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Souriau's Animal Aesthetics In Context: Nature, Sensibility, and Form

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Abstract. The work defines three aspects of Souriau's animal aesthetics by stressing their relevance in the context of early and contemporary ethology: in (1), the concept «biological nature» which is interpreted by Souriau as a realm of appearances and as intrinsically aesthetic; in (2), the concept of animal sensibility, which makes it possible to reframe animals' artistic behaviours and the sense by which such phenomena establish a meaningful relationship with the environment; in (3), the concept of form, in the description of natural appearances, is presented as it enters into the process of institution that, accordingly to Souriau's interpretation of biological nature, encompasses non-human animals and humans. All three definitions will allow us a), to present Souriau's critique of anthropomorphism and his proposal of an «healthy» zoomorphism; b) to reformulate animals' sensibility in a non-reductionistic fashion; and finally, c) to address the issue with the supposedly sole communicative function of animal artistic behaviors.

Keywords: Souriau, Animal Aesthetics, Nature, Form, Sensibility.

INTRODUCTION: SOURIAU'S ANIMAL AESTHETICS IN CONTEXT

In recent years, animal aesthetics has gained a special place in philosophical studies. In the last twenty years in particular, animal and plant aesthetics have been studied as independent branches of study within general «environmental aesthetics» (Brady [2014]: 289). Of course, the study of nature as an exemplary object of aesthetic experience was first conducted by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant [1790]: 141). But scholars in environmental aesthetics and animal aesthetics have tried recently to overcome the purely philosophical approach to natural aesthetics, while they have widened the field of study beyond human aesthetic experience of nature. In this sense, while analytical and experimental approaches have been dominant in environmental aesthetics, animal aesthetics has taken a similar path but in a more interdisciplinary way, with contributions

from ethology, animal psychology, behaviorism, and animal cognitivism (Parsons, Daniel [2002]; Gobster [2013]). This has also expanded the field of investigation of such sciences with issues traditionally assigned to speculative approaches, e.g., natural teleology, animal value etc. (Carlson [2014]: 14-15). Also, the growing work, from the '70s onwards, on natural preservation and wildlife conservation has promoted a renewed interest in natural aesthetics.

In this very broad panorama, it may be interesting to evaluate the contribution of Étienne Souriau's animal aesthetics. Souriau's aesthetics was always influenced by the results of positivism and phenomenology (Franzini [1984]: 251; Domenicali [2017]: 133). He was not an isolated figure within continental philosophy but his contributions to animal aesthetics are less known¹. This work aims to define three aspects of Souriau's reflections on animal aesthetics: the concept of biological nature; the concept of animal sensibility; and finally, the concept of form in the description of natural appearances. In our opinion, all three concepts provide innovative insights into questions of animal aesthetics which are still relevant today: first, a critique of anthropomorphism implicitly outlined in Souriau's animal aesthetics, and the affirmation of a «healthy» zoomorphism; second, a non-reductionistic interpretation of animal artistry and sensibility; third, the reinterpretation of artistic behavior in animals with respect to its communicative function.

Souriau's contribution is relevant to a debate that recognizes some conceptual limitations. Arguably, one of the most relevant trends within the interdisciplinary approaches to animal aesthetics is the evolutionary-Darwinist approach (e.g., Paden et. al. [2012]; Wolfgang [2004]; Voland [2003]). One of its main theoretical thesis is that aesthetic phenomena in the human species are explained in accordance with the hypothesis of the origin of such phenomena through environmental adaptation and sexual selection; in the same vein, «aesthetic behaviours» in animals are

also traced back to similar causes (Miller [2001]: 20-25). In this context, the study of the relationship between «purposiveness» (usefulness), the «necessity» for animals and plants to develop biological features and behaviours, and the «aesthetic sense» that must be recognized in certain species, shows a methodological bias. As soon as it introduces philosophical distinctions, animal aesthetics struggles to develop an interdisciplinary approach for it relies on different methodological assumptions and does not overcome the «fundamental contradiction between conventional philosophy and a Darwinian approach to the aspect of usefulness of aesthetics» (Volland, Grammer [2003]: 5).

