Art and linguistic bodies: a transformative view

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Abstract

This article takes its point of departure from the second (embodied) linguistic turn represented by the enactivist notion of humans as linguistic bodies, using resources from Hans Georg Gadamer in order to propose a view of the relation between art and everyday experience as one of symbolic transformation. Conceiving art as a form of linguistic phenomenon wherein one can engage in original situations of communication, this view rejects both autonomist and direct continuity views of the art-everyday relation. We start by situating the idea of linguistic bodies within the enactive approach, spelling out relevant aspects concerning the significance of language for human life and perception (Sect. 2). Then we embark on a discussion of aspects of Shaun Gallagher's and Alva Noë's enactivist perspectives on art experience, highlighting places where their views align with and depart from ours (Sect. 3). The last two sections aim to lay out the transformative view in more detail, proposing a pluralistic understanding of art media and a view of art and art experience as modes of ideational, embodied thought (Sects. 4 and 5).

Keywords Art experience · Linguistic bodies · Enactivism · Phenomenology · Hermeneutics · Gadamer

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1 Introduction

What is the relation between experiences of art and everyday experiences? In the last century, philosophical thought famously took a "linguistic turn", centered on the recognition that language is not a secondary or derived feature in human perception but something permeating and enabling perception and the human life form in the first place (Habermas, 1999; Lafont, 1999; Rorty, 2009). Many of the key figures of this turn, such as Hans Georg Gadamer, argued that both art, artistic performance and experience should be conceived as firmly integrated within a linguistic environment. Indeed, on this view, art should itself – in a broad sense not reducible to ordinary, verbal language – be viewed as a *linguistic phenomenon* (Gadamer, 1993b, 2004).

As Johnson and Schulkin note, however, these kinds of language-centered accounts tended to lack a recognition of the significance of "the living, breathing, moving, copulating, making, dancing, sculpting, emoting, valuing *body*" (2023, 157; our emphasis) for human life and experience. Over the last decades, approaches that emphasize the significance of embodiment have become increasingly influential within the fields of cognitive science and the philosophy of mind, with the movement known as *the enactive approach* as one of the key players (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991; Thompson, 2007; Di Paolo, Buhrmann & Barandiaran, 2017). In response to worries that the validity of such theories is limited in scope to "basic" aspects of the mind, such as the practice-oriented "ground-level" of perception, and that it will struggle to account for "sophisticated" aspects like language and symbolic thought, recent enactivist works have taken what could be called a *second* linguistic turn, suggesting novel, fine-grained conceptions of linguistic life with the enactive body as a constitutive and regulative starting point. Particularly promising is the work of Di Paolo, Cuffari, and De Jaegher (2018), which continues the non-representationalist and anti-cognitivist enactivist view of the mind at the level of symbolic and linguistic sense-making, demonstrating how human bodies are thoroughly shaped by linguistic realities.

In contrast to the first linguistic turn, however, the second one has yet to develop a comprehensive approach to art. The main purpose of this essay is to begin to remedy this deficit, exploring the consequences of the second, *embodied* linguistic turn when it comes to art experience and performance. In this context, we find it apt to return to the resources of the first linguistic turn. In particular, we see Gadamer's ideas as fruitful resources for bridging the first and second linguistic turns when it comes to questions concerning art. Our Gadamer-inspired linguistic approach denies both that art experiences are completely autonomous relative to our everyday experiences (call this *the autonomy view*) and that there are direct correspondences between the two forms of experience (call this the *direct continuity view*). Instead, we see the experience of art as a situation wherein reminiscences of everyday experiences and modes of understanding are merged, reorganized, and *transformed* through processes akin to linguistic communication and sense-making. The experiences are "taken up" (*aufgehoben*), as Gadamer would say. "Something is suddenly and as a whole something else" (2004, 111). We call this *the transformative view*.

Gadamer has already received some attention within enactivist literature, both within general studies of perception (e.g., the *enactive hermeneutics* suggested by

Gallagher and co-authors; Gallagher, 2004; 2016; Gallagher & Allen, 2018; Gallagher et al., 2017), and within contexts of more specialized musical capacities and transformations (Finke & Solli, 2023; Solli, 2022; Solli, Aksdal & Inderberg, 2021; 2022; Solli & Netland, 2021; 2023). A more elaborate account of what the Gadamerian transformative view entails, in terms of the plurality of artistic media that makes up the world of art, is however still lacking. Moreover, while Di Paolo et al. suggest a convincing non-representationalist and non-intellectualist conception of *thinking* in processes of participatory sense-making, the question of *how* this should be conceived in art experience and within art-media is still unexplored ground.

In what follows, we unpack the consequences of the transformative view gradually. Section 2 establishes the linguistic framework and how we believe art and art experience should be conceived in terms of what we (inspired by Gadamer, 2000) call *an original communication-situation*. In brief, this conception shows how engagement with art – both as perceivers and performers – does not rely on any criteria outside the event itself, but is a unique communicative situation actualizing and transforming human capacities for language. Section 3 reviews Shaun Gallagher's and Alva Noë's conceptions of art experience from the enactive-symbolic perspective. Being largely sympathetic to their accounts, we show how their analyses offer valuable perspectives for the transformative view we propose. At the same time, we also note that aspects of their analyses bear reminiscences of what we take to be a too narrow enactivist view, which fails to fully appreciate art as an extended linguistic phenomenon. Sections 4 and 5 suggests a pluralistic understanding of enacted art media and a view of art and art-experience as modes of *thinking* the world.

2 Linguistic bodies and experience

Let's begin with a brief exposition of the idea of linguistic bodies and the enactive-symbolic view. A core tenet is that the mind is constituted through *enaction* – i.e., a dynamic process of "co-definition" (Varela, 2011, 614) or "mutual shaping" (Di Paolo 2018, 88) of embodied agent and its meaningful environment. Experience is not a representation of an outside world by a cranium-internal computer or a disembodied intellect but an achievement and manifestation of a living body's active involvement with the world in which it is embedded. Gibson's (1979) notion of *affordance* is often invoked to illuminate this idea. 'Affordance' here refers to how the perceived world primarily manifests as opportunities for and solicitations of bodily activity. Hammers, for instance, show up as *affording* the activity of hammering. Thus conceived, affordances are correlational structures involving, intertwining, and shaping perceiver and perceived as poles of the same perceptual system.

