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ARISTOTLE ON THE AFFECTIVE POWERS OF COLOUR AND PICTURES

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle's works on natural science show that he was aware of the affective powers of colour. At *De an.* 421a13, for example, he writes that hard-eyed animals can only discriminate between frightening and non-frightening colours. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, furthermore, colours are the source of pleasures and delight. These pleasures, unlike the pleasures of touch and taste, neither corrupt us nor make us wiser. Aristotle's views on the affective powers of colours raise a question about the limits he seems to place on the affective powers of pictures at *De an.* 427b15-24, where he implies that pictures do not affect us immediately. In this paper, I examine the contrast between the affective powers of colour and the affective powers of pictures. I argue that colours can give rise to pleasure and pain in themselves and generate emotions incidentally. Similarly, pictures can please us or affect us in themselves and incidentally. In light of this account, I suggest that, on a plausible reading of *De an.* 427b15-24, the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects are not immediate because they require an intervening cause in order to be effective. The representations of pictures and statues affect us either with the mediation of deception or with the mediation of interpretation.

1. Introduction

Between 1966 and 1970, Barnett Newman produced four abstract paintings entitled *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*. The paintings gave rise to strong emotional reactions in those who first saw them, instilling anger rather than fear for the most part, because they broke the conventions of what could count as 'art'. *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue III* is impressive in size, measuring 224 by 544 cm. It features a strip of blue on the left side of the canvas and a strip of yellow on its right side. The rest of the painting is uniformly red. The intense reactions prompted by viewing this painting reached their zenith when it was the object of a knife attack in 1986, an event that led to an infamously unsatisfactory restoration

that for some qualified as a second attack.¹ *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue I, II, III and IV* are not figurative, yet they move those who look at them, in part because they challenge their assumptions and beliefs about colour and art. In this paper, my focus is on Aristotle's views on the affective powers of colours in nature and in art. I argue that Aristotle developed a sophisticated account of the affective powers of colour. He obviously did not envisage the possibility of colour in art moving and angering the spectators in the way Newman's works did. However, he discussed the way in which colours in nature can be affective in themselves and incidentally. In addition, he discussed the affective powers of colours in artefacts in a way that suggests an interesting difference between the affective powers of colours in themselves and as constitutive of a mimetic representation.

In his ethical works, Aristotle argues that we can be pleased by colour perception. At *De an.* 421a8-15 he suggests that certain animals may only discriminate differences in colours on the basis of whether or not these colours give rise to fear. In this paper, I start from these passages in order to reconstruct the relationship between colours and affections like pleasure and the emotions. I argue that, for Aristotle, seeing a specific colour can please us both in itself and incidentally, i.e. because the vision gives rise to a pleasant memory, perception or thought. Hence, we can rejoice in the vision of a shade of red in itself or because it reminds us of a beautiful sunset. In addition, a certain colour can give rise to emotions incidentally: a shade of violet can be fear-inducing because we associate it with a fearsome stormy sea.

In the second section, I argue that this account of the affective powers of colours in nature raises some questions for Aristotle's view of the affective powers of colours in visual art. Aristotle implies that pictures do not affect us immediately (*De an.* 427a22-24), which can be taken to suggest that while colour affects us in nature, it is not affective as part of a pictorial or sculptural representation. This view is, however, implausible: if colours can be affective in themselves, then pictures should be affective simply because of their colouration. Furthermore, pictures seem to affect us incidentally. These theses are defended in the Aristotelian corpus, for example in the discussion of the link between pleasure and pictures at *Poet.* 1448b5-19. In light of this and other texts in the *Poetics*, I argue that, for Aristotle, a

¹ The incident is narrated wonderfully by MARS (2019).

picture can move us incidentally because it reminds us of something or someone that we miss. A picture can also affect us in itself, for example because of its colouration.

In the third section, I argue that Aristotle's thesis that pictures do not affect us immediately may still be coherent with the account I reconstruct. His view might be that the representational content of a picture moves us through the mediation of deception, the mediation of interpretation, or the mediation of association. On this view, we are not immediately affected by a scary depiction of a centaur because, in order to be fearful of it, we need to be deceived by it, to look at it in light of its cultural context, or to associate it with something we find scary.

My study of the affective powers of colours can help us to interpret the affective powers of pictures in *De anima*. Aristotle's view on these matters is not fully spelled out, but it can be made coherent in a way that suggests different nuances in the link between colour vision, the visual arts, and the emotions. On my interpretation, Aristotle does not question the affective power of representational content of pictures, but he takes it to be mediated by the observer's psychological condition.

If this is correct, for Aristotle there is a difference between the affective powers of colours in nature and art compared to the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects. This difference is a matter of immediacy understood as the absence of intervening causes. Colours can affect us immediately, both in nature and as part of artistic representations. Thus, pictures affect us immediately because of their colouring or execution. As mimetic objects, however, pictures affect us through the mediation of interpretation, deception, or association. At first sight, the immediate affective powers of colours may seem surprising as a counterpart to the mediated affective powers of mimetic pictorial representations. We normally assume that emotions require a sophisticated intentional content which is most effectively and immediately conveyed by representational or mimetic art: we pity Oedipus because a play represents his cursed fate. However, as the case of music shows, representations are not necessary to transmit pleasure, pain or other affections. Music, especially if it is not accompanied by words, can inspire fear without representing something as fearsome. Hence, by bringing together Aristotle's remarks on the affective powers of colours, visual art, and music, we can reconstruct a more nuanced view. On this view, the case of simple colours and coloured pictures is parallel to the case of simple sounds and complex

melodies. Simple sounds and simple colours can give rise to pleasure and pain, while complex melodies and complex coloured pictures can affect us independently of any representational content. When they do so, they affect us without mediation. However, pictures affect us by virtue of their representational content only through the mediation of deception, association, or interpretation. In this respect, pictures differ from other mimetic arts like poetry.

2. Affective Colours

At *Eth. Nic.* 1118a1-b7, Aristotle discusses the scope of temperance, a virtuous state in relation to bodily pleasure and pain. He argues that temperance is strictly speaking about the pleasures of touch and taste and not about the pleasures of sight and hearing:

“For those who find enjoyment in objects of sight, such as colours, shapes, a picture, are called neither temperate nor intemperate, even though it would also seem possible to enjoy these either rightly or excessively and deficiently. The same is true for hearing; no one is ever called intemperate for excessive enjoyment of songs or playacting, or temperate for the right enjoyment of them.”²

One can enjoy colours, shapes and pictures more than one should.³ However, for Aristotle this is not intemperance, but some other vice, perhaps a kind of obsession with visual art. The same holds for the pleasures of hearing. Someone who enjoys songs and plays excessively is not an intemperate person.

From this passage, we can infer that colours can please us. The vision of a colour can either please us (or pain us) in itself or please us incidentally, because we associate it with something else. This distinction emerges very clearly in the following lines, where Aristotle explains that human and non-human animals enjoy the perception of colours, smells and sounds incidentally when it reminds them of the prospects of food or sexual pleasure. The lion does not delight in the sight of wildlife, but in the prospect of eating (*Eth. Nic.* 1118a18-23). In a closely related passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*, these incidental pleasures arise not only because of envisaged prospects, but also in virtue of one’s hopes and memories (*Eth.*

² οἱ γὰρ χαίροντες τοῖς διὰ τῆς ὄψεως, οἷον χρώμασι καὶ σχήμασι καὶ γραφῇ, οὔτε σώφρονες οὔτε ἀκόλαστοι λέγονται· καίτοι δόξειεν ἂν εἶναι καὶ ὡς δεῖ χαίρειν καὶ τούτοις, καὶ καθ’ ὑπερβολὴν καὶ ἔλλειψιν. ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὴν ἀκοήν· τοὺς γὰρ ὑπερβεβλημένως χαίροντας μέλεισιν ἢ ὑποκρίσει οὐθεὶς ἀκόλαστους λέγει, οὐδὲ τοὺς ὡς δεῖ σώφρονας. *Eth. Nic.* 1118a3-9. Translations of the *Eth. Nic.* are from IRWIN (1999).

³ Plato’s lovers of sounds and sights at come to mind.

