples of electrical field and entropy are not physical Gestalten. Even realist scholars do not believe in the reality of electrical potential and entropy. Moreover, the best models of our sensory organs are atomistic since they are based on the notion of information. Furthermore, each receptor takes autonomously information from the environment. Only in the transmission of this information are there processes of connection and aggregation of visual information.

Moreover, Köhler's notion of Gestalt is too rough. Contemporary formal methods allow us to distinguish different kinds of Gestalten. In particular, nonextensional wholes, parts depending on the whole, and causal wholes.

Despite these defects of the volume, we should say that quantum mechanics introduced real physical Gestalten through the discovery of entanglement. Therefore, at the end of the day, Köhler is right. Although this Gestalten probably are irrelevant for perception, Köhler is also right that each kind of part in science is partially an abstraction. Thus, psychophysiological processes at the basis of perception are indeed Gestalten.

We conclude that Köhler's book, after 100 years, is still a fruitful reading.

Thursday afternoon, September 26

Talks

Phenomenologies

Tellus Building (U4), Aula Sironi, Room U4-8 – Chair Fiorenza Toccafondi – 14:30–17:50

Alessandro Volpone
University of Urbino

Gestalt psychology's contribution to experimental epistemology: The key role of mimicry in nature

'Experimental philosophy' is the use of experimental methods of the cognitive sciences to shed light on debates especially in the field of epistemology and the study of knowledge. Arguably, Gestalt theory can also make essential contributions, both because of the value (in itself) of the research conducted over time, and because of the interesting implications that emerge when its psychological findings intersect with evolutionary biology, ethology, neuroscience, etc. From this point of view, mimicry in nature is fundamental, since the astonishing outcomes and optical illusions associated with it are not attributable to (only) selection by man as a natural species, but to independent and very different living beings. It represents the most striking case of evolutionary convergence that confirms most, if not all, of the Gestalt laws of perception. This leads to at least a couple of particularly significant general deductions. Firstly, the Gestalt laws of perception, according to different modes and degrees, are universally shared by all sentient organisms endowed, in the words of Konrad Lorenz, with 'a central nervous process in which many single elementary excitations converge into one common effect'. Secondly, it is not possible to establish whether this proves any correspondence theory of truth, but it can certainly be argued that perception – conceived as an integrated whole of individual sensory excitations and central processing – describes the world both when it probably appears as it is and, paradoxically, when it produces nothing more than an illusion. In both cases, perception is always an adaptation by natural selection.

Ulf Haßler
Fraunhofer Institute for Integrated Circuits IIS, Fürth

Empiric visual microintrospection

The origin of subjective percepts is still not fully explained. Existing instrumentation does not operate at sufficient resolution to observe in situ microscopic processes within the brain. We propose a specific phenomenological approach based on a personal experience. We like to discuss a phenomenon of visual perception, similar to von Helmholtz' investigations. A spot of light at the eye's resolution limit is observed via visual introspection under ametropic, especially myopic conditions. The discrepancy to discuss lies in the observation that rather than a respectively low-pass filtered version of the spot, a surprisingly rich and complex structure is perceived. Due to several reasons, the subjective percept cannot be a very exact copy of the light field image impinging on the retina. It therefore does not make sense to search the underlying effects within the optical tract, but rather within the psychophysical domain of the visual cortex. As the gestalt perceived under those conditions does barely contain any geometrical information from objects of the outside physical world, we postulate that the gestalt carries morphological information about its creating process at a very high resolution. Taking the original Gestalt ideas of Köhler interpreting perception as electromagnetic

fields, it is probable that the perceived gestalts could deliver insights about how some kind of unit perception comes into existence. We present our phenomenologically inspired experiment consisting of setup, geometric and radiometric considerations, the first-person percepts, our main hypothesis as well as a draft procedure for objectifying the subjective percepts.