The notion of affordance gives us the general shape of experience, but it is not, by itself, sufficient for grasping the full complexity of our experiential lives as human beings. On an extended enactivist analysis, we can distinguish between three dimensions of human enaction: the *organic*, the *sensorimotor*, and the *intersubjective* or social dimension (Di Paolo, Buhrmann, and Barandiaran 2017, 5; Thompson and Varela 2001, 424). It is in the latter dimension that the distinctive features of our existence as linguistic bodies are realized. Before proceeding to unpack those fea-

tures in more detail, however, it will be helpful to have a brief look at the organic and sensorimotor dimensions.

The organic dimension concerns the body's self-generation as a material, living being. On the enactive view, we here find the paradigm example of *adaptive autonomy* – a type of identity generation that, the idea goes, also characterizes our existence as a sensorimotor and linguistic body and, ultimately, is an essential feature of mind as such. Briefly, an adaptive autonomous system is a system composed of a network of mutually enabling processes that actively upholds itself as an individual by registering and responding to certain internal and environmental states in light of their relevance for the system's viability (as harmful, neutral or beneficial) (Di Paolo & Thompson, 2014). This responsivity to one's own precariousness constitutes the basis for affectivity, understood as the capacity to be "'touched' by something" (Colombetti, 2018, 574). Affectivity, moreover, is here seen as an essential feature of mind and experience in general. To experience is to be influenced – touched – by what one experiences, being modulated in one's lived or felt state of being. For instance, when we grab a perceived cup and drink from it, the cup's affective value as relevant for quenching our thirst permeates its motor significance as something grabable that solicits our drinking behavior. There are, in other words, no affordances without affectivity. The affective dimension of perception also underlies the general emotional vulnerability in the face of the perceived world, a vulnerability that involves the capacity to be pulled not only toward this or that overt action but also into different moods and emotions (Heidegger, 2010).

The sensorimotor dimension of embodiment concerns the ways in which perceivers achieve and maintain a perceptual grasp on the world through mastering relations between bodily movement and sensory flow (O'Regan and Noë 2001; Di Paolo, Buhrmann, and Barandiaran 2017). From this perspective, what we perceive is a result of our grasping—in an implicit, practical way—lawlike patterns of how the sensory flow changes and *would change* relative to our movement (i.e., sensorimotor contingencies). The idea of the sensorimotor body thus expresses a key feature of the notion of affordance. Without affectivity, however, the sensorimotor body would be oriented in a world where every possible movement had exactly the same neutral value, and hence it would not really be *oriented* at all, since nothing would stand out as possibilities to be pursued or avoided. Thus, we need to understand the organic, affective, and sensorimotor dimensions as *integrated* (Netland, 2022).

Crucial to our present concern, though, is the fact that we are linguistic bodies, sharing an intersubjective lifeworld. Our environment or niche is linguistically shaped. As Di Paolo et al. write: "With linguistic bodies […] a new form of autonomy emerges at the community level, that of patterns of utterances, expressions, styles, and open-ended norms" (2018, 197). Crucially, this entails that our organic and sensorimotor bodies are *resignified* (ibid., 63) or *transformed* (ibid., 196) into resources for living a life in language, for being sensitive to and expressive of linguistic significance. With the entry of language, our human world has become a linguistic environment. This gives a new meaning to the notion of affordances: Over and above what is entailed by the organic and sensorimotor dimensions alone, the perceived world is here disclosed as something normatively relevant also for *linguistic* enaction. Thus, even experiences and activities we tend to understand as pre-linguistic need to be

conceived as continuous with the overall structuration that linguistic bodies accomplish in shaping their environment, perceptually and socially (McDowell, 1996).

Against this background, we see that a new relation to the world is thereby introduced when compared to sensorimotor and affective dimensions: in virtue of being a linguistic environment, the world is also *thought*. Linguistic bodies shape the world in accordance with thinking. The world has become *symbolic*.

Crucially, this should not be understood on an idealist basis as was often the case with representatives of the first-generation linguistic turn, who left the role of the body unexplored (more on this in Sects. 4 and 5). Yet, by focusing on how a linguistic environment concerns part-whole relationships of meaning that introduces a normative sense of *ideality* in our *understanding* of our world, the turn to the linguistic body also has an edge towards a too narrow enactivist focus on organic, sensorimotor and affective dimensions. Humans engage in our world by employing linguistic expressions, signs, and gestures (such as indexicals and the like), and thus transforms the perceived world into contentful linguistic claims and judgments. As Di Paolo et al. note, in enactive terms, symbols constitute "novel normative relations between selves and world, relations of *ideality*" that bring forth "virtual flows in participatory sense-making" (Di Paolo, Cuffari, and De Jaegher 2018, 295, our emphasis). On this account, the perceived world is the result of an organization of recurring linguistic and sense-making *social* practices over time that are fundamentally symbolic and normative.

Within this linguistic framework, we suggest that engagement with art take place in what we, inspired by Gadamer (2000), call an *original communication-situation* – i.e., a situation or environment in which verbal and pre-verbal capacities are involved in a *dialogical* mode directed at mutual understanding and ongoing disclosing of open significations in part-whole relationships. The original communication situation captures an extended and processual sense of being in language. It is not limited to explicit linguistic resources, but involves the features of bodily sense-making upon which the development of language and linguistic competence is based, constituting what Gadamer calls the human *Sprachlichkeit*[1] (Gadamer, 2010, 399 ff; see also Johnson and Schulkin 2023). In an original communication-situation both performer and interpreter are interrupted and disengaged from their habitual or ordinary pragmatic concerns and communicative use of language. This, we claim, is the typical situation of artistic sense-making.