Eud. 1231a5-10). While both human and non-human animals take pleasure in vision, hearing, and smelling incidentally, in these passages Aristotle explains that only humans can enjoy beautiful colours, melodious sounds, and the fragrant smell of flowers in themselves. In *De sensu*, he even provides a scientific explanation of the link between specific colours and pleasures. In the context of a discussion of the ‘juxtaposition theory’ of colour, according to which hues result from white and black juxtaposed in different proportions, he argues that we find pleasant colours that are juxtaposed in a well-proportioned ratio (*Sens.* 439b31-440a6). Later on, he rejects the juxtaposition theory in favour of a mixture theory, but he seems to consider this theory suitable to explain the proportions of pleasant colours on the same lines (*Sens.* 440b18-23).⁴

These passages invite further investigation on the relationship between colour discrimination and pleasure. From *Eth. Nic.* 1175a29-36, we know that pleasure makes our cognitive states more vivid and salient. This applies to high level cognitive activities that involve thinking and learning, but it seems to extend to lower level activities too. At *Eth. Eud.* 1237a23-26, taking pleasure in something leads us to recognise it more easily. This recognition may be either perceptual or intellectual. Furthermore, the fact that we can take pleasure in colours either in themselves or incidentally suggests that colour vision is affective in a broader sense. Pleasure and pain are closely connected with the emotions (*pathê*) they follow, or they may accompany emotions like fear, confidence, envy, and so on (*Eth. Nic.* 1105b21-23, *Eth. Eud.* 1220b12-14, and *Mag. mor.* 1186a34-35).⁵

A study of the relationship between the sense of sight and self-preservation supports the thesis that certain colours may catch our attention and elicit emotions. Emotions, attention, and desires guide an animal’s behaviour in a way that promotes its self-preservation. At *Sens.* 436b18-22, animals who are capable of locomotion have sight, hearing, and olfaction for the sake of their self-preservation. In cooperation with desires and other affective states, these senses enable animals to pursue food and to avoid danger. Hence, specific colours may be especially vivid in an animal’s experience and elicit emotions in a way that contributes to self-preservation.

⁴ On simple colours being pleasant and beautiful *per se*, see *PL. Phlb.* 51b3.

⁵ The sense in which pleasures and pains follow (*hepomaî*) the emotions requires further study. See further Dow (2011); LEIGHTON (1982); FORTENBAUGH (1975).

The role of colour perception in Aristotle's psychology and biology indicates that colours can give rise to emotions, even if the affective powers of colours are not discussed at length. In addition, Aristotle mentions the link between fear and certain colours at *De an.* ii 9, in the context of a discussion of the peculiar difficulties that occur in the analysis of the sense of smell:

“Matters concerning smell and the object of smell are less easy to determine than those that have already been discussed: it is not clear what sort of thing smell is, not in the way that it is in the cases of sound and colour. The reason for this is that we do not have this sense with precision, but are inferior to many animals. For humans smell things poorly and do not perceive any object of smell without its being painful or pleasant, because the sensory organ is imprecise. It is also likely that hard-eyed animals perceive colours in this way, and that differences in colour are not especially clear for them, excepting those which do and do not inspire fear. So too is the human race when it comes to smells.”⁶

Analysing the sense of smell is difficult because, in humans, it is inferior and less precise than in other animals. As such, our poor sense of smell often leads to an inability to smell things, save those with a connection to pleasure or pain. Our condition in relation to smell is similar to the condition of hard-eyed animals in relation to vision, which only allows them discriminate differences in colour on the basis of whether they inspire fear or not.

The animals Aristotle calls “hard-eyed” may be insects, crustaceans or lizards.⁷ These animals have imprecise vision, as their capacity for colour discrimination relies on the link between certain colours and fear. In noting this link, Aristotle may mean one of two things: either hard-eyed animals only categorise colours in two groups, the fearful and the not-fearful, or they only recognise differences in hue when these inspire fear or confidence. On the first interpretation, hard-eyed animals do not have a way to categorise and perceive green and red, say, as green and red. On the second, they can perceive green and red as green

⁶ περί δὲ ὁσμῆς καὶ ὄσφραντοῦ ἦττον εὐδιόριστόν ἐστι τῶν εἰρημένων· οὐ γὰρ δῆλον ποῖον τί ἐστὶν ἡ ὁσμή, οὕτως ὡς ὁ ψόφος ἢ τὸ χρῶμα. αἴτιον δ' ὅτι τὴν αἴσθησιν ταύτην οὐκ ἔχομεν ἀκριβῆ, ἀλλὰ χεῖρω πολλῶν ζῴων· φαύλως γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ὁσμάται, καὶ οὐθενὸς αἰσθάνεται τῶν ὄσφραντῶν ἄνευ τοῦ λυπηροῦ ἢ τοῦ ἠδέος, ὡς οὐκ ὄντος ἀκριβοῦς τοῦ αἰσθητηρίου. εὐλογον δ' οὕτω καὶ τὰ σκληρόφθαλμα τῶν χρωμάτων αἰσθάνεσθαι, καὶ μὴ διαδήλους αὐτοῖς εἶναι τὰς διαφορὰς τῶν χρωμάτων πλὴν τῶ φοβερῶ καὶ ἀφόβῳ· οὕτω δὲ καὶ περὶ τὰς ὁσμάς τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος. *De an.* 421a8-16 Trans. of *De an.* based on SHIELDS (2016).

⁷ HICKS (1907) 391 suggests insects on the basis of *Part. an.* 657b29-658a10, ROSS (1961) 254 includes crustaceans and lizards on the basis of *Hist. an.* 525b15-526a11; *Hist. an.* 537b12; *Part. an.* 683a27; *Part. an.* 691a24.

and red, but they only do so when these hues are associated with something that they find fearful, like a predator.⁸

Independently of which interpretation we find most persuasive, Aristotle's views on colour and pleasure imply that hard-eyed animals find certain colours fearsome incidentally, i.e. because they associate them with predators or other sources of danger. In addition, these remarks on colour perception and fear in hard-eyed animals allow us to suppose that humans, too, can be affected by colours beyond their capacity to take pleasure in them. We can discriminate and categorise different colour hues and associate them with fearful things, thus fearing the colour incidentally. Although Aristotle does not discuss pursuit and avoidance in relation to colour vision, he does discuss it in relation to the visual perception of movement. At *De an.* 431b5-10, seeing the movement of a beacon, we come to recognise an enemy approaching and, presumably, we feel fear or anger. This association may lead us to develop a fear of certain beacons. Similarly, we might develop a fear of violet because it reminds us of a stormy sea.⁹ Unlike the beacon-phobia, a violet-phobia of this sort would be irrational, as violet is often associated with perfectly safe foods like plums or pleasant objects like flowers.

There is no evidence in the corpus that beings like us could also develop intrinsic fears of certain colours, without the need to associate them with other fearful things. However, Aristotle argues that we can be affected by colours in themselves, at least in so far as we can find them pleasurable (*Eth. Nic.* 1118a1-5). Other passages suggest that we might be also capable of finding colours painful in themselves. At *De an.* 429b1-3, intense objects of perception (*sphodra aisthêta*), like strong (*ischyra*) colours and smells, prevent us from seeing and smelling. In this context, the strength of a colour presumably refers to its

⁸ *Contra* FREELAND (1992) 238 n. 10 and JOHANSEN (1996) 4 n. 5, who assume that the remark must be taken to mean that hard-eyed animals can only categorise colours as fear-inducing or non-fear inducing. See also Philoponus' commentary in *De an.* 15, 387, 1-35. This passage seems compatible with the view that hard-eyed animals can categorise different colours, but only when they concentrate on them because of fear. On the precision of the senses, see further *Gen. an.* 781b1-29, where Aristotle suggests that discrimination of perceptual differences may depend on whether certain movements reach our central perceptual organ, i.e. the heart. Perhaps, his view is that in hard-eyed animals, due to the nature of their eyes, the perceptual movements relating to differences in colours reach the central organ only in association with affections like fear or pleasure. I discuss the relationship between movements in the sensory organs, pleasure, perception and attention further in CAGNOLI FIECCONI (forthcoming).