Carola Salvi
John Cabot University of Rome

Gestalt's perspective on insight:
A recap based on recent behavioral and neuroscientific evidence

The Gestalt psychologists' theory of insight problem-solving was based on a direct parallelism between perceptual experience and higher-order forms of cognition (e.g., problem-solving). Similarly, albeit not exclusively, to the sudden recognition of bistable figures, these psychologists contended that problem-solving involves a restructuring of one's initial representation of the problem's elements, leading to a sudden leap of understanding phenomenologically indexed by the "Aha!" feeling. Over the last century, different scholars have discussed the validity of the Gestalt psychologists' perspective, foremost using the behavioral measures available at the time. However, in the last two decades, scientists have gained a deeper understanding of insight problem-solving due to the advancements in cognitive neuroscience. This talk will provide a retrospective reading of Gestalt theory based on the knowledge accrued by adopting novel paradigms of research and investigating their neurophysiological correlates. Among several key points that the Gestalt psychologists underscored, the talk will focus specifically on the role of the visual system in marking a discrete switch of knowledge into awareness, as well as the perceptual experience and holistic standpoints.

Stefano Uccelli[1] – Nicola Bruno[2]
[1]University of Milano-Bicocca / [2]University of Parma

The effect of the Uznadze illusion on perception and action
depends on factors that affect multisensory processing

Behavioural perception-action dissociations are widely used to test the functional split between the ventral and dorsal visual streams in the human brain. Despite more than 30 years of research, however, the role of multisensory processes in perceptual and motor responses has been underestimated. Here, we compared perceptual (manual matching) and motor (grasping) responses by exposing participants to the Uznadze size-contrast illusion, in which presenting a larger (or smaller) inducing stimulus causes a successive medium test stimulus to appear smaller (or larger). To manipulate multisensory information, we presented the inducing stimuli in vision or haptics and either in the same or a different spatial position than the test. Combining such factors revealed a complex pattern of results: perceptual responses can be affected by the illusion or remain unaffected, whereas motor responses can be affected by the illusion, remain unaffected, or, surprisingly, even reveal a reverse effect of the Uznadze illusion. Thus, results indicate that similar or dissociable illusory effects on perception and action depend on factors that are known to favor or hinder multisensory integration, which in turn are also likely to affect the internal model of the hand during sensorimotor processes. These findings are relevant to attempts to resolve a long-standing debate in cognitive neuroscience concerning the interpretation of the functional split in the human high-level vision.

Ivana Bianchi[1] – Roberto Burro[2] – Ian Verstegen[3] –
Erika Branchini[2] – Marco Bertamini[4]
[1]University of Macerata / [2]University of Verona / [3]University of Pennsylvania /
[4]University of Padua

On the relationship between thinking in opposites and art appreciation

Modern and contemporary art are not easy for the average observer. We investigated whether non experts' aesthetic appreciation of modern and contemporary artworks could be modified by exposing them to two different kinds of intervention. The first, which was more traditional, provided additional information relating to art history (HI). Another more innovative intervention invited the participants to observe the creative elements in the artworks by "thinking in terms of opposites" with respect to standard, more traditional ideas (CI). We also added a third condition with no additional information (NI).

279 Italian adults completed an online questionnaire. This started with 35 items which measured curiosity, openness, familiarity and interest with regard to art. 15 artworks were then presented according to either the CI, HI or NI conditions followed by 6 questions to assess the participant's appreciation of and/or interest in the artworks. Four final questions evaluated the participant's overall experience.

The CI and HI interventions both increased the degree of interest expressed by the participants and were also associated with greater feelings of overall enrichment ("I now feel more capable of appreciating this kind of artwork"). There was also less boredom as compared to the NI condition. Interestingly, the participants' personality traits had a moderating effect on their responses in the HI and NI conditions, but not in CI. Thus, observing the artworks from a cognitive perspective by thinking in terms of opposites generally produced more consistently positive effects.

Erika Branchini[1] – Ivana Bianchi[2] – Roberto Burro[1]
[1]University of Verona / [2]University of Macerata

Training people to think in opposites facilitates the falsification process in Wason's rule discovery task

Opposition is implied in various types of reasoning processes, probably more than we imagine (for a review see Branchini et al. 2021; Byrne 2016, 2018).