Placing experience and performance within an original communication-situation, Sects. 4 and 5 below demonstrate how art re-livens the implicit generative resources of linguistic sense-making that are not normally attended to in habituated linguistic practices, except when attention is brought to sense-making as such due to novelty, break-down or pragmatic failure. Art, the idea goes, discloses the world in an understanding that is concerned with normative idealities and part-whole relationships. It

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[1] This word cannot really be translated into English, something which is demonstrated by Weinsheimer and Marshall's translation of *Wahrheit und Methode*, i.e., *Truth and Method* (2004), which only uses *language*, 396. Here, the sense of potentiality (which is what Gadamer is getting at, as far as we can see) is lost in favor of language as actuality.

discloses the world within an open-ended dialogue over the very significance of the world. To this extent, it is also a mode of thinking.

3 Linguistic bodies and aesthetic difference

Within the context of music, critical discussions have shown how there is a tendency among authors associated with enactivism to neglect the role of the linguistic environment in favor of a conception that views music in direct continuation with low-level coping responses to the world (Solli & Netland, 2021; Solli, 2022). Musical experience and performance are conceived as derived phenomena with an experimental basis in motor and affective affordances, leaving out the linguistic environment in which all sense-making, perceptually and otherwise, occurs.

Though neither of them associates themselves directly with the second linguistic turn, Gallagher and Noë offer valuable insights that transgress the narrow view on sensorimotor enaction, pointing fruitfully towards a nuanced conception of the varieties of linguistic bodies, that is, towards what we call the transformative view. Still, as far as we can see, some minor tendencies undermine their insights into the transformative nature of art due to reminiscences of a direct continuity view. The following discussions motivate our position by identifying possible pitfalls of the positions that have not fully embraced the second, embodied linguistic turn.

3.1 Pragmatic disengagement

In Gallagher's approach, there is a tendency to avoid depicting the communicative situation of artistic media. The focus is on the perceiver's or the performer's (e.g., dancer's) experiences in ways that treat art perception and performance separately. As we will try to show shortly, this does not do justice to the ongoing participatory sense-making that goes on in encounters with art media. The symbolic nature of art experience and performance is underplayed in favor of an organic, motor, and affective encircling of the environment of artistic affordances and kinesthetic events.

That said, Gallagher also, if somewhat indirectly, fruitfully reveals the symbolic dimension of art encounters. For instance, in discussing Yarbus' (1967) and Holsanova's (2006) experiments exploring how narrative expectations impact eye movements in seeing drawings, Gallagher (2011) implicitly highlights the significance of the symbolic dimension. Moreover, in a rather subtle passage, he notes how the perceiver implies a "pragmatic disengagement" (2021, 133):

> Since I can't pick up the hammer represented in the painting; since I can't interact with the person portrayed in the painting, I experience the work of art in the mode of an anticipatory kinaesthetics that I can never fulfill or satisfy in the way that I may be able to satisfy if the hammer or the person is present. (Gallagher, 2021, 131–132).

Because the hammer or person is present only as art, that is, as pictorial outlines and gestures — and not as a tool or a human person in everyday contexts of coping and

engagement — the art object no longer affords action in the normal way. Affordances are "short circuited" (Gallagher, 2021, 8). In this way, at least from the perceiver's perspective, there is a symbolic organization to be acknowledged in aesthetic experience, a difference of a certain kind.

However, Gallagher is quick to correct this pragmatic disengagement from the point of view of the performer:

> If this is part of the observer/audience aesthetic experience, however, a positive accomplishment of this kind of encounter with art, it is nonetheless significantly different from the aesthetic experience of the performer - the dancer, musician, actor, and perhaps even the painter and sculptor, etc. *The aesthetic experience of the performer cannot involve short-circuited affordances or an aesthetic stance that remains at the edge of action* (2021, 133, our emphasis).

Similarly, Burnett and Gallagher (2020) claim that the danger of conceiving aesthetic experiences as involving a short-circuiting of affordances and, in some cases, a re-routing of affective affordances is "that these views fail to emphasize how aesthetic practices originate in and are reintegrated into everyday activities" (168). In other words, the conception of pragmatic disengagement runs the risk of falling into the trap of an autonomy view where the art experience too forcefully is cut loose from the ordinary perception of everyday life, "carrying us away from the everyday (biological, practical) into a separate realm of strange relations" (Burnett & Gallagher, 2020, 168)[2].

From our transformative view, however, the idea of pragmatic disengagement looks different. First, the distinction between the observer's and the performer's experiences is secondary relative to the fact that the performers and the audience partake in something – i.e., the unfoldment of a medium – that plays itself out *between* the parties. Both performer and perceiver participate in a communication-situation directed at a mutual understanding of – and responsiveness to – aesthetic significance. While the capacity to enjoy art is not the same as the capacity to produce it, the parties partake in the same event of participatory sense-making, wherein the symbolic medium plays itself out in the shared symbolic environment, both in terms of being a local event and in the broader historical sense of sharing culture and a linguistically shaped environment. In other words, it is an event within an extended horizon of linguistic understanding in Gadamer's sense, encompassing the situation as a whole (2004).

Secondly, we do not have to look at the pragmatic disengagement as somehow paradigmatic for the autonomy view. From the transformative perspective, pragmatic disengagement enables awareness of being placed in an original communication-situation and a symbolic de-coupling from the habitual sensorimotor, affective, and linguistic shaping of environments, which transforms these dimensions of experience within the organization of the artistic medium. The medium brings in a process of sense-making unique to its mode of disclosure of the world. And insofar as the

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[2] This paper offers a critical review of Noë's account of art experience, but to avoid unnecessary complexity we leave this out of the current context.

medium places both observer and performer in a specific communicative situation where the very meaning and sense of signification is at issue, it draws on the general interpretative resources of linguistic bodies. So construed, pragmatic disengagement does not mean detachment from everyday activities. While it does not refer to or represent specific kinesthetic events as contents of significance, the artwork manifests continuity by taking up and transforming the generative resources of both perceivers and performers, as these are involved in shaping a symbolic environment.

