

Foreword

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Inherent to the concept of «imitation» is the difference between the object to be represented and its representation. In art, but also in public life (as in fashion and politics for instance), to recognize the gap between the real and its image, between the model and his/her imitators or followers, means to safeguard the proper perceptive, to defend the cognitive pleasure of form, and to guarantee the value of symbolization. The same principle that regulates the relation between the model and its reproduction, between the original and the fake, also governs the imitation of something or someone prestigious, powerful, glamorous, as well as the «embodied simulation» of moving bodies and expressive gestures, no matter whether real or depicted.

However, mimesis may also turn into mimetism, mimicry, and camouflage. Pushed to the limits of its possibilities and to the zero degree of reference, similarity becomes identity, images lose their typical «as if» dimension, and we suddenly fail to discern the prototypes from their duplicates. This switching economy pertains to biology, poetics, aesthetics, and sociology as well: a living being may become image of an inanimate object by adopting different survival strategies in the «struggle for life»; the artists may strive to achieve an extraordinary degree of similarity in order to create works in front of which we cannot decide whether we are dealing with artifacts or real things; the mimetic desire may result in conformation and identification or even conformism and assimilation, thus potentially leading to the destruction of one's own (ontological, social, gender) individuality.

In all these cases, what we are dealing with is an issue concerning identity: we believe it is just a heap of leaves, when in fact it is a snake; we are convinced it is a real person, until we suddenly realise it is a statue; we think we know all of our friends, but we find out they are always bearing some kind of living masks, altering their own shape and transfiguring their outward public appearance, their «façade»; we are assessing our uniqueness and

originality, while we are also aware of being continuously influenced by others' words, feelings, actions, and gestures.

Mimicry, camouflage, transvestism, chance or cryptic anamorphism, fascination – all ways of changing clothes, habits and habitats in nature as well as in culture, in any symbolic field created by human beings during their history. Art and artification, aestheticization, stylization and beautification are all practices reflecting the need and desire for biological as well as social adaptation, all performances producing functional and fictional frames, boundaries or hierarchies in ordinary life, including the artworld. They can persuade and convince by creating consensus and belief, but they can also lead to a different common sense, a sensorium – a sensorial medium and an aesthetic mediation open to a new world and to new experiences.

By investigating mimetism as a fundamental and polymorphic aesthetic performance, this issue of «Aisthesis» aims to rethink the concept, value, and function of mimesis and its media in the context of camouflage, simulation, and dissimulation, where images do not reveal themselves as such, but are to be perceived unambiguously as what they are not – as hieroglyphs or puzzles. In the animal kingdom, as well as in war or in ordinary public life, camouflage consists in taking on the traits, colours, and shapes of a given form or environment. This is a twofold process: on the one hand, by blending two or more shapes in one, the *camoufleur* seeks to remain hidden and to mislead the others in order to keep a vital secret or an ephemeral whim; on the other hand, however, he/she aims to be recognized by a specific milieu or group, thus betraying a craving for communication and familiarity, as well as a need to convey an agreeable appearance and to share a way of life.

The first three essays of this issue of «Aisthesis» focus on the roles of imitation in animals. Bertrand Prévost highlights the aesthetic positivity of mimicry by regarding the camouflage strategies more as an appropriation of the environment than a submission to it. In a similar way, Valeria Maggiore's article refers to Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Hannah Arendt, Roger Caillois, and Adolf Portmann (crucial in Prévost's researches, too) in order to outline a semiotics of the visible which could show how the sphere of the appearance(s), far from being merely «superficial», is a privileged point of view for reconsidering the role and value of self-presentation to the others. Moreover, a key point in Maggiore's argument is the link between (philosophy of) biology on the one hand, and artistic practices on the other, here illustrated by the application of the laws of color camouflage in Abbott Thayer's painting.

The relationship among biology, aesthetics, and art is also at the core of Roy Behren's, Maite Méndez Baiges' and Érik Bulloz's essays. Roy Behrens focuses on military camouflage

during World War I, stressing that the camoufleurs specialised in fooling the enemy through spatial and chromatic distortions had been originally trained as artists, graphic designers, architects, and theatre scenographers. Not by chance, the mimetic strategies they adopted are also frequently described in artistic terms as theatrical set designs, trompe-l'oeil paintings and wildlife displays. The word *camouflage*, which might derive from the Italian «camuffare» (to disguise, to fool) or the French «camouflet» (to blow smoke in someone's face in order to cause disorientation) has spread in current vocabulary and in various languages since World War I, when mimicry and dissimulation strategies used in the animal kingdom inspired human strategies of concealment: academic painters and stage designers created techniques of *simulation* and avant-garde artists (coming from cubism and surrealism in France, futurism in Italy, vorticism in England) invented the camouflage patterns of *dissimulation*.