In the first part of the presentation, we will briefly revise evidence from studies testing the hypothesis that "thinking in opposites" might represent a simple and effective prompt to overcome fixedness in visuo-spatial insight problem solving (Bianchi et al., 2020; Branchini et al 2015).

In the second part of the presentation, we focus on two studies conducted with Italian adult participants which investigated the effects of this prompt on Wason's rule discovery task (Branchini et al., 2023: Branchini et al., submitted).

The results showed a significant improvement in performance under the prompt to think in opposites when compared to two control conditions, both in terms of the proportion of participants who discovered the correct rule and how quickly it was discovered. These findings are discussed in relation to previous literature showing improvements in performance that were prompted by strategies involving "contrast" as a critical factor.

Zsuzsanna Schnell[1] *– Francesca Ervas*[2] *– Róbert* Járai[1]
[1]*University of Pécs /* [2]*University of Cagliari*

Context awareness in meaning construction.
An experimental study in pragmatic interpretation

Background. Our experimental pragmatic study investigates preschoolers' social cognitive skills, and in view of these, their ability to decipher opaque constructions (metaphor, irony, verbal vs non-verbal humor). Different contexts offer different cues for interpretation. We test our hypothesis whether context *targeting* mental states significantly improves interpretation of non-compositional meaning and examine the role of '*modality as context*' in the verbal (linguistic) vs. visual (nonverbal) domain in our non-verbal humor condition. Effects of modality-given context are also investigated using Spearman's correlations, Mann-Whitney and ANOVA in SPSS.

Purpose. We propose a model of context-sensitive interpretation and claim that usability of context awareness is a tool for identifying optimal relevance (Sperber-Wilson 1986, Giora 2001) very early on. We examine properties that describe parameters of the context of interpretation itself: meta-context. Our model examines the effect of optimal relevance and thus mental-state specific context on interpretation (Sperber-Wilson 1986).

Results. Mental state specific context significantly improves comprehension of pragmatic utterances to an extent that it can serve as a compensatory strategy. Effect of context was more pronounced in the inter-contextual (visual vs verbal context) comparison than in an intra-contextual (verbal: contextualized vs decontextualized) dimensions.

Conclusion. Our findings confirm results in developmental research that surface cues help in the recognition of communicative intent (Csibra 2010) and contribute to the successful resolution of the intended meaning at hand (Schnell 2014, 2019, 2022). Properties describing the type- and use of context, the cognitive aspects of context management thus affect pragmatic development that can contribute to AI modeling of pragmatic interpretation as well.

Ines Langemeyer
Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

Field-theory applied to the experiences of martial arts

The approaches of Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) and Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) used the concept of the *field* to explain (among others) the affectual and motivational modulations. They both addressed the here-and-now of an experienced situation and thus explained the changes as to how and why they occurred (Langemeyer 2023). The learning process to become more conscious of the real causes of one's actions can be accessed as a type of experience which starts from the hypothesis that our ego is *not* the ultimate cause and that the ego maybe does not even existent. Egoless states are part of the Asian arts and practices such as Yoga or Butoh martial arts or the Buddhist religion, and they closely relate to the concept of mindfulness.

The experiences of learning martial arts are insightful and shall be discussed in the paper presented. The paper revolves around the following questions: Can we see the interaction between two bodies in martial arts as an egoless event and thus as a field of forces – such as aversion or attraction? What events in a fight however exceed the notion of the field? Is this analogy helpful to transfer the theoretical principles of field to pedagogical and psychological practice?

Workshop
Communication between the senses: Language, space, music, intersensoriality, creativity

Tellus Building (U4), Room U4-1 – Chair Walter Coppola – 14:30-17:30

Organized by Walter Coppola
University of Trieste

This workshop has as its subject some aspects concerning the modes of communication, analyzed from the point of view of Gestalt Theory, highlighting its theoretical and methodological criteria and its historical-scientific course.

Language certainly represents one of the most prominent communicative forms. The different articulations originating in the various Gestaltist schools (Berlin, Graz, Vienna) will be examined, with obvious and important influences on the functionalist structuralism of the Prague Language Circle.