These kinds of considerations seem to be implicitly acknowledged when Burnett and Gallagher (2020) turn to discuss Sandy Rodriguez's painting *You Will Not Be Forgotten*. The painting "re-routes our affective response (affording, for example, some type of empathetic response to the weeping figures), or motivates other possibilities (inspiring, for example, a longer-term reflection on the social and political context)" (Burnett & Gallagher, 2020, 171). In other words, the painting seems to initiate a communication-situation of open significance and symbolic possibilities. It appears to be a medium wherein perceptual sense dynamically emerges for the perceiver through participatory efforts.

However, Burnett and Gallagher's discussion of the relevance of the figurative evocations in Rodriguez's painting threatens to undermine this conclusion. Even though the painting evokes its figurations only somewhat abstractly, the empathic response to the outlines and gestures of child-like reminiscences, together with the political context of their execution, "is *continuous* with the everyday activities that the artwork plays upon in order to communicate these points" (Burnett & Gallagher, 2020, 172, italics added). "To the extend that art can suspend our habits of thought […] it does not by differentiating itself from our everyday encounters. It can reveal something different, in a way that shakes and challenges our everyday attitudes, *only by maintaining continuity with the latter* (Burnett & Gallagher, 2020, 169, italics added).

The crux of the matter is the meaning of the word *continuity*. Burnett and Gallagher (2020, 164) explicitly reject that it has anything to do with a one-to-one correlation between the mirror neurons activated by the artwork and the perceiver's emphatic responses to kinesthetic events outside the current art encounter (e.g., Freedberg and Gallese 2007; closely reviewed in Gallagher, 2011). They also demonstrate how the continuity does not rely on an idea of a more fundamental world of pre-symbolic affordances that art somehow gives access to. So far, so good. But then, they propose a model wherein the kinesthetic and symbolic event attains a *representational value*, construing the artistic or painterly technique as anchored in everyday kinesthetic events or a general understanding of such events. Thus, "What *Mapa* [Rodriguez's painting] is offering us is precisely a depiction that is situated in a world of meaning such that its aesthetic qualities can be immediately affective, and continuous with an understanding of what these qualities in turn *represent*" (2019, 172; italics added).

We are not denying that art is connected to the extra-artistic world. The artwork participates in the worldly situation and the lived experience of symbolic bodies. Hence, paintings like the ones produced by Rodriguez need to be understood within a broader context of meaning, drawing not only on the human and political commitments in the explicit sense but also on the resources of perceiving and linguistic bodies more generally. We do however miss a consistent affirmation of the thorough,

multidimensional, and ongoing transformative power of art and art experience. More precisely, we miss an explicit and coherent description of how the continuity between the artwork and the extra-artistic world is not anchored first and foremost in kinesthetic events that yield representational value, but is reflected and transformed in and through a larger original communication situation and the open-ended dimension of symbolic transformation.

While Burnett and Gallagher do not admit this explicitly, their model seems to entail a subtle reification of the artistic medium that undermines the artwork's disclosive powers, i.e., its capacity to initiate and keep the perceiver in an open-ended and ever-ongoing original communication-situation. Their model fixates on a part of something that arguably is a larger whole: Instead of viewing the them as taken up and transformed within a broader original communication situation, it foregrounds the kinesthetic events (part) as key. In the same move, the processual character of the painting is lost: Instead of being an object that evokes a never-fulfilled event wherein perceptual sense emerges *for* and *with* the participating perceiver, the artwork becomes an object whose sense *has already emerged*, therefore allowing it to be compared to extra-artistic features of the world. Hence, the artwork's fuller transformative power is also lost sight of: When Burnett and Gallagher (2020) talk about "re-routing of affective response" (171) or "re-organizational reflection" (169), they seem to have in mind a kind of re-organization within a cluster of possibilities and impossibilities where context *(a) art experience* stands in a representational relation with context *(b) everyday life*, rather than a thorough, multidimensional event wherein the already transformed symbolic environment is restructured into something else.

This, we claim, means that Burnet and Gallagher's model in certain respects glides too close to what we called the *direct continuity view* of the relation between art experience and everyday experience above. That is, although a simple one-to-one correspondence is not in question, their model is not able to fully acknowledge the transformative nature of the work and its symbolic organization.

3.2 Return to presence

While Gallagher only somewhat ambiguously embraces the idea of pragmatic disengagement from the perceiver's point of view, Noë (2015) does it upfront. "Art," he says, "starts when things get strange" (100). The things or *tools* of art deviate from ordinary everyday objects because they cannot be taken for granted as action affordances. In contrast to doorknobs or, for that matter, illustrative pictures in a magazine, the artwork cannot be integrated into natural-seeming contexts of action in any intelligible way. Works of art "stop you dead in your tracks. That is, *if you let them*. If you suspend. If you interrupt. If you enter that special place and altered state that art provides or allows" (2015, 115, italics original). Art thus transforms by leaving ordinary pragmatic constraints in brackets. The medium, we could say, thus affords a very different environment than that of ordinary bodily coping with the world. It restructures and shapes significance anew within its own terms of signification. There is no direct track back into the world of ordinary affordances or kinesthetic events, no direct continuity between art and the everyday experience that precedes it.

Noë (citing Heidegger, 2017) points to the world-disclosing potential of the artwork. The artwork not only shows the structure of the world but also actively institutes and sets up the very structures that organize our perception. The job of the artwork is "bringing into the open […] It reveals organization and it also reorganizes" (Noë, 2015, 199). In other words, the artwork embeds an open-ended structure enclosing its own re-organization of the resources of bodily enactments and the perceived world. The pragmatic disengagement and re-routing of the affective responses have a symbolic and open-ended dimension that places the perceiver in a communicative and sense-making environment that is enabled by the medium of art.