Maite Méndez Baiges' article can be considered as the ideal complement of Behren's, as it explains not only how avant-garde artists contributed to the invention and refinement of military camouflage techniques but also – the other way round – how military camouflage influence contemporary visual culture. If military camouflage was in its origins and early history inspired by avant-garde art, now it is paying back its debts by inspiring painters, sculptors, and architects and by providing camouflage with an aesthetic sense in the expanded field of multicultural, globalised contemporary life.

By focusing on Paolo Gioli's and Stan Brackhage's film aesthetics and poetics, Érik Bulloz explores the use of flickering, variations in lighting and flashes of still frames so as to show how flicker films work at the heart of the filmic itself, since they expose the intermittent nature of the filmstrip and thus mimic the filmic device.

Andrea Mecacci proposes a critical survey of the aesthetics of fake, starting from Plato's concept of mimesis and investigating its persistent influence on the contemporary philosophical debate over the status (and artistic value) of copies and simulacra. He thus outlines a «grammar of fake» through three points: a) the issue of pseudos in Plato and its impact on contemporaneity; b) the notion of hyperreality as absolute fake; c) the dimension of operative fake, grasped in its postmodern enucleation.

Anton Killin's and Brenno Boccadoro's essays introduce readers to the fascinating issue of camouflage in singing and music. The first deals with the so far highly underestimated vocal mimics (i.e. species capable of mimicking sounds heard in their external environment), whereas the latter proposes a detailed analysis of the role played by calembours and dissociation between shapes and sense in verbal and visual images as well as in sounds and musical scores. Boccadoro argues that musicologists have to delve deeply

into this harmonic phenomenon, going back to the ancient Greek theory of *metabolai* in order to understand the mimetic ambiguity of Renaissance music.

By highlighting the paradox of social imitation in the European culture during the 17th and 18th Centuries, Giancarlo Alfano focuses on the concepts of politeness and *honnêteté* in the so-called Ancien Régime. If the *honnête-homme* has to conform to an ideal standard, then identity means to be like all the others – an ordinary man without any special quality. To live in a society means to constantly reshape the original and unique self in accordance to a given repertory of masks: identity is a mimetic process that must always cope with the ideal gaze – omnipresent and ubiquitous – of society.

Another kind of masking of the self and unconscious self-deception has been deconstructed by Freud. The last essay, by Markus Klammer, is on the metaphor of «reading» and the notion of «rebus» in psychoanalysis. Freud regards the verbal accounts of dream images provided by the patient as a specific kind of ekphrasis; at the same time, however, the images themselves are distorted versions of an underlying «dream text». The psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams amounts to a very special art of misreading between the lines of a distorted form of a different, deeper, censored and disfigured text: dreams are at the same time a rebus resulting from incomplete mimicry of the correctness of everyday language, a rhetorical camouflage for a cryptic and unseen figurability, a text waiting to be translated and re-interpreted again and again. Klammer ends his article with a sidestep to Freud's aesthetics as exemplified by the famous essay on «The Moses of Michelangelo», emphasizing the striking similarities between the hermeneutic «reading» of dreams and an interpretation of works of art that reduces images to a set of signs and makes them perform a mimicry of textual systems.

Copies which are only mine: the latest contribution is a poem by Luigi Trucillo specifically written for this issue of «Aisthesis». It is a witty and cruel exercise of self-reflection about his work as poet. But this auto-analysis is not just about the originality and the plagiarism set up by the writer against himself. The poem reveals the relationship of the alleged artist's uniqueness with a camouflaged auto-mimesis or a dissimulated auto-simulation made up through replicas and repetitions of themes, formulas and styles. It sounds like a refrain of Rimbaud's *Je est un autre*: «the other is the self-expropriated self», a clandestine lookalike. Trucillo affirms that the poet's style is «a raptus of / an empathic snatching». Finally, the human style is not a clean break with the world: rather, it is a sudden and dangerous theft of the living matter of all beings and things – not only through feeling, but also through language.