⁹ This thesis might find support in the view that Greek colour terminology is tied to primary experiences, e.g. fecund oozing green vitality, see CLARKE (2004) or objects, e.g. plant coloured, see BRADLEY (2013).

brilliance, as suggested by *Gen. an.* 780a9-11, where an example of a strong blinding colour is the colour of the sun. Similarly, at *De an.* 426b2-7 sight is destroyed by excessively brilliant (*lampra*) and dark colours (see also *Pr.* 959a37-b4). Brilliant colours are destructive and looking at them is painful. Hence, these colours may be the ones that pain us in themselves and not incidentally. According to the mixture theory of colour in *Sens.* 439b15-440b25, different hues (like purple, crimson and so on) are all the result of two basic colours (white and black) mixed in different ratios. On the most plausible reconstruction of this view, white has to be understood as the brightest colour and black as the darkest. Aristotle's theory, therefore, might be based on the observation that an increase or reduction in the proportion level of brilliance generates a change in hue: the sun is white, but it appears red when its brilliance decreases because it is seen through the clouds (*Sens.* 440a10-11). If different levels of brilliance correspond to changes in hue, it makes sense to think of certain hues as painful because they are, by nature, blinding and painful to behold.¹⁰

If this reconstruction is right, for Aristotle, human colour perception can be affective in itself or incidentally. In the first case, colours can be the source of pleasure and pain by virtue of their balanced or excessive brilliance. In the second case, colours can be affective because they are associated with things that we (or the other animals) find scary or attractive, like the stormy sea, a predator, or a sunset.¹¹

¹⁰ Aristotle's mixture theory and its Empedoclean and Democritean ancestors are discussed in detail by KALDERON (2015) ch. 4, 5 and 6; IERODIAKONOU (2018); (2005); SORABJI (1972). There are, of course, problems with regarding hues as a result of different combinations of light and dark, especially if one is used to a multidimensional ordering of colours in accordance with their brightness, saturation, and hue. See OSBORNE (1968); PLATNAUER (1921). Aristotle's unidimensional ordering strikes us as incorrect because it is limited, but it is not, of course, an indication of some suspicious ethnolinguistic thesis about the alleged "colour blindness" or insensitivity to hues of the ancients. See BRUNO (1960) 47-51 and POLLITT (2007) against the ethnolinguistic thesis defended most famously in GLADSTONE (1858) 488 and to some extent in PLATNAUER (1921). See KALDERON (2015) 133-136 on how Aristotle's mixture theory is not a result of his insensitivity to hues and can even be seen as an ancestor of modern reflectance theories. A study of Greek colour terminology is beyond the scope of this paper, for an excellent reconstruction and literature review see BRADLEY (2009) 12-30; SASSI (2003); (2009).

¹¹ Aristotle's analysis of the affective powers of colour brings together the two main strands of interpreters of Greek (and Roman) colour terminology and colour perception, see SASSI (2015). According to, *inter alia*, BRADLEY (2009) and CLARKE (2004), colour terminology and colour perception are to be explained by virtue of their relationship with either specific objects or cognitive domains. According to OSBORNE (1968); PLATNAUER (1921) and IRWIN (1974), colour terminology and colour perception are explained as expressing different degrees of light and darkness.

3. Affective Pictures

In the previous section, I argued that colours are affective: they give rise to pleasure, pain and other affections in themselves and incidentally. If the most primitive object of vision can be affective in this way in nature, it seems plausible for Aristotle to assume that they affect us as part of objects of vision in artefacts like pictures and sculptures. In *De anima* iii 3, however, he suggests that pictures or drawings scarcely move us. This idea plays an important role in his account of the difference between the affective powers of belief and the affective powers of *phantasia*.

For Aristotle, *phantasiai* and *phantasmata* are perceptual remnants or traces of past perceptions that we store in our souls. These traces are at the basis of the explanation of phenomena like dreams, perceptual illusions, and memory. Here, I choose to leave the terms untranslated. For the purposes of this discussion, it is for the most part suitable to take *phantasia* to correspond to imagination and *phantasmata* and *phantasiai* to correspond to appearances.¹² The point at the centre of this analysis is Aristotle's view that *phantasia* and pictures have similar affective powers:

“It is clear that mere thought and supposition are not the same. The former affection [sc. thought or *phantasia*] is up to us whenever we want (it involves putting something before our eyes, as those who consider their memories and construct images), believing however is not up to us: for it is necessary either to say the truth or to speak falsely. Furthermore whenever we believe that something is terrible or frightful, we are immediately affected, and the same happens with something audacious. With respect to *phantasia* we are like someone looking at terrible or audacious things in a picture.”¹³

¹² *Insomn.* 458b25 ff.; *De an.* 429a1-2; *De an.* 429a4-5. In this paper I do not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of Aristotle's notion of *phantasia*. On the unity or disunity of his account, see especially: CASTON (1996); SCHOFIELD (1992); and FREDE (1992). On the role of *phantasia* in Aristotle's ethics see MOSS (2012).

¹³ ὅτι δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ αὐτὴ [νόησις] καὶ ὑπόληψις, φανερόν. τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ τὸ πάθος ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἔστιν, ὅταν βουλώμεθα (πρὸ ὀμμάτων γὰρ ἔστι τι ποιήσασθαι, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημονικοῖς τιθέμενοι καὶ εἰδωλοποιοῦντες), δοξάζειν δ' οὐκ ἐφ' ἡμῖν· ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἢ ψεύδεσθαι ἢ ἀληθεύειν. ἔτι δὲ ὅταν μὲν δοξάσωμεν δεινόν τι ἢ φοβερόν, εὐθὺς συμπάσχομεν, ὁμοίως δὲ κἂν θαρραλέον· κατὰ δὲ τὴν φαντασίαν ὡσαύτως ἔχομεν ὥσπερ ἂν εἰ θεώμενοι ἐν γραφῇ τὰ δεινὰ ἢ θαρραλέα, *De an.* 427b15-24. In 15, I retain νόησις and I follow the majority of manuscripts which have ἢ αὐτὴ as opposed to αὐτή, see however BARBOTIN / JANNONE (1966). I follow Polansky, Freudenthal and Hamlyn, *inter alia*, in taking *noêsis* in the first line to stand for *phantasia* (see POLANSKY [2007] 410; HAMLYN [1968] 132; FREUDENTHAL [2010]), cf. SIMPL. *In De an.* 206, 5 and PHLP. *In De an.* 492, 24. For a similar use see *De an.* 433a9-10. SHIELDS (2016) 77, n. 44 obtains the same result by either reading *phantasia* instead of *noêsis* or by secluding *noêsis*. Since in this passage Aristotle is contrasting belief (*doxa* or *hypolêpsis*) and *phantasia*, it is clear that *to pathos* in the second line is *phantasia*.

Believing and imagining are different, the former is not up to us whenever we want, the latter is up to us. In addition, believing that something is terrible, frightful, or audacious affects us immediately. If, instead of a belief, we have a *phantasia* of something frightful, we react in a different way, which Aristotle thinks is similar to how people react when they look at audacious or terrible things in a picture.

In attempting to elucidate the contrast between belief and *phantasia* in this passage, some have assumed that, for Aristotle, pictures do not move us emotionally.¹⁴ This assumption can be made more palatable by an obvious qualification: *phantasiai* or pictures leave us unmoved *unless* we take them to be true.¹⁵ If, for some reason, our reasoning capacities are covered over and we are deceived by a picture or a *phantasia*, we will react accordingly. Someone who is fooled by a well-crafted *trompe l'œil* of a growling predator will feel fear. Similarly, someone who takes a perceptual illusion to be true may react emotionally to it. Aristotle describes a case of this sort in his account of the illusions that are characteristic of feverish people at *Insomn.* 460b9-17: in the grip of fever, cracks on the wall might look like living animals to the sick person. If the fever is high, it might escape her notice that the animals are not actually there and she might move toward them (*kineisthai pros auta*). Surely, if we move toward false appearances when we are deceived by them, we can also be affected by them. Similarly, we can be affected by a picture if we fail to distinguish it from reality.¹⁶

Despite the added qualification that we can be affected when appearances and pictures deceive us, this account of the affective powers of *phantasia* and the affective powers of pictures is likely to still strike us as unsatisfactory, even within the context of Aristotle's own writing on these topics. Let us begin with the case of *phantasia*. In his psychological works, Aristotle allows that merely contemplating fearsome things can affect us, even if we do not take them to be truly fearsome. At *De an.* 432b29-433a1, just thinking of something fearsome can make our heart leap, even if our intellect does not urge us to escape or to feel fear (*De*

¹⁴ The tradition goes back to Themistius in his commentary *On Aristotle On the Soul* 89, 18. See also HICKS (1907) 498; DOW (2009) 164-165, n. 69 assumes that pictures do not move us emotionally and notes how this claim is in tension with the *Poetics*.