In this way, Souriau's animal aesthetics achieves something new even in terms of today's standards. He addresses classical ethological topics (anthropomorphism, animal sensibility and cognition) starting from empirical observation. But, in doing so, he assumes a broad interpretation of nature as a realm of «aesthetic appearance» that tries to resolve the dichotomies, still preserving a pluralistic ontology of aesthetic phenomena. Evolutionary cognitivism, in particular, tends to assume in animal aesthetics the dichotomy of «goal-directed action or stimulus-elicited behaviour» – already present in the works of Darwin and Huxley (Clayton et. al. [2003]; de Wit et al. [2009]). Souriau's animal aesthetics does not reduce the artistic behaviour of animals to a mere useful performance (e.g., functional to reproduction), while animal cognition and sensibility are not squeezed into a mechanistic framework. Instead, aesthetic sensibility in the animal kingdom is the sensible intellection of a form which is *instituted* by the biological life in the sense of a collective, environmentally-relevant relationship with other specimens and kingdoms. Moreover, Souriau distinguishes aesthetic phenomena that belong to different kingdoms by highlighting the differences in the application of aesthetic categories (plants, animals, humans). Still, Souriau defines biological nature in particular as artistic and aesthetic *in essentia*:

By recognizing that a natural art exists, and that there even exists a certain artistic activity in the

¹ See, for instance, Hedwin Conrad-Martius (1916, 1934).

spontaneous processes of nature, I must trace back the various aesthetic facts, that can be observed by the development of the animal life and cannot be immediately attributed to the very same animal, to this natural art. (Souriau [1948]: 219)

As we will see in what follows, starting from this definition it is possible to rethink the place of animal aesthetics with respect to, on the one hand, nature and its aesthetic manifestations, and, on the other, human art. Art has «cosmic» foundations for Souriau, that is, within nature we find instaurating [instituting, maybe?] powers that, while they instaurate forms, manifest themselves in animals as an artistic instinct. Human art is «cogenerated» by such powers (de Vitry-Maubrey [1974]: 199). This instinct is also in animals no simple reflex to external/internal *stimula*, being neither a volitionless pattern of behavior nor a guideless action (Lorenz [1977]: 211-212). Animal art «links nature and the Human» for it shows the instaurating powers that are present in nature as a whole and in human art (Mazzocut-Mis [2003]: 124). In this way, Souriau enters the debate on the anthropomorphisation of animal aesthetics and zoomorphisation of human art. Here, the danger is of misinterpreting the idea of art itself: the true misconception is not to interpret animal artisticity by adopting parameters and explanations borrowed from reflection on human art, but on the contrary, by not recognizing artisticity in plants and animals we understate human art in the first place (Souriau [1965]: 44).

1. THE INTRINSICALLY AESTHETIC CHARACTER OF BIOLOGICAL NATURE

The work Souriau has conducted in studying the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of animals represents a special part of his general definition of aesthetics as the «science of forms» (Souriau [1929]: 388)². In targeting the process of instau-

ration, aesthetics brings together the «modes of acting» and «the modes of being» and examines «how and by what means they might be combined». That is, philosophical aesthetics conceives the *mediative* nature of instauration as a «unifying synthesis» of the halves of «being (ontic)» and «action» (Souriau [1943]: 184). The process of instauration does not erase the distinction between artist and work. Instead, the aesthetics of instauration highlights how these latter are only different modes of existence, which encompass a pluralistic ontology. That means, instauration serves as suitable concept for interpreting the processes of concretization of forms in all ontological domains (e.g., human art, the physical world, culture, etc.) where we find categories that define the aesthetic characters of phenomena (e.g., beauty in human art and the physical world). Art has a morphological function as instauration, while «with each of the artist's actions, or rather *as a result* of each of the artist's actions, «the work under construction» can live or die» (Souriau [1943]: 229). The artist' actions, in a broad sense, *instaur* new entities in the process of fragile consolidation of the form, always susceptible to change, in the bound with matter and with the participation of sensibility (Souriau [1939]: 314; cfr. Lapoujade [2021]: 51-55). So, aesthetics becomes the investigation of the objective forms bounded to matter³.

For its part, in order to understand the artistic nature of animal and plants, animal aesthetics must avoid two mayor dangers. The first is the «mechanistic» reduction of animal life to a pure *stimula*-reaction mechanism that excludes any kind of conscious and intentional guidance over animal making. The second is the danger of interpreting animals' work by using the psycho-

given without a necessary active participation of animal craftsmanship, while artistic phenomena do preliminarily involve the distinction between agent and product.

³ Within this viewpoint, Souriau's interpretation of aesthetics as a science of forms with a realistic approach, as well as the peculiar interpretation of the relationship between form and matter in artistic production, is closely related to Focillon's presentation in *Vie des formes* (Focillon [1934]: 33-34, 95f).