In effect, Noë's analysis appreciates that art brings forth a rich symbolic presence. There is no simple or direct continuity between art and ordinary experience; apparently, it is not founded by anything that goes prior to it. Art seems to be a language of its own, situated within a linguistically shaped environment. Artworks are models for worldly engagements yet without any fixed relation to what it is presented as a substitute for. In Noë's words, "there is no internal or intrinsic connection of a model to that for which it goes substitute" (2012, 102). In other words, art does not provide indexes for tracing objects, affects, or kinesthetic significances or affordances in extra-artistic world, because everything is transformed within the artwork and the perceptual encounter with it. Even if there is a trace of movement in a brushstroke, a gesture in a particular rendering of a color or a smile, these traces or sedimentations of kinesthetic events on the canvas are not contents representing something else in the world, but are reorganized within a novel communicative context enabled by the artistic medium itself. From this perspective, performance is also part of a communicative and mutual accomplishment of artistic significance, a shared aesthetic experience of all parties involved.

But again, there is an ambiguity. On the one hand, Noë correctly notes that, in perceiving an artwork, one is not concerned with *what* one sees since what is at issue is the *seeing* itself, as enabled and enacted in terms of the painterly medium: "It is almost impossible to state what they show you because, really, before they show you anything, or in showing you something, they force you up against the limits of what is showable" (2015, 167). Here, Noë clearly acknowledges the disclosive power of the work as enabling seeing, dismissing the kind of representational picture indicated by Burnet and Gallagher. Seeing, on his view, takes place in forming outlines and pictorial elements of the medium, not directly comparable to or representable by how events are indexed external to art. On the other hand, when discussing the cognitive status of children's drawings (2004, 176), this stance, which should include both the performer's and perceiver's aesthetic experience, is soon undermined. In judging the drawings' flatness and lack of perspective and skillful presentation as tied to a naïve attempt to get at things in an immediate way, grown-up standards are applied to the child's efforts in the following way: "The [grown-up] painter attends to the world not as a domain of […] states of affairs, but rather, to the world as a domain of skillful activity" (Noë, 2004, 179).

In effect, children's drawings are thus marked by a *lack*, since they are not attentive to "perspectival looks" in the grown-up's sense, having acquired the mature language of painting to render what seeing is like (Panofsky, 2020). If any trace of contents is rejected as transitive to everyday experience, art is construed a model adopting an

external standard for the correct *ways* (the 'how') of seeing that pertains to mature bodies involved in the world. Painting becomes a model for seeing, adequate or inadequate, to what seeing is really like.

However, as Merleau-Ponty has made clear, adopting such a standard of perspectival looks is an adult way of accounting for a way of seeing retrospectively, and does not pertain to the renderings of the child: "The adult does not give us the situation with the thing as it is lived, but rather offers this situation as projected onto paper as a simple 'perspectival view'" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, 418). Merleau-Ponty's point is not to devalue this achievement (in, say, classical painting), but only to point to its partiality, emphasizing that engaged bodily vision cannot be adequately rendered by imposing an external standard upon it. The adult's "perspectival view" is just one mode of symbolic articulation of lived or wild seeing that takes another and more self-sufficient form in the child's flat drawings, another mode of accounting, of expressing the demands of our bodily touch with things. What is so interesting in children's drawings is exactly that they grasp the gestures of painting in an original communication-situation (Merleau-Ponty, 1973, 147 ff.), where language is about to evolve, meaning about to emerge in a sense-making and communicative gesture that implies the adult, the perceiver's sense-making contribution (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, 9 ff.). By taking the adult's perspectival looks for granted one sees merely outlines and geometrical depth, bypassing the flesh of presence that our engagements with the world placed in the original communication-situation of the child (see also Finke, 2013; Merleau-Ponty, 2009). The first gesture, the doodling or tadpole man, is already initiating a language of its own.

Construing it as a model for perspectival looks, Noë too seems to allow for a form of reification of the artwork. By contrast, according to the transformative view, as well as the ideas from Noë that we started out from above, the *how* of the artistic medium needs to be articulated as drawing upon the same resources that are involved in how linguistic bodies disclose a world of signification. That is, as transforming the kinesthetic dimensions of seeing, hearing and touching within a linguistically shaped environment. Here, a hermeneutical circle is in play: Seeing is seeing in accordance with a medium that transforms seeing in accordance with the sense-making accomplishments of linguistic bodies —of which art is an extended medium or body of signification. Seeing is always already shaped by the linguistic and symbolic environment; it is a way of probing, looking, and revealing the world to be spoken or made sense of along with other human beings. In the context of art, seeing is rendered in an original communication-situation prior to the settling of habitually closed significance, verging on meaning and sense. It reflects and draws upon the implicit bodily resources that enables language for bodies that speak, and needs to be taken into account, as belonging to what Gadamer called *Sprachlichkeit*, in order to grasp the full and rich sense of humans as linguistic bodies.

4 Ideational presence and sensible ideas

In pursuing the consequences of the transformative view, we suggest holding on to the fruitful leads given by Gallagher and Noë, while refraining from the implicit attempt at re-connecting with the ordinary life-world as something given prior to or outside art. This does not mean that we affirm an autonomist and idealist conception of art as detached from and elevated above any ordinary life-significance, something that was easily encouraged by the first linguistic turn where the body played no significant role. Nothing is further away from our ambition: Thinking embodiment also means thinking continuity, yet through the very ways in which language and art constitute formative media crucial to shaping the human environment accomplished by linguistic bodies. Art articulates a world, not by a secondary act of modeling or expressing pre-artistic features of the world, but by transforming the relation to the world through its medium.

This section deals with what an artistic medium is and how the pluralism of various media can be conceived in accordance with the second linguistic turn. Dewey voices the precaution: "Each art has its own medium and that medium is especially fitted for one kind of communication. Each medium says something that cannot be uttered as well or as completely in any other tongue" (2005, 110). Ernst Cassirer makes a similar point, underlining that the demarcations are different within different media: "It is the art form as such that determines the 'face' of the work of art […] Each individual art form prescribes specific boundaries for this face […] it is thus a very specific way of seeing that comes to expression in the various arts" (our translation, Cassirer, 2022, 249–250). Pursuing the enactive-symbolic consequences of these observations will lead us to an understanding of the place of art in the environment of linguistic bodies that underwrites its transformative dimension – being not only an extended and embodied language on its own, but also a language that exhibits, as Dewey contends, "one of the most exacting modes of thought" (2005, 47).