¹⁵ PEARSON (2014) sec. 7, cf. MCCREADY-FLORA (2013), who introduces the notion of restraint to account for our responses to appearances. Both authors note that this qualification does not on its own account for our emotional responses to fiction.

¹⁶ See e.g. and Pliny's famous account of Zeuxis' painted grapes, which were so realistic that they deceived birds (*NH* 35, 36).

motu an. 701b16-22, *De motu an.* 703b4-8).¹⁷ If endorsement is not necessary in these cases, it is hard to see why it should be in the case of *phantasia*. Furthermore, we find evidence that *phantasia* can induce emotions like anger if it is not rationally endorsed.¹⁸ For instance, the desire for retaliation that is characteristic of anger can be the result of dwelling on the *phantasma* of a pleasant revenge at *Rh.* 1378b1-10. It is also plausible to think that *phantasia* gives rise to emotions and desires that go against what we take to be the case, such as recalcitrant emotions and urges (*Eth. Eud.* 1235b25-29, *De an.* 433b5-10). If you are afraid of weasels despite your belief that they are harmless, in Aristotle's view, your fear is likely to be based on a *phantasia* of the weasel as fearful. This *phantasia* is affective, yet it is not one you rationally endorse.¹⁹

On reflection, then, Aristotle might not be so convinced that *phantasia* is affectively inert unless we rationally endorse its representations. Nor does he seem committed to the view that looking at pictures of terrible and audacious things leaves us unaffected. He mentions cases in which pictures give rise to emotions at *Poet.* 1454b19-1455a21, where we find a detailed summary of the various ways in which a character's identity can be unveiled in a play:

¹⁷ See BELFIORE (1985), who takes these reactions to be analogous to the ones we have to fiction in general and pictures in particular. Below I suggest that, in fact, for Aristotle, our reactions to pictures are more complex than these involuntary physiological reactions.

¹⁸ See further MOSS (2012) 69-94.

¹⁹ In addition to MOSS (2012) See also COOPER (1998) 417; STRIKER (1996) 291; SIHVOLA (1996) 59-60. Unlike these authors, I do not take the cognitive basis of recalcitrant emotions as evidence that emotions are necessarily based on *phantasia*. The question of the cognitive basis of emotions has received much attention in the literature. Here, my aim is merely to show that taking something to be rationally true is not necessary to be affected by it, even outside the context of our engagement with fiction. Thus, my view is incompatible with interpretations that take the evaluative cognitions at the basis of all human emotions to be endorsed DOW (2009); (2014); LEIGHTON (1982); NUSSBAUM (1996) 307. However, my view is compatible with those who argue that emotions are based on *phantasia*, and hence need not be taken to be true by cognitively well-functioning humans MOSS (2012) 75; COOPER (1998); STRIKER (1996); NIEUWENBURG (2002); PEARSON (2014) argues that the cognitive basis of our emotional states is mixed, i.e. it includes both beliefs and *phantasiai*. Here I argue that *phantasia* can affect us without assent (rational or non-rational) because it can give rise to recalcitrant emotions against what we take to be the case. I take it that there is no evidence in Aristotle for different kinds of assents, one rational and another non-rational, but I agree that we might make sense of his view by introducing these notions, see e.g. DOW (2014). The central point of this paper still stands even if one grants that *phantasia* is affective only when we assent to it, either rationally or non-rationally. This would still mean that *phantasia* affects us with the mediation of assent, just as painting affect us with the mediation of deception or of interpretation. The analogy would however be less neat, because, while painting requires either deception or interpretation, *phantasia* would presumably only require a kind of assent. The presence of other mediating psychological conditions would be relevant only in so far as they give rise to a sort of non-rational assent. I thank Paolo Crivelli for pushing me to clarify this point.

“[Examples of this are in] The *Cyprians* of Dicaeogenes, the sight of the picture makes the man burst into tears, and in the tale of Alcinous, hearing the lyre player and reminiscing, Odysseus weeps. Thus, they are recognised.”²⁰

In these examples, the main characters give away their disguise because they are moved by what they see or hear. For our purposes, it matters that, in one case, the character is so moved by the sight of a picture that he bursts into tears.²¹ This suggests that Aristotle was aware that pictures can be affective incidentally, when they give rise to moving memories. In the same way, music or stories can be moving because they remind us of past events, as the lyre player reminds Odysseus of the fall of Troy.

Furthermore, similar to the case of colours, Aristotle’s discussion of the pleasures that viewers take in pictorial representations suggests that they can be affective in themselves, even if they do not remind us of something else.²² In the *Poetics*, Aristotle draws on our engagement with pictures in order to explain the sense in which *mimêsis* comes natural to beings like us:²³

“Mimetic activity is natural to humans from childhood, and they differentiate themselves from the other animals because they are most mimetic, they first learn through *mimêsis*, and they take pleasure in mimetic objects. A sign of this is what happens in practice: for we take pleasure in contemplating the most precise pictures of the very things we find painful to see, the forms for example of the worst animals and of corpses. The explanation is this: to learn something is most pleasant not only for the philosophers but similarly for everyone else, even though they have little access to it; the reason why they delight in seeing pictures is because as they contemplate they learn and reason what each thing is, e.g. that this one is that one; since unless one happens to have seen it before, it will not generate pleasure as a mimetic object, but because of its execution, colouring, or some other similar cause.”²⁴

²⁰ ὡσπερ ἡ ἐν Κυπρίοις τοῖς Δικαιογένοισι, ἰδὼν γὰρ τὴν γραφὴν ἔκλαισεν, καὶ ἡ ἐν Ἀλκίνου ἀπολόγῳ, ἀκούων γὰρ τοῦ κιθαριστοῦ καὶ μνησθεὶς ἐδάκρυσεν, ὅθεν ἀνεγνωρίσθησαν. *Poet.* 1455a1-4. Trans. of the *Poetics* are adapted from Bywater’s in BARNES (1991).

²¹ We do not know much about the *Cyprians* beyond this reference to the recognition scene.

²² See also HALLIWELL (1990).

²³ I leave the term and cognates untranslated, as an interpretation of Aristotle’s account of *mimêsis* would be impossible to tackle in this paper. See further (and *inter alia*) HALLIWELL (2002) and WOODRUFF (1992).

²⁴ τὸ τε γὰρ μιμῆσθαι σύμφυτον τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐκ παίδων ἐστὶ καὶ τούτῳ διαφέρουσι τῶν ἄλλων ζώων ὅτι μιμητικώτατον ἐστὶ καὶ τὰς μαθήσεις ποιεῖται διὰ μιμήσεως τὰς πρώτας, καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς μιμήμασι πάντας. σημεῖον δὲ τούτου τὸ συμβαῖνον ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὰ λυπηρῶς ὀρῶμεν, τούτων τὰς εἰκόνας τὰς μάλιστα ἠκριβωμένας χαίρομεν θεωροῦντες, οἷον θηρίων τε μορφὰς τῶν ἀτιμοτάτων καὶ νεκρῶν. αἴτιον δὲ καὶ τούτου, ὅτι μανθάνειν οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλοσόφοις ἠδιστον ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίως, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ βραχὺ κοινωνοῦσιν αὐτοῦ. διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο χαίρουσι τὰς εἰκόνας ὀρῶντες, ὅτι συμβαίνει θεωροῦντας μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι τί ἕκαστον, οἷον ὅτι οὗτος ἐκεῖνος· ἐπεὶ ἐὰν μὴ τύχη προεωρακῶς, οὐχ ἢ μίμημα ποιήσει τὴν ἡδονὴν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἀπεργασίαν ἢ τὴν χροιάν ἢ διὰ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἄλλην αἰτίαν. *Poet.* 1448b5-19.