² In the specific sense of animal aesthetics, we have to distinguish between aesthetic phenomena and artistic phenomena in the animal world. Aesthetic phenomena are

logical categories derived from the human mode of existence, without clarifying why and how far such categories encompasses the realm of the Aesthetic as such (Souriau [1965]: 7-8). The recognition of the bias that belongs to the description of animal activity in terms of response to biological instincts, genetic programs, behavioral mechanisms, environmental stimuli, etc. has been labelled nowadays as «mechanomorphism» (Crist [2000]: 203). What, then, is at stake in the description of the psychic faculties of non-human animals and their artistic behaviours, is not the exclusion of such psychic faculties from the animal kingdom but the recognition of the specificity of human self-reflection (awareness) on the psychological faculties involved in the aesthetic experience. To the second risk addressed, one may link also the need to preserve the peculiarity of the human experience of art production with respect to natural objects, i.e., to establish aesthetic categories for natural phenomena without making an analogy with human production and *vice versa*⁴.

Now, Souriau's approach to the mechanistic/anthropomorphic-zoomorphic debates is defined by his definition of nature. The categories that we may apply to the human experience of aesthetic and artistic phenomena are shared with other realms because the Human is encompassed in Souriau's peculiar definition of nature. His definition is based on a double recognition that shows *biological nature as artistic nature in itself*. He recognizes in the technical work and behaviour of animals the specific character of «artisticity». But, as a counterpart, it is exactly in the belonging of the Human to the animal kingdom that we find the roots of «artisticity», that is, we recognize artistic behavior in the animals because humans are «artistic animals». In this sense, it seems that we do not endanger art by «finding its roots in animality» (Souriau [1965]: 7).

But it would be erroneous to ignore the differences. The «gestures» and «movements» performed by animals and plants are «performed» with different modalities of awareness. «The movements of the plants are performed in a deep sleep», and this excludes the possibility of defining nature as a sort of undifferentiated kingdom with uniform forces and goals, i.e., «to affirm a global evolution of life towards sensibility and consciousness» (Souriau [1965]: 29). What it is at stake in all such observations is Souriau's attempt to avoid a naively unitary ontology of nature that uncritically erases the differences through the application of aesthetic categories or that irreconcilably separates nature and (human) art.

To understand Souriau's attempt, we are going to present more precisely in which sense the aesthetic character is something that belongs to biological nature as such. Souriau denies that the aesthetic features in animals (e.g., the colourful pigmentations of the *Chrysidia rhipheus*' wings) may represent in nature a *surplus* in a biological substratum independent of such aesthetic characters. He starts by analyzing the idea that the elements we found aesthetically appreciable in the natural phenomena are felt as some sort of «additional elements» with respect to the purely «functional» ones. For example, certain characteristics of animals must become functional, i.e., useful, to the needs of sending messages, establishing dominance, sexual attraction etc. Besides this «needs/appropriate function» relationship, there is no additional explanation for such tinsels and ornaments that are the elements that vary the most with respect to the biological system they are coupled with (e.g., wings). Now, what is questioned by Souriau is precisely the idea of functionality and usefulness. In brief, the aesthetic phenomenon in nature is functional to nothing; rather, nature is *essentially* aesthetic. The necessity connected to the existence of appreciable characters in animals and plants is not the response to a need that may have originated them. The existence of such characters is not solely explicable in terms of their

⁴ For example, one may recognize aspects of the debate over the establishment of separate aesthetic categories for the appreciation of human art and nature in the affirmed necessity, starting from the work of Saito, of appreciating nature on its own terms (See Saito [1998]: 135-149).

function or purpose in terms of survival⁵. At the same time, the beauty of the features of the *Chrysidia rhipheus*' wings is not something added to an ontologically independent substrate and therefore evaluated aesthetically (by us or other species). But one ought to recognize that the beautiful characters are *in a sense* inherent to the genesis of the living Being.

Souriau's argumentation raises some issues. The argument cannot exclude that natural beauty (or any other aesthetic category) may be the result of a «fortunate coincidence». If one takes the example of the astonishing rocky formations in the Calchaquies valley, one is inclined to recognize that all the formal elements that give rise to the sense of beauty are not the ultimate purpose of the complex geological process involved in the valley's formation. But beauty is not inherent to the genesis of the process either. Therefore, the «aesthetic parameter» is found in the natural phenomena as long as the formal elements are felt as corresponding to the «*desiderata*» of our aesthetic sensibility (Souriau [1965]: 10). The situation is different when the active participation of an agent takes part in the genesis or realization of the aesthetic phenomenon. Examples of such participation are the construction of webs, traps, backdoors holes etc. A clear distinction appears with this kind of example: it is aesthetically relevant to consider the product of an activity by some agents; or, differently, the aesthetically notable feature is part of the structure of a Being (the *Chrysidia rhipheus*' wings). Here, an aesthetic feeling must be supposed in the genesis of the phenomena.