4.1 The artistic media and iconic difference

Paintings, sculptures, music, poems, etc. – all forms of art put distinct senses in the foreground. Each art medium involves distinctive ways in which the resources that move in interpersonal fields are transformed into a new sensory-perceptual phenomenon. Music has its own ways of picking up, responding to, and transforming affective and symbolic aspects in a culture, which is then distinct from, say, a painting, which relies on and opens up the visible (Merleau-Ponty, 2007). Cezanne's delicate strokes, color nuances, and the balancing and destabilization of figures and backgrounds are ways in which the painting carves out and pushes forth a symbolic sense embedded in the visual world. From the enactive-symbolic perspective, the visible is relevant to the audible and musical, and vice versa. But the ways in which they are formed relate to different languages with different emphasis and anchoring in the expressive register of the linguistic body. Similarly (and differently), dance and sculpture are closely connected, as when a sculpture by Anthony Caro motivates movements with the gaze and demands a certain posture for it to be understood or accommodated, very much in similarity with grasping the movement of a dance. However, dancing or perceiv-

ing dance is still not the same as forming or perceiving a sculpture, as the former presupposes special attention to the body as an organ of expression and medium for a choreographed temporal event of meaning (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015).

In short, each medium has an artistic core, a core which must not be confused with an essence but which must be understood as a condensation of sensual-perceptual meaning that provides direction for constantly new participation and interpretation (Gadamer, 1993a, 2004), such as the tonal language in music. The language of an artistic medium never falls into place, at least when one aims to understand the artwork in its individuality rather than to determine it according to pre-established cultural categories.

In being a language, an artistic medium exhibits what Boehm (2007) calls *iconic differences*: "What becomes visible in the iconic difference is the contentfulness which it claims for itself in its absence" (38). This is Boehm's way of expressing the idea of pragmatic disengagement, pointing to the ways in which an artwork is a complete symbolic transformation of all contents into its own organization of significance. This needs to be understood against the background of a linguistic environment: even if art media are not languages in the ordinary sense, they disclose a significance, perceptual, affectively, bodily, and symbolic that is open to articulations that cannot be pragmatically closed. It is a language that remains and dwells in an original communication situation without closure, thus invoking signification, symbolic or iconic difference, only in its absence.

To avoid misunderstandings, to say that art media constitute languages is not to say that they are languages in the sense of something consisting of articulated *propositions*. They are, in other words, not languages expressed in claims and judgements concerning something being *thus and so*. Artworks don't make claims in this way. But they draw on and transform the general resources of linguistic sense-making as these are involved in initiating us to language, experiencing the situation on the whole as verging on meaning, and which requires the employment of the full repertoire of bodily sense-making and gestural attunement. In other words, it evokes what Gadamer calls *Sprachlichkeit*, designating the extended bodily sense-making that enables articulated linguistic comprehension and understanding.

In other words, art media are modes of expression structured akin to verbal language, yet without being verbal languages properly speaking. They constitute communicative situations, even if their scope and aim are not that of coming to a mutual understanding *about* something in the world, but only to re-enliven and disclose the rhythm, phrasing, tone, and modes of mutually interacting and sense-making linguistic bodies in an open-ended, that is, not pragmatically closed, communication-situation. They articulate meaning, so to speak, bottom-up, from the body in mutual sense-making and upwards towards symbolic articulation rather than downwards from concepts to their applications. They carve out the significances of the perceived world in their own ways, according to their idiosyncratic modalities and execution, invoking particular attention towards lines of rhythm, movement, and affective valeur.

4.2 Art as thought

Against this background, we now see better how artworks initiate original communication situations. Insofar as artistic media affords the enactment of open-ended significations that are embodied in phrasing, rhythm, tonality, and color, they reveal the world in particular ways, with particular resonances in bodily resources for sense-making; they yield a direction for seeing, for listening, for moving along their outlines and contours.

Moreover, we see now how distinctions between performance and experience cannot be upheld as separated moments of aesthetic experience. Just as the poet herself is the first reader (Gadamer, 1993a), dancers are performative interpreters of the dance medium that their kinesthetic fluency enacts and elaborates upon (Sheets-Johnstone, 2015), while musicians interpret the musical language (Solli, Aksdal, & Inderberg 2021; 2022), and so forth. In various ways, the media are open-ended sketches to be accomplished in experience, contributing to the working out of significance (Eco, 1989). Analogous to the way verbal language carves out perceived significance in the world, the artistic media reveals the perceived world within the scope of its own organization and distribution of part-whole-relationships aiming at a symbolic expression that constantly needs re-articulation and novel confirmation through coupled sense-making.

As Gadamer famously argues, there is always a sense of the whole guiding the attention to parts (2004, 268–299); there is an *ideality* of sense that guides and regulates the sense-making practice of moving in attunement with an artistic medium – visual, musical or otherwise (100–119). In other words, in the play of part-whole relationships, art transforms the perceived world in a way that should be seen as a mode of *thinking* the world in an artistic medium – granted that one understands thinking, more generally, as reflectively pondering symbolic relations of part and whole.

If only somewhat indirectly, Noë captures the sense of this when he states that artworks are "engagements with the *problems of life* itself," representing "an opportunity for engaged thinking" (2015, 198). Engaged thinking is what Dewey would speak of as exacting modes of thought – thought that reveals some particular in view of a sense of the whole (2005, 47). When a picture or a literary work (a tragedy, say) draws attention to the problems of life, one becomes aware of how the medium verges on signification as a *whole*, how a sense of *wholeness* is reflected in the interplay of medium-internal formations, and how this sense of wholeness concerns life, even everyday life, as such, how it is to be engaged living it, being human (Nussbaum, 1985).

Following this lead, it is possible to reformulate the idea of art-life continuity based on a conception of *symbolic ideality* rather than access to some givens outside art or any pre-given culturally laden experiences of what its symbols ultimately are about. *There is no representational value to be recovered, and yet no autonomy view is involved.* Instead, the relation of art to everyday experience is construed as a relation of symbolic or iconic difference. It reflects the relation to its contents in its absence, as Boehm has it, a content which is then the larger whole, life as lived, in which art is embedded and that by itself will require endless articulation. Art opens

this possibility up, so we read Noë, rather than closing it. Art thinks the world in an original mode of communication. It is a form of pragmatically disengaged thinking. And it converges with language in achieving symbolic idealities regulating the practice of linguistic bodies (Di Paolo, Cuffari, and De Jaegher 2018).