Human beings are the most mimetic animals, which is proven, among other things, by the fact that they take pleasure in *mimêsis*. In order to explain the nature and workings of our mimetic pleasures, Aristotle chooses the example of taking pleasure in seeing a picture (*eikôn*).²⁵ Some pictures give us pleasure in themselves, or merely by virtue of their colouring and technical execution. In this case, Aristotle explains that we do not enjoy them as mimetic objects. Contemplation of a picture as a mimetic object gives rise to a specific pleasure: the pleasure of learning and reasoning.²⁶ Evidence for this is also the fact that we enjoy looking at pictures of things that we find disgusting or fearsome, like corpses (see also *Part. an.* 645a8-15 and *Rh.* 1371b4-10).

Interpreters have struggled to unpack the nature of the reasoning, learning, and pleasure that we take in pictures as mimetic objects. We can get a sense of the difficulties that this passage raises by reflecting on why Aristotle thinks that we can enjoy a picture as a mimetic object only if we have seen it before. Depending on the nature of this presupposed acquaintance, we end up with very different explanations of the sort of pleasure and learning that pictures as mimetic objects afford. Perhaps Aristotle simply means that we need to be familiar with the person or the thing that the picture represents. Hence, we need to have seen Coriscus to take pleasure in a portrait of Coriscus. This suggests that the pleasure that we take in pictures as mimetic objects is something like the pleasure of recognition, or perhaps the pleasure of understanding that the picture is a fine (or realistic) representation.²⁷ From this perspective, we can explain why the pleasure in question is accessible to all humans and why we can take pleasure in looking at pictures of things we do not find pleasurable in real life. Recognising the similarities and differences between a picture and what it represents is something all of us can do. Furthermore, we can take pleasure in this recognition independently of whether or not we find the object of the representation pleasant.

This interpretation, however, is not well suited to explain why Aristotle describes our pleasant engagement with pictures as a form of learning (*manthanô*) and reasoning

²⁵ In some contexts, *eikôn* means portrait (e.g. *Mem.* 450b21-451a15), but I follow HALLIWELL (2002) 183 and GONZÁLEZ (2019) in taking *eikones* to stand for pictures in general here.

²⁶ The same difference is at play at *Poet.* 1450b1-4, where we take different pleasures in beautiful colours laid over without order in orderly black and white pictures.

²⁷ See respectively TSITSIRIDIS (2005); HEATH (2009).

(*sylogizomai*).²⁸ Being able to recognise the subject of a painting does not seem to require something as sophisticated as reasoning.²⁹ Similarly, distinguishing a painting from its subject is a trivial cognitive exercise.³⁰ In addition, the scope of the pleasures we take in contemplating pictures would be very narrow if they only stemmed from distinguishing (or identifying) the representations with their original. At *Poet.* 1448b5-19, Aristotle makes a general point about mimetic pleasures. This suggests that he had in mind something that goes beyond portraits of specific people or things. Presumably, he also considered representations of mythical subjects, with which he and his contemporaries would have been very familiar. If this is so, it is unlikely that he took the pleasure that one takes in viewing a picture to be dependent on whether they had seen its subject before, because no one has genuine perceptual encounters with a hero or a giant. If Aristotle is making a point that applies to pictures of this kind too, he must mean that we take pleasure in learning from a picture if we connect it with some pre-existent knowledge of the myth it represents, including perhaps our previous acquaintance with other representations of the myth. Perhaps, this also involves grasping ethical universals that explain the relevance of the myth: if we see a picture of Medea, we can adjudicate the emotions it expresses and the character it represents on the basis of our views on the appropriate grounds for anger and the appropriate expressions of vengeance. Thus, we might draw a close analogy between the way in which poetry speaks of universals at *Poet.* 1451b5-7 and the pleasure of learning from pictures.³¹

This dense passage from the *Poetics* therefore suggests that we can take pleasure in pictures in two ways. We might take pleasure in the artistic skill or colouring that characterises them, perhaps because of the brilliance of their colours or the innovative technique with which they were created. We might also take pleasure in pictures as mimetic objects. When we do so, we take pleasure in learning from the representational content of

²⁸ A full sketch of this sort of reasoning requires a closer analysis of the terms in question and of the expression *houtos ekeinos* at *Poet.* 1448b17 and analogous expressions at *Rh.* 1371b9 and *Rh.* 1410b19. See further GONZÁLEZ (2019) and HALLIWELL (2002) 188-193. Even if we do not take *sylogizomai* to signify 'to construct syllogisms' in the technical sense, it seems appropriate to take this activity to involve some kind of reasoning.

²⁹ See HEATH (2009) *contra* TSITSIRIDIS (2005).

³⁰ See GONZÁLEZ (2019) *contra* HEATH (2009).

³¹ On this controversial link, see GONZÁLEZ (2019); HALLIWELL (2002) ch. 6; HALLIWELL (2001). NUSSBAUM (1986) 388 seems to me right in noting that we should allow the kind of reasoning and learning that stems from contemplating a picture to be wide-ranging and to include reflection on moral maxims as well as basic recognition.

the picture. If the representation is simple, the learning might concern the anatomical structure of an animal that we never have the opportunity to observe closely. If the representation is complex, the learning might go as far as instilling or recalling moral lessons about bravery in battle or about the appropriateness of anger and vengeance.

The case of pictures is similar to the case of simple colours in some respects. Pictures can please and pain us incidentally when they remind us of something pleasant or painful or because we learn from the things they represent. They can also please us or pain us in themselves, because they display brilliant or terrible colours and techniques. If this is correct, we have good reason to think that, for Aristotle, pictures can be affective beyond their ability to generate pleasure. As we have seen in our discussion of colours, pleasure and pain are closely related to the emotions and the ability to generate pleasure and pain is a good indication of a thing's affective powers.

This analysis also allows us to draw an important distinction in the affective powers of pictures. We are affected by the colouration and execution of a picture and also by its representational or mimetic content. When he implies that the affective powers of pictures are limited at *De an.* 427b15-24, Aristotle might only be concerned with their representational content. His view, then, needs not be in tension with the thesis that colours can please us and affect us, whether or not they are part of a pictorial representation. Hence, Aristotle can coherently maintain that there is no difference between the affective powers of colours in nature and colours as part of an artistic representation. Since pictures can please us both because of their colouration and as mimetic objects, however, this clarification leaves us with the challenge to explain the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects. After all, Aristotle grants that pictures can affect us as mimetic objects at least incidentally, when they remind us of something we find moving (*Poet.* 1455a1-4).

4. The Affective Powers of Pictures as Mimetic Objects

In order to address the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects, it is helpful to look at Aristotle's most detailed account of the way in which pictures represent character, found in the *Politics*. In this context, Aristotle's concern is to explain the difference between the educational role of the visual arts—such as painting and sculptures—versus music. He argues

that both have some potential, but music is more powerful because it contains likenesses of character:

“It so happens that in the other objects of perception, as in the objects of touch and taste, there is no likeness of characters, although in the objects of vision there is a little (figures are of this kind, but only a little, and not everyone shares in this kind of perception. Furthermore, these resulting figures and colours of characters are not likenesses of characters, but rather signs, and these signs are distinguishing marks for the emotions, in so far as even contemplating them makes a difference, the young must not look at the works of Pauson but at those of Polygnotus, and of any other ethical painter), but in melodies themselves there are imitations of characters.”³²

In the objects of vision there are not likenesses of characters, but mere signs. Figures or shapes (*schēmata*) of painting and statuary contain signs of character, and these signs are the marks of emotions. Aristotle, here, is emphasising the limits of paintings and sculptures. Unlike music, these art forms cannot contain likenesses of character, presumably because they do not change through time.³³ In the following lines, Aristotle goes on to argue that an indication of the ability of music to contain likenesses of character is that it affects its listeners emotionally (*Pol.* 1340a40-b15). However, this does not mean that paintings cannot affect us or represent character. After all, in this very passage Aristotle allows that paintings can make a difference in moral education, which is why the young should look at Polygnotus’ work and not Pauson’s. As we know from *Poet.* 1448a5, the difference between these two artists is that the former represented people in a favourable light, making them better than they tend to be, while the latter represented his subjects as worse than people normally are. Hence, the signs of character in a painting allow us to recognise moral exemplars and their opposites. Not many sources in the Aristotelian corpus offer clarification on the difficult point that figures