We will then talk about communication between the senses, hence synesthesia; a concept that has affected various fields, from the artistic to the philosophical, from the scientific to the extra-scientific, from the phenomenological to the musical. In the Gestaltist debate, the unity of the senses and the inter-modal aspects of experience have been important and stimulating topics of discussion.

Finally, we will deal with an area that plays a fundamental role in communication, and that is music. Introduced always by a careful historical reconstruction, it will be illustrated by privileging certain peculiar characteristics such as timbre and consonance, then pushing on to the more innovative aspects of a certain contemporary musical repertoire.

Serena Cattaruzza[1] – Savina Raynaud[2]
[1]University of Trieste / [2]Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan

Gestalt psychology and language, a historical overview

The value of Gestalt psychology is revealed through a new interpretation of reality, hinging on minute observations and precise experimental research. It arose in the early 20th century as a reaction to earlier psychology based on a point-by-point analysis of the elements of consciousness and behavior.

Prominent among the many schools, that of Graz (Von Ehrenfels, Meinong, Witasek, Benussi), Berlin (Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka, Lewin) and Vienna (Bühler, Brunswick, Kardos, Popper, Lorenz). Von Ehrenfels' long teaching career in Prague (1896-1929), however, leaves important traces in the functionalist structuralism of the Prague Linguistic Circle. The notion of form emerges as an organized and organic unit in the field of perception, as a problem structure in the field of thought (see Marty and the constructive internal linguistic form; Mathesius and the ongoing articulation of utterance) and as an articulated system in the linguistic domain (see the correspondence of Bühler with Brøndal).

Fiorenza Toccafondi
University of Florence

Intersensoriality and art

The mid-1920s and early 1930s witnessed in Germany what has been described as a veritable Synästhesie-Euphorie. What was being debated was the question of the inter-modal (and not only uni-sensorial) aspects of experience, the meaning to be accorded to synaesthetic metaphors deposited in ordinary language, and Vassily Kandinsky's statements when he referred to seeing colours on the palette as 'raindrops, tall, round, coquettish'. My talk will focus on the contributions made on these issues by Erich von Hornbostel, Helmuth Plessner, Ludwig Klages, Wolfgang Köhler, Heinz Werner, Kurt Goldstein and Wolfgang Metzger.

Sebastian Klotz
Humboldt University, Berlin

Musical timbre, fusion, and Gestalt – three important auditory paradigms in early 20th century philosophy and psychology

The topic of timbre seems an unlikely candidate to be discussed in the context of Gestalt theory. It targets the physical features of acoustic phenomena such as vocal and musical sounds and their auditory perception. It is usually studied within organology and empirical and systematic musicology. And yet timbre research, when undertaken from a reflexive conceptual angle aiming at the perception of timbral qualities, shares basis assumptions and challenges with the concept of Gestalt.

Just like in the Gestalt debate, timbre research raises the issue of non-dualism, of the peculiar logic of perception which does not stand in a causal relation to the physical world. It represents the dawn of field theory and of non-linear energy distributions (formants). Through its proximity to holism, some wings of timbre research address foundational questions that affect philosophical worldviews: how is the given organized? Which structural laws are operative in the function that relate to the phenomena?

Timbre research cannot be accommodated in either acoustics, physiology, psychology, or philosophy. It can indeed be placed at the interface of the humanities and the natural sciences - manifest in the unorthodox cross-disciplinary trajectories by protagonists such as Carl Stumpf and in the technical and media arrangements in which timbre was explored.

Nicola Di Stefano
National Research Council, Italy

Consonance and dissonance: A view from the Gestalt

This presentation aims to provide an overview of the Gestalt-related sources and concepts relevant to understanding musical consonance and dissonance (C/D). I will begin by discussing key concepts such as “beating” (Helmholtz, 1954) and “perceptual fusion” (Stumpf, 1890, 1898). Following this, I will explore the concept of perceptual coherence, considering recent research on auditory consonance and the ‘processing fluency’ theory (Reber et al., 2004). I will conclude by suggesting that the pleasantness of consonances may represent a subjective correlate of certain Gestalt laws of perception, such as perceptual coherence and processing fluency, and might ultimately relate to the general concept of Prägnanz (Luccio, 1986; Arnheim, 1987).