One peculiar consequence of all this, of art reflecting exacting modes of thinking, is how relations of part and whole might be displaced even within the artwork itself. Singular scenes, motifs, or brushstrokes can stand out as specifically expressive of the symbolic content of the whole: a singular motif or tune in a musical work or one scene in a film can be elevated to give particular presence to ideal content. For example: At a point late in the narrative of Joachim Trier's *Oslo 31. August* (2011) the film takes a turn where the protagonist is seen on the back of a bike clinging to his cycling friend, giving the impression of having given up the possibilities of change, of avoiding the unavoidable, the suicide that is set out as the path to be accomplished from the beginning of the film. The clouds of white fog released by a fire extinguisher accompanying the scene invoke an enigmatic impression, a nearly dream-like character, where the pulse of its release comes to stand in for the protagonist's heartbeat, soon to be overlaid by an electronic beat closing the take, the fading out of both sound as well as projected image. This scene does not merely fold into the overall scheme of narrative progression but stands out in its symbolic ideality as it engages us in a thought concerning this life, reflecting a larger horizon of the difficulties concerning happiness, moral luck, lives well lived, the very background of everyday concern that would complete our sense of wholeness, say, reconnection here. The viewer needs to pause to reflect on the presence of this absent whole in the composition of the scene, the existential theme of a young life fading, his resignation and renunciation of a future, a life beyond summer, and what meaning all this might claim for itself.

The lucky perceiver attains a thinking relation to the world at this moment, not in the way we would generally do in discussion, but in accordance with our attunement and reflexive or sense-making movement along this medium. The sense of the whole is something we sense in terms of gesture or posture – taking up the very direction of sense that we are heading at, the film is heading at. In this way, one might say, with Kant, that the scene in question embodies an aesthetic idea that "occasions *much* thinking, though without it being possible for any determinate *thought* […] to be adequate to it" (Kant, 2000, 192, our emphasis). The difference between the artwork and language is here well taken; the open-ended signification of the artwork remains indeterminate, not pragmatically closed. The scene leaves the perceiver dead in the tracks, to re-invoke Noë's expression.

This notion of thinking as expressing a symbolic ideality in our relation to the world was also important to Gadamer (2004) and Merleau-Ponty (2012;, 1968). In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the phenomenon just alluded to in terms of a *sensible idea*, referring to the way Marcel Proust, in his *In Search for Lost Time*, lets Swann ponder over a musical motif of love and happiness (1968, 151). Similarly, in her famous short essay on the novel, Simone de Beauvoir speaks of the *metaphysical* in the novel, meaning not the exemplification of specific philosophical ideas by text or characters (De Beauvoir & Simons 2004, 275) but the invocation of a certain ambiguity or discordance, "a meaning that will suggest problems, new twists and unforeseen developments" (2004, 272), constituting "a living discovery for the

author as for the reader" (2004, 271). In this way, the ideality invoked in writing and reading—in the unfolding of the iconic and symbolic difference that art presents—reactivates a communicative bond between performer and interpreter that returns to the discovery of oneself as a symbolic or linguistic body in relation to others, situated in the world, in everyday experience. Yet, we contemplate in art, because the world has become unfamiliar; art makes the demand upon us to recover relations between part and whole. Indeed, the ordinary and familiar has become the extra-ordinary, something which we, on certain occasions, can only marvel at (Cavell, 1994). The idea of totality in art thus grasps our reflexive presence in an original communication-situation, where something makes sense, but is not yet completed signification. Or as Gadamer would say: *It is on its way to language* (*unterwegs zur Sprache*) (2004).

5 Body, art and the linguistic turn

Crucially, the idea we are proposing here, of art perception as a mode of thought, should not interpreted as a relapse into the intellectualism that enactive and embodied approaches to the mind are set to reject. The above analyses, and the transformative view we recommend, only make sense against the background of us being linguistic bodies, giving shape to our everyday life as a linguistic and embodied phenomenon. This allows for an extended notion of linguistic sense or *Sprachlichkeit* that is not limited to a view of language as complete significations with corresponding thoughts. Hence, when we speak of thinking or thought we think of *embodied thought* – thought exercised by linguistic bodies, not by disembodied minds. And we think of language as the whole extended field of interactive bodily sense-making, bodies that understand one another in gesture and coupled interaction, including what Dewey referred to as *immanent meaning* (Johnson and Schulkin 2023, 62; Dewey 1925/1981, 200).

In this way, we hope to avoid the idealism upon which much of the first linguistic turn (Gadamer excluded) took its point of departure. Susanne K. Langer exemplifies an instance of such idealism when she claims that "[l]ike speech, that is physically nothing but little buzzing sounds, [an artistic form] is filled with its meaning […] In an articulate symbol, the symbolic import permeates the whole structure" (1953, 52). Although we agree with the last sentence, the former idea that this is achieved through an act of filling something initially meaningless with meaning fails to do proper justice to the embodied character of art perception and the immanent sense of linguistic, bodily sense-making. It fails to take our bodily existence into account. Simultaneously, the symbolic-enactive view has an edge towards an all too simplistic enactivist approach to art that founds art in low-level coping with the perceptual environment, thus ignoring how, for the human, there just is no perceptual layer unrelated to linguistic articulation. This is why we insist on Gadamer's notion of *Sprachlichkeit*, capturing not only language as a finished system of expression of propositions but also the field of potent, immanent sense pertaining to linguistic bodies in interaction with one another. To put it with Johnson and Schulkin, we want to reveal "the body-based meaning that exists pre-linguistically (in children) and then, in adults, constitutes a vast realm of embodied meaning that extends beneath and beyond language while giving rise to language" (2023, 54).