³² συμβέβηκε δὲ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις μηδὲν ὑπάρχειν ὁμοίωμα τοῖς ἡθεσιν, οἷον ἐν τοῖς ἀπτοῖς καὶ τοῖς γευστοῖς, ἀλλ’ ἐν τοῖς ὀρατοῖς ἡρέμα (σχήματα γὰρ ἔστι τοιαῦτα, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ μικρόν, καὶ <οὐ> πάντες τῆς τοιαύτης αἰσθήσεως κοινωνοῦσιν· ἔτι δὲ οὐκ ἔστι ταῦτα ὁμοιώματα τῶν ἡθῶν, ἀλλὰ σημεῖα μᾶλλον τὰ γινόμενα σχήματα καὶ χρώματα τῶν ἡθῶν, καὶ ταῦτ’ ἐστὶν ἐπίσημα ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν· οὐ μὴν ἀλλ’ ὅσον διαφέρει καὶ περὶ τὴν τούτων θεωρίαν, δεῖ μὴ τὰ Παύσωνος θεωρεῖν τοὺς νέους, ἀλλὰ τὰ Πολυγνώτου κἂν εἴ τις ἄλλος τῶν γραφέων ἢ τῶν ἀγαματοποιῶν ἐστὶν ἠθικός), ἐν δὲ τοῖς μέλεσιν αὐτοῖς ἔστι μιμήματα τῶν ἡθῶν. *Pol.* 1340a23-39. Trans. of the *Politics* are based on KRAUT (1997). The text and content of this passage are difficult to interpret. I follow *OCT* and accept the conjectural insertion of οὐ before πάντες at 1340a31 *contra* JOWETT (1885). Another possible emendation is σχήματα γὰρ ἔστι τοιαῦτα, καὶ πάντες τῆς τοιαύτης αἰσθήσεως κοινωνοῦσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ μικρόν, see SUSEMIHL / HICKS (1895) 593. A similar reading can be obtained without transposing, see GONZÁLEZ (2019) 183 n. 32. For my purposes, it does not matter which reading one adopts.

³³ I defend this point at length in CAGNOLI FIECCONI (2016), where I argue that music is not representational, but contains the same order in variety that character dispositions and actions display.

and colours are signs of characters or distinguishing marks for the emotions.³⁴ His view might be that a painting's colouring and shapes can give us an indication of the emotions felt by the subjects represented. These emotions, in turn, are a sign of their character traits.

In absence of further evidence, one way to understand this view better takes us to the work of other authors who describe ethical and emotional paintings and sculptures.³⁵ For example, in *Memorabilia* 3, 10, Xenophon describes a conversation between Socrates and the painter Parrhasius, in which they discuss whether it is possible to depict moral characters (*ethê*) in painting. Socrates convinces Parrhasius that it is possible to paint eyes and gazes so as to represent attitudes like malevolence and benevolence. Similarly, painted faces, motions, and states can represent character traits like prudence (*to phronimon*) or insolence (*to hybristikon*). In the subsequent interaction between Socrates and a sculptor, Cleiton, Socrates persuades his interlocutor that it is possible to represent emotional states in sculpture. For example, this may be achieved by imitating the threatening eyes of a fighter or the triumphant look of the victor. One's face, eyes and posture can indicate one's emotions and character, which is why emotions and character can be represented in sculpture and painting. This view finds an echo in the pseudo Aristotelian *Phgn.* 812a12-b12, where a pale yellowish complexion and white eyes indicate fear and cowardice, while bravery and aggression are signalled by bright (*charypos*) eyes.

Similar accounts of the depiction of emotions and character can be found in later sources. In the *Zeuxis*, Lucian appreciates how Zeuxis communicates the father centaur's brutishness and savageness even if he depicts him as laughing (*Zeuxis* 5-6). Aelian, about a century later, describes a painting by Theon which depicts a soldier with a fierce (*gorgon*) look in his eyes. The soldier is said to appear bloodthirsty and ready to kill, his posture showing that he has no intention to spare anyone (*Varia historia* 2, 44).³⁶

If paintings can represent character and emotion in this way, it is plausible to think that they can also generate emotions within their viewers. While these sources do not tell us much

³⁴ This expression translates ἐπίσημα ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν, taking the *episêma* to be distinguishing marks for the emotions. Another option is the emendation καὶ ταῦτ'έστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ σώματος ἐν τοῖς πάθεσιν, see e.g. REEVE (2017) who takes the passage to mean that colours and shapes are signs of a body affected by emotions.

³⁵ This analysis is indebted to GONZÁLEZ (2019).

³⁶ For emotions depicted in war and battle themed paintings, see also PLUT. *De glor. Ath.* 346e-347a. Both passages are described in SHEPPARD (2015).

about the emotional reactions of the spectators, we can speculate that these expressive paintings might have been affective if aided by the contextual assumptions or background of the viewer. Lucian seems able to appreciate *The Centaur Family* and its depiction of a savage centaur because he has some background knowledge of the contrasts between centaurs and humans. This background would allow him to feel fear or awe in contemplating the centaur. Aelian tells us that when Theon's soldier was first unveiled, Theon arranged for a trumpeter to play the call to attack. It is hard to see how the sound might have fooled the audience into thinking that the soldier was real, given that the picture is static. Presumably, the terrifying sound was meant to enhance the terrifying effect of the painting by evoking the context of an upcoming battle.

This analysis of how paintings can contain signs of character and emotions, if it is right, suggests that paintings can also make their viewers feel emotional. However, they do so by relying on either background assumptions or on the interpretive effort of the viewer. The viewer has to contextualise the painting of the soldier with an approaching violent battle to be affected by it. Similarly, the viewer must have some knowledge of the nature of centaurs to be affected by their frightening depiction. In virtue of this background knowledge, the vividness of a painting can be very effective in moving its spectators.³⁷

In this view, paintings and sculptures differ in their affective powers from other art forms, like music and tragic poetry, which can affect us even if we lack any interpretive background, assumptions, or knowledge. Music in particular, for Aristotle, is immediately affective, even when it is not accompanied by words (*Pol.* 1340a40-b15; 1340a10-15, see Ford [2004] on this difficult passage). Tragic poetry, in turn, can give rise to pity and fear without requiring interpretive effort from the spectator.³⁸ A tragedy can move us because of the spectacle, but, according to Aristotle, the best way for it to give rise to pity and fear is by virtue of its complex plot. The plot on its own is sufficient to move us, proven by the fact that merely reading a tragedy can make us feel pity and fear (*Poet.* 1450b18-19; 1453b1-7). The way in which the

³⁷ This point brings to mind later accounts of how an interpretive activity (*intelligere*) brings out the emotional impact of a picture, see e.g. PLIN. *NH* 35, 98 and KEULS (1978) 103-105.

³⁸ I do not mean to suggest, here, that interpretation is not necessary for the cathartic powers of tragedy. Rather, interpretation is not necessary for the mere arousal of emotions. I thank Tom Mackenzie and Maria Michela Sassi for pushing me to clarify this point.

plot secures these effects is multiform: it has to be plausible (*Poet.* 1452a12-13); it must represent the right kind of change of fortunes (*Poet.* 1452b33-1453a10); it can enhance its emotional impact in virtue of the correct effects, including the discovery of a character's identity that leads to a reversal of his or her sorts (*Poet.* 1452a22-b9).

Thus, the affective powers of pictures and sculptures are not as immediate as other art forms. In light of this suggestion, we can make sense of Aristotle's remark in *De anima*, which served as our starting point: when we believe that something is terrible or frightful, we are immediately affected (*euthys sumpaschomen*), but the same does not happen when we have a *phantasia* or when we look at something terrible or audacious in a picture (*De an.* 427b15-24). In this passage, Aristotle is not necessarily claiming that we are not affected by pictures or *phantasiai*. He writes more specifically that *phantasia* and pictures do not affect us immediately (*euthys*). The adverb *euthys*, in this context, does not have to indicate temporal or spatial proximity. Instead, it can indicate the absence of other intervening causes.³⁹ These intervening causes that enable pictures to affect us—according to the admittedly speculative explanation I proposed—go beyond deception and include the viewer's interpretive activity and her background knowledge. In addition, they include the association between what the pictures represent and other things the viewer might find scary or moving (*Poet.* 1455a1-4).