Riccardo Wanke
University of Coimbra

From sound patterns to mental images: The shape-paradigm of the perceptual experience of sound-based music

The paper explores the perceptual potential of certain genres of experimental music, commonly labelled “sound-based music”. Works by artists like James Tenney, Giacinto Scelsi or György Ligeti are centred on intrinsic sonic features and favour a phenomenological engagement. Sonic patterns of sound-based music are mostly associated with visual and tactile sensory qualities and can evoke mental representations as shapes in motion. Drawing onmorphodynamic theory, the paper explores the relationship between these sound patterns and evoked mental images, proposing that image schemas, embodying Gestalt and kinaesthetic principles, are central to this relationship. This music activates sensorimotor structures, enabling a rich array of cross-modal responsive schemes.

Symposium
Mind, Reality … and Perception in the middle: The present role of Gestalt principles in understanding psychology and visual design. In memory of Prof. G. B. Vicario and his legacy

Bios Building (U3), Room U3-5 – Chair Rossana Actis-Grosso – 14:30-17:30

Organized by Rossana Actis-Grosso
University of Milano-Bicocca

Rossana Actis-Grosso
University of Milano-Bicocca

"In Gestalt Psychology all scientists are writing the same big book": Gestalt principles and their role in understanding the human mind

Since Wertheimer's classical paper on organization of perceptual forms (1923), the so called "laws of Gestalt" were embraced as fundamental principles in understanding how human perception works. However, those principles are often misunderstood. Several web sites are dedicated to the explanation of these principles, showing not only a fundamental misconception of the principles themselves, but also a sort of "naive thinking" on perception and, more importantly, on Gestalt Theory. The same misconception could be found on the majority of textbooks of General Psychology. Starting from a paper published by Vicario in 1998, and on the answer given by Luchins (a scholar of Wertheimer himself) in the same year, I will try to deepen the reasons of this misconception, which is rooted in the sterile opposition between perception as stimulus driven and perception as a top-down interpretation of reality.

Steven Lehar
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications

Harmonic Gestalt: Sound from structure, structure from sound

In 1931 Christian von Ehrenfels wrote "Über Gestaltqualitäten" in which he introduced the concept of the "Gestalt", a perceptual whole which is more than the mere sum of its component parts. Ehrenfels used the example of the perception of musical melody which retains its essential character as the melody is transposed to different keys, or played at different tempos. The founders of Gestalt theory, Koffka, Köhler, and Wertheimer, identified similar Gestalts in visual perception, for example the recognition of simple shapes independent of their particular orientation, translation, or scale, or patterns of grouping between perceptual elements in visual stimuli seen as a global whole.

I propose that these Gestalt phenomena are more than just an indication that the perception of sound and of spatial structure operate on similar underlying principles, but indeed there is something very special about the nature of sound itself that relates perceived sound to spatial structure, indicating that the perception of spatial structure is represented in the brain by way of harmonic oscillations across the tissue of the brain. In other words, the "pictures" we see in our experience are literally "painted out" by electrochemical oscillations in the brain. The principles of this Harmonic Gestalt are demonstrated by the phenomenon of the Chladni plate where spatial patterns of standing waves across the plate are induced by oscillations across the plate, and also by the way an oscilloscope "paints out" Lissajous figures on the scope based on electrical oscillations.

Daniele Zavagno
University of Milano-Bicocca

Illusion defines reality, and vice versa

Illusion and Reality are entwined concepts: in general, the definition of one automatically outlines the nature of the other. This work addresses their definitions within the frameworks of three major theories in psychology of perception: the Cognitive, the Ecological and the Phenomenological approach. Similarities and differences are sketched out along with the main theoretical tenets of each approach, in particular in relation to visual perception. Demos and arguments will be put forward, showing limitations and deficiencies within the cognitive and ecological definitions of 'illusion', and how these reflect upon the definition of 'reality'. Finally, a proper definition of illusion from a Gestalt-phenomenological standpoint will be advanced, which does not reflect or rely on the definition of 'reality'.

