

Conference Report

Aesthetic Foundations, May 19-21, 2017

Wassard Elea, the refugium for artists and scholars, held its *VIIIth International Wassard Elea Symposium*, in Ascea, focused on the theme of Aesthetic Foundations. The contemporary diversification of aesthetics as applied to sport, film, video games, food, and so on, has involved a confident and facile use of such notions as aesthetic experience, aesthetic value, aesthetic judgement and aesthetic pleasure. But this use in fact often belies confusion about what these terms mean, or what we mean when we use them. The question of what makes any kind of encounter or object a particularly aesthetic one cuts to the heart of the discipline at its most complex. This year's symposium was dedicated to the analysis of some core problems in aesthetics, such as the nature of aesthetic experience, the link between the aesthetic and pleasure, the kinds of objects that can rightly be called aesthetic, as well as the modality of aesthetic judgements.

With two intensive all-day sessions, the symposium was able to accommodate eight presentations with commentaries and twelve discussants, coming from Taiwan, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Sweden, USA and Canada. A range of approaches to the theme were represented, from a conceptual analysis of the role of verdictive judgments in artistic appreciation to a Nietzschean challenge to the primacy of pleasure in aesthetic encounters. A number of papers sought to clarify the nature of aesthetic experience, as, for instance, being characterized by genuineness and authenticity; as being educative or formative at its core; as being fundamentally interpretive; or as leading to harmony and unity on a Deweyan model. As to what objects can be said to be aesthetic, the range of responses was from (a) anything, to (b) works of art only, and (c) design in particular. Design, it was suggested, can best illustrate how aesthetic categories have changed due to contemporary changes in production and media culture. A defense of Adorno argued that only works of art are aesthetic objects, and moreover that ugly art has an important role to play in social and political critique. The issue of art's autonomy or heteronomy, and the distinction between aesthetic and artistic values produced lively and, we hope, fruitful discussion for all participants.

The organizers would like to thank all those who submitted papers, and to the symposium's contributors, for a successful event. Proceedings of the symposium have been published in *Wassard Elea Rivista*, IV, nos. 3, 4, and V,1. The theme for the *VIIIth International Wassard Elea Symposium* is tentatively entitled "Taste, Bad Taste and Tastelessness". A call for papers is expected in the fall.