

## **The problem of images. A view from the brain-body**

Vittorio Gallese - University of Parma, University of London, Columbia University NY

By exploiting the empirical approach of neuroscience and physiology, we can investigate the brain-body mechanisms enabling our interactions with the world, shedding light on the potential functional antecedents of our cognitive skills and at the same time measuring the influence exerted by human cultural evolution onto the very same cognitive skills. In so doing we can deconstruct some of the concepts we normally use when referring to intersubjectivity or to aesthetics and art, as well as when referring to the experience we make of them.

Experimental aesthetics will be discussed in relation with current neuroscientific approaches to art and aesthetics. We can now look at the aesthetic-symbolic dimension of human existence not only from a semiotic-hermeneutic perspective, but starting from the dimension of bodily presence. According to Hans Gumbrecht (2004) aesthetic experience involves two components: one deals with meaning, the other one with presence. The notion of presence entails the bodily involvement of image beholders through a synesthetic multimodal relationship with the artistic/cultural artifact.

Cognitive neuroscience can surrender us from the forced choice between the totalizing relativism of social constructivism, which doesn't leave any room to the constitutive role of the body in cognition, and the deterministic scientism of some quarters of evolutionary psychology, which aims at explaining art exclusively in terms of adaptation and modularity. I will present empirical results of our research showing that the creative expressive processes characterizing our species, in spite of their progressive abstraction and externalization from the body, keep their bodily ties intact. Creative expression is tied to the body not only because the body is instrument of creative expression, but also because it is the main medium allowing its experience.

---