Marco Cremaschi
University of Milano-Bicocca

Why do Gestalt principles influence web design?

In the rapidly evolving field of web design, creating interfaces that are both visually appealing and intuitively navigable is essential. Gestalt principles, rooted in psychological theories of perception, provide a powerful framework for achieving this goal. This presentation explores how these principles – such as similarity, proximity, continuity, and closure – play a crucial role in influencing web design and user experiences. By aligning with the natural tendencies of the human mind to perceive patterns and organise visual information, designers can create websites that not only look good but also function seamlessly, guiding users through content and interactions.

Gerhard Stemberger
Society for Gestalt Theory and its Applications
Austrian Association for Gestalt Theoretical Psychotherapy

Wertheimer on Gestalt laws of seeing and of mental health

Around 100 years ago, Max Wertheimer's famous work "Untersuchungen zur Lehre von der Gestalt II" was published, in which he first presented what has since been widely referred to as the "Gestalt laws" (albeit not always appropriately). It is less well known that at the same time Wertheimer dictated an article on the development and healing of mental disorders to the German psychiatrist Heinrich Schulte. A comparison of the two studies shows that Wertheimer pursued the same far-reaching project in both works, namely, to decipher the "inner structural laws" of Gestalten – in the first work for the area of simple instances of seeing, in the other for the area of community in human life and its role in mental health. This shows that Wertheimer's project of exploring the "structural laws of Gestalt" had more and something different as its goal than the often-simplified understanding of the "Gestalt laws" in textbooks and on the Internet would suggest.

Friday morning, September 28

Workshop
On elucidation

Tellus Building (U4), Aula Sironi, Room U4-8 – Chair Rossana Actis-Grosso and Daniele Zavagno – 09:30-12:30

Organized by Walter Gerbino
University of Trieste

Keynote speakers
Michael Kubovy[1] and Achille Varzi[2]
[1]University of Virginia / [2]Columbia University

We consider *elucidation* to be an activity that we often engage in to point out to another person (be it in the course of a personal interaction or more indirectly) hitherto unnoticed features of an experience, or a class of experiences, resulting in the recipient being *enriched*.

The book-in-progress to be discussed at the workshop contains drafts of the first five chapters (out of a currently planned total of seven). The first four are case-studies in elucidation.

The core of the first chapter is the elucidation of the phenomenon of figure/ground as offered by Rubin by means of his famous vase/face figure. This illustrates the fact that a class of elucidations covers what has been treated as phenomenological observations or demonstrations. But the chapter also contains historical and methodological elucidations that together provide us with a deeper understanding of figure and ground.

The second chapter is concerned with mirrors and their discontents. Our understanding of mirrors is often riddled with misapprehensions, such as a failure to see that the height and width of the outline of our head in the mirror is half the actual dimensions of our head. This chapter illustrates how elucidations can lean on facts, *without themselves being factual* (we return to this in a moment).

The third chapter is about art. It is an elucidation of a pair of frescoes painted in Padua by Mantegna. The elucidation leads the recipient to appreciate the possibility that these works of art constitute an allegory of perspective and an homage to Alberti, the first scholar to codify the rules of perspective.

The fourth chapter shows that an appreciable part of mathematics is elucidatory. We illustrate this claim with striking visual "proofs" of theorems in set theory having to do with infinity, and with strikingly persuasive diagrams that reveal fundamental ideas in topology.

The fifth chapter looks back at all these case studies and shows why elucidations are not explanatory, how they are related to the activity of teaching, why they can be so effective, and how they may even serve to "enrich" the recipient with falsehoods, pseudoscience, and conspiracy theories. Most importantly it argues that elucidations are the means through which most of us acquire many if not most of the notions that we believe we know.