The interpretation can also be supported by the analogy between pictures and *phantasia*. A *phantasia*, like a picture, can be affective even when it is not endorsed. However, its affective powers are often mediated by a more complete range of mental activities or states. In the *Rhetoric*, we find a number of cases in which *phantasia* gives rise to emotions when accompanied by other mental states, like hopes, beliefs, or desires. Take, for example, fear, defined as "a pain or disturbance arising from the *phantasia* of a destructive or painful future evil" (*Rh.* 1382a21-22). The *phantasia* of a future evil that gives rise to fear, Aristotle explains, is accompanied by other *phantasiai*: the evil must appear close (*Rh.* 1382a25). Furthermore, the people who feel fear must be in a certain condition (*diakeimenoí*), which Aristotle

³⁹ See BONITZ (1870) 296 on this use of *euthys*, which occurs also at *Eth. Nic.* 1140b17; *Ph.* 235b3; *Ph.* 248b19. My view is similar to the one defended by MCCREADY-FLORA (2013) 20-25, who takes the *euthys* to indicate a *ceteris paribus* generalization and concludes that beliefs are generally or for the most part affective, while *phantasiai* are not. In my interpretation, *phantasia* is affective through the mediation of an intervening cause, belief is affective without. However, unlike McCready-Flora, I do not think that this consideration allows us to generalise that *phantasia* fails to affect us in most circumstances or in normal circumstances.

describes from *Rh.* 1382b26 onwards. This condition may include different sets of memories and experiences: for example, people who are affected by a *phantasia* of an incumbent evil are those who have not been very fortunate, for fortunate people tend to think no evil is likely to happen to them. Thus, they tend not to feel fear (*Rh.* 1382b25-1383a13).

Similarly, confidence (*tharsos*), which is the opposite of fear, is “so that hope of safety is accompanied by the *phantasia* of it as being close, while frightening things are absent or far off” (*Rh.* 1383a16-19). In this case too, Aristotle goes on to describe the condition of confident individuals as typical of those who have overcome many dangers or no dangers at all, for both inexperience and experience can help us to be fearless in the face of dangers.

Another case to consider is pity, “a pain taken in an apparent (*phainomenôî*) evil, destructive or painful, befalling one who does not deserve it, which one might anticipate oneself or someone close to one suffering, and this whenever it appears (*phainêtai*) near” (*Rh.* 1385b13-16). However, not everyone is in the condition to be affected by these appearances or *phantasmata* of evils befalling on those who do not deserve it. For example, insolent people or people prone to panic do not feel pity because they are too focused on themselves to care about the others (*Rh.* 1385b30-1386a4).

The cases of fear, confidence and pity are not isolated. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle does not only describe the appearances that give rise to our emotions, but also the background conditions, such as other mental states, typical of those who are prone to feeling these emotions. This suggests that, although *phantasia* can be affective when it is not endorsed, its affective powers are often mediated by one’s wider psychological condition. Some interpreters take these mediating conditions to suggest that Aristotle is not using *phantasia* as a technical term for appearance in the *Rhetoric*, but as an equivalent of belief.⁴⁰ However, this interpretation clashes with Aristotle’s own discussion of *phantasia* as the kind of mental phenomenon that we experience in dreams and that is closely related to perception in *Rh.* 1378b1-10 and *Rh.* 1370a28-35.⁴¹

⁴⁰ See Dow (2009), who defends a different view in his Dow (2014).

⁴¹ See Moss (2012) 78. My view, here, differs from Moss’ and from Dow (2014) in that I take the further mental states that give rise to the emotions not to be endorsements of the affective *phantasmata*, but accompanying background conditions like general dispositions, further *phantasmata* or beliefs.

The suggestion that *phantasia* does not cause fully fledged emotions immediately, but when it is mediated by other psychological states can also find support in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In *Eth. Nic. 7, 6*, Aristotle argues that *akrasia* with respect to spirit (*thymos*) is less shameful than *akrasia* with respect to appetite (*epithymia*). Our behaviour is less shameful when we act against our decision to restrain our anger than when we reach out for a third piece of cake having decided that two were enough. This is because spirit follows reason, in a way, while our appetite does not. Spirit is like a servant who does not hear the instruction of the master in full, or like a dog who barks at the person at the door without having checked whether or not it is a friend:

“In the same way, since spirit is naturally hot and hasty, it hears, but does not hear the instruction, and rushes off to exact a penalty. For reason or *phantasia* has shown that we are being slighted or wantonly insulted; and spirit, as though it had inferred that it is right to fight this sort of thing, is irritated at once. Appetite, however, only needs reason or perception to say that this is pleasant, and it rushes off for gratification.”⁴²

Spirit, in this passage, seems to be closer to an emotional reaction like anger than to a mere desire. If this is right, unlike an appetitive desire, an emotion like anger can arise on the basis of a mere appearance or isolated thought, but it needs further mediation in order to flourish as a fully-fledged emotion. Aristotle argues here that spirit engages in a quasi-inference (*hōsper syllogisamenos*), which, in addition to the initial thought or *phantasia*, supports it in boiling up.⁴³ When spirit has mediated the initial input of reason or *phantasia*, it is irritated at once (*euthys*). In this context, the adverb *euthys* does not indicate the absence of mediation, but temporal vicinity. This passage therefore suggests that *phantasia*, and sometimes even reason, tends not to cause complex emotions in isolation. It causes emotions as a part of a more complex psychological condition that can involve reasoning or quasi-reasoning.

At this point, one might be persuaded that *phantasia* is not immediately affective because it often requires other background conditions in order to generate an emotion, such as further appearances, beliefs, or dispositions. However, one might wonder why *phantasia*

⁴² οὕτως ὁ θυμὸς διὰ θερμότητα καὶ ταχυτήτα τῆς φύσεως ἀκούσας μὲν, οὐκ ἐπίταγμα δ' ἀκούσας, ὀρμᾶ πρὸς τὴν τιμωρίαν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ λόγος ἢ ἡ φαντασία ὅτι ὕβρις ἢ ὀλιγωρία ἐδήλωσεν, ὁ δ' ὥσπερ συλλογισάμενος ὅτι δεῖ τῷ τοιοῦτῳ πολεμεῖν χαλεπαίνει δὴ εὐθύς· ἢ δ' ἐπιθυμία, ἐὰν μόνον εἶπη ὅτι ἡδὺ ὁ λόγος ἢ ἡ αἴσθησις, ὀρμᾶ πρὸς τὴν ἀπόλαυσιν. *Eth. Nic.* 1149a30-b1.

⁴³ The nature of this quasi-reasoning is debated, see PEARSON (2011). What matters for my purposes here, however, is just that here something more than an isolated *phantasia* is needed for one's anger to boil up.

differs from belief in this respect. It is conceivable that a belief that something is scary could fail to affect us, given other background conditions. These include our former experiences and memories about dangerous events or other emotions that we might be feeling at the same time. Aristotle does not necessarily overlook these conditions in his account of the affective powers of belief. Rather, some passages in the ethical works suggest that intervening conditions can prevent beliefs from affecting us. The brave person, on some interpretations at least, does not feel fear in the face of death, even though presumably they believe that they are facing a dangerous task.⁴⁴ If this is right, in Aristotle's view, belief and *phantasia* seem to be specular opposites with respect to the immediacy of their affective powers. Mediating causes enable *phantasia* to be affective, but they prevent belief from being affective.

We are now in the position to take stock on Aristotle's view of the affective powers of colours and pictures. Like colours, pictures can be affective in themselves or incidentally. Pictures affect us because of their colouration and execution, because of their mimetic nature and because they lead us to recall moving memories. Nonetheless, for Aristotle, the representational content of pictures does not affect us immediately. In order to give rise to an emotion as mimetic objects, pictures require some mediation. We are affected by them when we interpret them, when they deceive us, or when we associate them with something we find moving. This lack of immediacy in the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects makes them a suitable term of comparison with *phantasiai*.