Let's pursue the comparison between art and speech for a moment to get a clearer sense of the consequences of the enactive-symbolic and transformative view. We here follow Merleau-Ponty in thinking that "we move beyond intellectualism as much as empiricism through the simple observation that the *word has a sense*" (2012, 182, italics original). Words have a gestural and sense-making significance; they are extended environments for our linguistic bodies. The field of phonetic expressions and modulations that make up speech are already expressive of a body in posture and movement, extended gestures that verge on meaning within mutual practices of sense-making, in which the gestural body already has immanent sense in Dewey's parlance. Words do not need to be "filled" with meaning by a disembodied intellect, since they belong to the extended gestural repertoire of linguistic bodies shaped in coupled interactions directed at mutual understanding and co-ordination (Di Paolo, Cuffari, and De Jaegher 2018). Like smiles and waving display expressive significance, initiating and responding to patterns of symbolic and sense-making possibilities, words manifest extensive bodily and gestural sense derived from their meaning and function in an original communication-situation. "Symbols," as Di Paolo et al. make clear, "are joint enactments that project new trajectories for collaborative sense-making" (2018, p. 10).

This occasions us to return to the very idea of linguistic bodies from which we set out, and that we might now try to make more precise. Linguistic bodies entertain communicative possibilities, patterns of possible sense, and mutual symbolic attunement that are achieved in ongoing communicative experiences, involving reflection over part-whole relationships. This means that the pattern of mutual sense-making invoked by the use of words—and the bodily, vocal, and linguistic expressive gestures upon which this relies—is always an open-ended, *unfinished* matter, always invoking a horizon of possible elaboration, intervention, and exploration: "linguistic bodies remain unfinished, always becoming, even in adulthood, […] navigating a sea of meaning-engendering and person-constituting utterances and relations" (2018, 9). In the situation of original communication and sense-making, a symbolic ideality emerges from *within* the embodied practices of language, reflecting the whole as a horizon for possible meaning: "The realm of the ideal or *ideality* emerges as meta-stable patterns or reifications in this ongoing confrontation between world, practices, norms, and bodies" (2018, 207). The idea of a complete language of signification, and of complete thought animating significations is a false abstraction. It thinks about language without thinking the body. Again, thought is embodied, situational and felt sense (Johnson and Schulkin 2023, 49 ff.). We are linguistic beings in the sense of being linguistic *bodies*. This is the insight of the second linguistic turn.

It is the full-blown embodied conception of symbolic ideality in language and linguistic practice that becomes reflected and articulated in artistic media and in the practices of art. The artistic medium does not derive its sense from being conferred upon some special meaning, but evolves from the implicit bodily sense and rhythm that is already part of linguistic behavior. And it is this also that constitutes the transitivity between art and ordinary life: Both art and linguistic practice work toward the same world of symbolic ideality, transforming the relation to the world by shaping our environment in accordance with the practices of linguistic bodies. Art shapes the

environment. It shapes our sense of everyday life and the cultures and history we share.

If we search for the words to articulate the posture adopted to accommodate the sculpture by Anthony Caro, to attune to it, one is on the way to reveal this sculpture and its affinities and correspondences to our body as an event that requires reflective thought. The perceiver engages with the body in a sense-making encounter with the gestures of the sculpture. Since this is linguistic behavior in the extended sense, thinking here does not somehow come in addition to adjusting posture and movements, but is actualized *in* the bodily adjustments *qua* the adjustments of a symbolic body. In other words, there is no thinking behind the body, no conferring of significations upon empty signs. The sculpture becomes a model for embodied thinking, and if we experience its title—say, Caro's *Early One Morning*—as adequate, the perceiver attains an everyday significance of the sculpture as soliciting exactly this gesture of words. Yet, the very openness of this moment of early morning is itself only making the significance of this enigmatic rather than closed. The sculpture does not represent anything but opens up questions and concerns for a sense of a whole, a life, in this condensed fragment of loosely connected beams and surfaces.

Thus, manifesting a language of its own, an artistic medium carves out a place for significations—in painting, e.g., for figurative motives like apples, pears, humans, faces, gestures, but also more broadly for things like engagements, moods, and ways of thinking—akin to, and continuous with how our world is disclosed in language, invoking the resources of the linguistic body, yet with a different purpose, open-ended and without pragmatic closure. From this perspective, encountering art can often be similar to encountering a language not yet known, a foreign language, except – importantly – without the expectation that words will finally make sense in the way our natural language mostly does. In the everyday language we know, words have become familiar, habitual, and it is often first when communication breaks down – e.g., when the interlocutors attempt to get the gist of what someone says in a foreign language by attempting to attune to the totality of the other person's linguistic behavior (Merleau-Ponty, 2010) – that one is brought to thinking, becoming aware of the unfinished and open-ended nature of sense-making. The linguistic and communicative capacities are then suddenly re-located in an original communication-situation. In art, by contrast, nothing is merely habitual. There is no pragmatic closure to begin with.

Thinking in art is thus specific to the medium of the artwork and its language; it is afforded by a sensible idea that invokes or projects an unattained whole as a communicative idea. This kind of thinking – where we are engaged in the open and unfinished horizon of what the artwork *says*, without claiming anything, constantly concerned with relations of part and whole that never entirely settle – is, we believe, unique to art experience.

6 Conclusion

Our aim has been to contribute to the turn within enactivist thought towards linguistic bodies, spelling out its consequences for an embodied, enactivist conception of art-experience. Thus, we have presented and defended the Gadamer inspired *transformative view*, which has an edge both against the remains of linguistic idealism that characterized the first linguistic turn and too narrow enactivist approaches to art. More specifically, we have defended the continuity between art and ordinary experience, not by founding art in low-level motor coping with perceptual affordances, and neither by recovering some representational value founded in everyday experience, but by advocating a view that construes the everyday as *transformed* by art, occasioning thinking about it, as Kant would say. The continuity between art and everyday experience consists in that they both are ways of articulating or thinking the world, reflecting our home in language. Art enables us to open up the everyday experience to itself, to question what it means rather than to represent it as given. Art thus founds a thinking relation to the world.

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