Friday afternoon, September 28

Workshop
Walk-in Art
Psychological Art Exploration of Anselm Kiefer's "I Sette Palazzi Celestiali" in Hangar Pirelli

Hangar Pirelli – 10:30-12:30

Organized by Herbert Fitzek
BSP Business & Law School, Berlin

Close to the conference venue is one of the most exciting examples of modern art. 20 years ago Anselm Kiefer built his monumental installation "Seven Heavenly Palaces" as a permanent exhibition in Hangar Pirelli. The place challenges to experience art as a walk-in installation and to explore psychologically what exactly happens when dealing with a work of art in a time-stretched approximation. The scientific background of our impact analyses is "psychological morphology", which assesses works of art as prime examples of the complex and multi-layered nature of psychological experience in general. In an ongoing research project, we conduct in-depth interviews with visitors to the exhibition, who are given an hour to orientate themselves in the area and gain a personal approach to the work of art. The interviews are analysed using the techniques of "morphological description", which has been developed on the basis of Gestalt psychology and depth psychological experience. Following this kind of approach in our art exploration session, we will provide the opportunity to familiarize with the work of art in a similar way and to discuss our findings based on personal experiences of the participants.

Kanizsa Lecture

Tellus Building (U4), Aula Sironi, Room U4-8 –16:30-18:30

Achille Varzi

Columbia University

On Owning a Border

Posters

Corridoio della Scienza – 17:40-18:30

Marta Maisto – Rossana Actis-Grosso
University of Milano-Bicocca

The impact of spatial placement on valence judgments of images: A comparative analysis between right-handed and left-handed individuals

The Body-Specificity Hypothesis proposes that the space toward the dominant hand is perceived with a positive valence due to the motor fluency associated with that hand. In contrast, the space toward the non-dominant hand is perceived with a negative valence. Since there is no evidence regarding the evaluation of neutral images based on the spatial positioning of stimuli, this study aimed to explore how spatial positioning (center, right, left) affects the valence evaluation of neutral images by 15 right-handed and 15 left-handed individuals. Participants completed a valence evaluation task in two sessions, three weeks apart. In the first session, they rated 36 images presented at the center of the screen on a 9-point Likert scale. In the second session, images originally presented at the center were now positioned on the right and left sides. Right-handed individuals rated left-positioned images more negatively than center ones (p = .007). Left-handed individuals showed no significant difference in valence ratings across positions (p = .85). An interaction effect between handedness and location (p = .02) revealed that left-handers tended to rate left-positioned images more positively compared to right-handers. These results suggest a valence reinforcement effect linked to image location, independent of hand movements, highlighting differences in valence evaluations between right-handed and left-handed individuals based on image positioning.

Federico Paulesu – Matteo De Tommaso – Daniele Zavagno – Rossana Actis-Grosso
University of Milano-Bicocca

Perceptual saliency might override gender stereotypes attribution in gaze-following behaviour paradigms

Other people's gaze conveys a plethora of information, and for this reason it is such a strong and automatic attractor for our attention: the tendency to attend to other people's attention is defined *gaze-following behaviour* (GFB). Although automatic, the GFB can be suppressed due to social categorization processes, at the cost of delayed reaction times. In regards of automatic categorization, a recent study highlighted the role of second-order facial features (e.g. makeup for women and beard for men), in facilitating the activation of gender stereotypes. From these bases we wanted to explore the GFB paradigm together with different second-order features, to study the role of gender stereotypes in joint attention processes. To achieve this, we modified a set of female and male faces that were manipulated by their second-order features (i.e. hair color, hair length, glasses, makeup/beard). Participants were asked to perform a left or right saccade, according to the instructions received, while a to-be-ignored face (woman or man) gazing either left or right appeared at the centre of the screen. Gaze direction could be either congruent or incongruent with the task. Results confirmed the GFB (more errors in the incongruent condition and slower time-tosaccade for correct answer in the incongruent condition) and show a tendency to follow faces with more pronounced second-order features suggesting a prominent role of perceptual saliency overriding gender stereotyping.