5. Conclusion

In Aristotle's works on psychology, rhetorical persuasion, biology and aesthetics, we find a complex and, at times, incomplete map of the affective powers of colours and pictures. My interpretation of these texts above allows us to fill in some lingering gaps in the map to form a coherent account. According to Aristotle, colours can give rise to pleasure and pain either in themselves or incidentally. In addition, colours can give rise to emotions like fear incidentally. Pictures, similarly, can affect us incidentally or in themselves. In the first case,

⁴⁴ *Eth. Nic.* 1115a53-b4, see also MCCREADY-FLORA (2013).

they affect us because they remind us of things we find scary or moving or in virtue of their representational content. In the second case, pictures affect us because of their colours and execution. These distinctions help us to make sense of Aristotle's remark that pictures do not affect us immediately at *De an.* 427b15-24. In this passage, Aristotle is not necessarily contradicting his account of the affective powers of colours, because he might be concerned with the affective powers of pictures as mimetic objects. His considered view may thus be that pictures affect us as mimetic objects through the mediation of interpretation, deception, or association. It is in this sense, therefore, that pictures are similar to *phantasiai*. An appearance of a scary prospect does not affect us on its own, however vivid it might be. Rather, it affects us through the mediation of other mental states and dispositions.⁴⁵

This difference in emotional immediacy between pictures as mimetic objects and colours is the result of the attempt to fill in some gaps in Aristotle's analysis of colours and pictures. It may be seen as a reflection of his careful analysis of the links between perception, the arts, and the emotions. Aristotle thought that colour perception can be immediately affective, just as non-representational arts like music can move us without an intervening cause. Pictures, however, raise a whole new set of problems when we consider their representational content. In order to address these problems, one might speculate that pictures move us in virtue of what they represent only when we interpret them, when we are deceived by them, or when we associate them with something else. In a way, pictures require this further effort on our part because they are, at the same time, too complex and too simple to affect us immediately as music and colour perception do. While their representational nature adds to their complexity, unlike tragedies, pictures are not representationally complex enough to affect us without the aid of context and interpretation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The affective powers of *phantasia* might be different in the case of non-human animals that lack reason and belief. Since non-human animal emotions are based on either perception or *phantasia*, it is plausible to think that *phantasia* in this case does not require mediation because it is the primary source of affections. The same view can be defended if one grants that *phantasia* requires assent in order to be affective. Non-human animals might be thought of as assenting to *phantasia* by default, if one thinks that they are capable of giving a non-rational kind of assent to their impressions see e.g. MCCREADY-FLORA (2013). I thank Paolo Natali for pushing me to clarify this point.

⁴⁶ I am immensely grateful to Fiachra Mac Góráin, Tom Mackenzie and the participants to the *Entretiens* for their very helpful and insightful comments on an earlier draft.

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DISCUSSION

A. Grand-Clément: Dans votre communication, les principales émotions liées aux couleurs qui ressortent sont le plaisir (que l'on a déjà rencontré avec Maria Michela Sassi) mais aussi la peur. Existe-il des exemples précis de couleurs particulièrement effrayantes? Aristote mentionne-t-il l'or parmi les couleurs suscitant du plaisir?

E. Cagnoli Fiecconi: Aristotle does not mention specific colours that one might find fearsome or terrible, even though he does mention colours that are pleasant in themselves, like τὸ ἀλουργὸν καὶ τὸ φοινικοῦν, at *Sens.* 440a1. Perhaps the reason why he does not mention specific colours is because, as the discussion made me realise, he does not think that colours give rise to emotions like fear or anger in themselves, but incidentally, i.e. because we associate them with other fearful things. In this respect, thus, there is a difference with intrinsically pleasant colours like crimson or purple and colours an animal (human or non-human) may come to fear as a result of a painful experience linked to it.

D.B. Wharton: In your chapter you discussed different situations in which colors might excite emotions according to Aristotle, including for, example, paintings by artists whose work Aristotle either recommends or condemns as being appropriate or inappropriate for youth to view. In such situations, what uses of color do imagine Aristotle might have had in mind that would excite either appropriate or inappropriate emotional reactions in the painting's viewers, and what might those emotions be?

K. Ierodiakonou: How do you understand exactly the characterisation of a painter as ἠθικός?

E. Cagnoli Fiecconi: For ease of exposition, I grouped these questions together. At *Poet.* 1448a5 and at *Pol.* 1340a23-39, Aristotle contrasts the works of Polygnotus to the works of Pauson. In the *Poetics*, he argues that Polygnotus depicted superior (*beltiones*) people and Pauson inferior (*cheirones*) people, while in the *Politics* he suggests that the young should be

exposed to the works of Polygnotus. It is hard to reconstruct whether Aristotle had in mind a specific use of colour or a specific technique in recommending the works of Polygnotus. However, one may speculate that Polygnotus is more appropriate for young people in so far as he depicts good moral characters. This might be the point in calling him ἠθικός at *Pol.* 1340a35-39. If this is right, the characterization of a painter as ἠθικός refers to the fact that the painter in question not only represents characters, but more specifically represents morally good or virtuous characters.

K. Ierodiakonou: According to your interpretation of Aristotle's passages, colours and sounds are immediately affective, whereas the colours and sounds of artistic works are less affective. Does Aristotle follow the Platonic tradition on this, thus devaluing the importance of art?

E. Cagnoli Fieconi: While I argue that for Aristotle painting is not immediately affective in so far as it is mimetic, I do not mean to imply that it is less affective (in the sense that it gives rise emotional reactions which are less intense). I also do not mean to imply that music is less affective when it is accompanied by words. In fact, I think that music can also be immediately affective when accompanied by words. In a sense, the case of pictures is special; the limit on their affective powers is a result of the fact that they are both mimetic (unlike simple colours and sounds) and static (unlike music with or without words and tragedy). The question concerning Aristotle's relationship with the Platonic tradition is very interesting and also too large to be answered satisfactorily in a few lines. I do not think Aristotle devalues the importance of art, in fact unlike Plato in the *Republic* 10 he seems to think that art even in its current form may be suitable for moral education. Perhaps art cannot take us all the way to virtue, but it can be a starting point in *Pol.* 8. In addition, for Aristotle art is suitable for other purposes, like recreation. Another interesting point of comparison between the Aristotelian tradition and the Platonic tradition concerns the role of painting. In *Republic* 10, it is not obvious that the greatest charge against poetry, i.e. that it corrupts even the best of us, also applies to painting. Aristotle, if I am right, also thinks that painting is less powerful than poetry, at least in so far as it requires mediation in order to affect us. These comparative

issues require of course a more careful treatment and it would be helpful to take into account the reception of these ideas in later thinkers.

M.M. Sassi: Your discussion about the different way in which tragic poetry and painting elicit emotions in the spectators meets one of the most intriguing problems of both ancient and modern theory of art and literature (from *ut pictura poesis* to Lessing, and beyond), and I like your subtle argument about it. However, it would not seem fair to me to deny an intellectual involvement and some interpretive effort in the emotional experience of tragic theatre. Your final claim that “tragic poetry gives rise to pity and fear without requiring an interpretive effort from the spectator” sounds to me too strong with respect to the hard issue of the concept of *katharsis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. I would like just remind you, in most general terms, that Aristotle in the *Politics* presents the purification induced by the tragic spectacle as integral to the education of the Athenian citizen. In this connexion I would like you to clarify if you admit that in following the imitation of *ethê* through the *mythos* the spectator learns something about him/herself, or, in other words, there is a cognitive component in causing tragic emotions.

E. Cagnoli Fieccoli: Tragic emotions have a cognitive component, but this cognitive component does not always require an interpretive effort. We pity Oedipus even if we are unable to introduce further external interpretive points and even if we do not know the myth. This happens because the tragedy’s plot gives us enough information about the unhappy fate of Oedipus to generate emotions. By this I do not mean to deny that interpretation enhances or supports tragic emotions. I just mean to say that interpretation is not necessary to give rise to them. The topic of *katharsis* is so complex that any treatment I may offer here is doomed to be unsatisfactory and superficial. *Katharsis* may indeed require interpretation and it is incorrect to imply, as I may have done, that tragedy does not require interpretation for its cathartic function. However, even if *katharsis* is very important in both the *Poetics* and the *Politics*, it is not a precondition of the pity and fear that tragic poetry instils, but it seems to be a subsequent elaboration (or purification, depending on the correct interpretation) of these emotions. So perhaps the role of *katharsis* need not be taken into account when we look at the necessary conditions for the arousal of tragic emotions.