Olga Daneyko[1] – Svetlana A. Emelianova[2] – Daniele Zavagno[3]
[1]Sheffield Hallam University / [2]Lomonosov Moscow State University /
[3]University of Milano-Bicocca

Abstract shapes show affective traits

The "Takete/Maluma" phenomenon involves presenting participants with two abstract shapes (one curvy/roundish, the other angular/pointy) and two non-words (one characterised by a 'smooth' sound, the other by a 'sharp' sound). Participants tend to associate the curvy shape with the smooth sounding non-word, and the angular shape with the sharp sounding non-word. Our research expands on such phenomenon by investigating the correspondence between abstract shapes and affective traits. In experiment 1, 122 native Italian speakers were presented with nine abstract shapes and ten non-words: three sharp sounding, three soft sounding, two mixed sounding, and two which sounds may remotely recall the name of geometrical figures. Each shape was presented singularly with two tasks: 1) choose a name for the shape among the list of non-words; 2) select an affective trait that best described the shape among the 10 listed. In Experiment 2, 193 native Russian speakers saw the same visual stimuli; the tasks associated with each shape were three: two were identical to those in exp. 1, another task required to choose a non-word that best describes a shape from a list of non-words which were the Italian affective words transposed into Cyrillic. Results: a) the naming task did not lead to clearcut results in either experiment; b) the assignment of affective traits (task 2 exp. 1; task 3 exp 2) were practically identical in both experiments; c) the assignment of non-words derived from Italian affective words transposed into Cyrillic (task 2 exp. 2) was basically random, not influenced by sound.

Tiziano Agostini[1] – Valter Prpic[2] – Serena Mingolo[1] –
Krzysztof Cipora[3] – Mauro Murgia[1]
[1]University of Trieste / [2]University of Bologna / [3]Loughborough University

Using playing cards as stimuli: The role of order and magnitude in the SNARC effect

The SNARC effect reflect a left-to-right mapping of numbers resembling a mental number line. However, disentangling the roles played by numbers' magnitude and order in the SNARC effect remains a challenge due to their inherent correlation. This study examined the impact of order and magnitude on the SNARC effect using playing cards as stimuli. While most people organize cards in ascending order (AO), a subset of individuals arranges them in descending order (DO). For individuals in the DO category, there is a stable tendency to associate low-magnitude cards (e.g.,2) to the right and high-magnitude cards (e.g.,6) to the left, creating conflicting spatial mappings for cards' order and magnitude. In our first lab experiment, DO participants (N= 31) engaged in a magnitude classification task involving both simple numerals and playing cards as stimuli. A one-sample t-test conducted on mean regression weighs showed that they deviated significantly from zero in the simple-numerals condition, in line with the SNARC effect. However, no difference emerged when classifying cards. To further investigate this null effect, we conducted an online experiment with a larger sample of DO participants (N=59) to replicate Experiment 1 and clarify spatial associations in card classification. Surprisingly, results showed that DO participants consistently exhibited SNARC effects in both number and card classification tasks, suggesting that magnitude played a decisive role, regardless of card order.

Elena Capitani[1] – Ivana Bianchi[1] – Roberto Burro[2]
[1]University of Macerata / [2]University of Verona

What's on your head and what's in your mind?
Personality profiles and the aesthetic and functional profiles of hats

The study investigates the relationship between people's personality and the types of hats they wear. The question is of interest for the psychology of personality and aesthetic preferences, empirical aesthetics, and potentially also for marketing studies.

539 Italian adults completed an on-line questionnaire showing black and white images of 34 iconic types of hats (section 1) and 8 baseball caps (section 2) one at a time. For each hat, they were asked to rate how much they liked it and how likely it was that they would wear it. The rating referred to a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 100. The order of the two sections and the hats in each section was randomized between participants. The Big Five Inventory-2 was used for personality evaluation.

In both sections 1 and 2, significant associations were found between all five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism/negative emotionality) and the preference and willingness to wear ratings. For example, participants who had a high score for Openness reported liking and being willing to wear a particularly wide range of hats. Those who had high scores for Neuroticism (i.e. with greater emotional instability) were willing to wear extravagant hats (such as a fascinator or a turban) but did not rate these as particular favorites in terms of preferences.