Surely, Souriau stresses how «the arousal of the reproductive functions represents a particularly fertile ground for the appearance of the aesthetic phenomena», for example, in the case of the sensible manifestations of the reproductive organs, directly involved in the reproductive process (as in the case of flowers in plants), or indirectly involved but functional to reproduction (as

in the case of the colors in the plumage of birds) (Souriau [1965]: 18). At the very base of this recognition we find the idea, dominant within the Darwinistic approach to animal morphology, that some characteristics of the specimen in animals and plants are functional to reproduction, i.e. sexual selection, and, therefore, the perpetuation of the species (e.g., Zahavi [1975]: 205f; Prum [2012])⁶. The topic is utterly complex and presents many aspects, not always reconducible to an unique principle in the history of the species. But Souriau's argumentation highlights an aspect of biological life, the analysis of which helps to make it possible to avoid the reduction of the aesthetic features to their (e.g., reproductive) function. Souriau recognizes, in the case of the mimetic and symbiotic relationship, the ability of plants and animals to «put on appearances» and even to «pretend» or «simulate» something (Souriau [1965]: 21). In this respect, the most interesting aspect of the aesthetic phenomena in plants and animals, and their relationships (e.g., pollination), is not the biological mechanism that explains the successful adaptation of the species but rather, the fact that *animals and plants are able to generate a very specific aesthetic feeling in specimens belonging to the same or other species*. Therefore, the purpose of the aesthetic manifestations is not immediately reproduction, dominance etc. but the generation of an aesthetic sense.

In the case of plants (but also animals), the speaking of an «intention» or «awareness» in the genesis and development of the «aesthetic strategies» devoted to establishing the relation to other lifeforms, must be correctly understood. The biological mechanism is immediately and uniquely devoted to performing the *artistic gesture*. In this sense, artisticity belongs to biological nature as a category that encompasses all artistic gestures (an animal work or the showing of some features). The nature of this artistic gesture appears in all its significance in the cases where no sensible organs

⁵ This is an idea that has seen a long-lasting debate even within Darwinistic aesthetics (Wallace [1895]: 378; Dawkins [2004]).

⁶ «Darwin's really dangerous idea is his own proposal that natural selection fails to explain the evolution of all form and design in biotic nature» (Prum [2012]: 2264).

are apparently involved. The example here would be the flowers (the *Drakaea* genus of orchids) that simulate the appearance and odorous features of a female specimen of the *Thynnidae* wasp family to attract the male. Even if we cannot immediately speak about «intentions» or «sensible awareness» in the plants, there is no doubt that flowers (and animals) use their aesthetic appearance for «setting up a show», or «creating great choreographies». Souriau's argument highlights here an aspect little investigated by ethologists. If the phylogenetic structure of the species may explain in deterministic terms the biological features, this explanation would still miss an aspect of the phenomenon: The animal *must* put into action the appearance, the show, even the «artwork», and by that means it establishes the distinction between artist and artwork (Souriau [1965]: 22). That means, the biological features must be placed in relation with an aesthetically sensible «environment» – they are not sufficient in themselves to generate anything.

Souriau borrows here an idea from the philosophical tradition: the senses are in the Biological «immediately aesthetic». That is, wherever we find organically sensible apparatus, we also find sensibility and, therefore, some kind of aesthetic relation to the environments. This theory was present, for example, in Diderot's theory of the «sensibility of the organic components» (Diderot [1830]: 111). In this idea, that mutated into different forms from the modern conception of matter as intrinsically capable of motion and action (for example, in Leibniz' monadology), all matter is also sensibility and continuous generation of forms⁷. Souriau seems to rethink what was already implicit here: the Aesthetic is inherent to biological nature, because where we find sensible organs, we necessarily find matter involved in an aesthetic relationship with the environment (other specimens within a certain ecosystem). The purpose of the establishment of this relationship cannot be immediately traced back to the sole purpose of

survival (which is a result, anyway). At least, not in the sense of the immediate outcome of a mechanism responding to a need. The aesthetically relevant features are not a surplus either, because the biological is aesthetic *per se*.

2. FROM NATURE TO SENSIBILITY

At the end of the last section, an important point was stressed. According to Souriau, biological life creates «aesthetic appearances» and «performances» even where no conscious intention is apparently present. The intention guiding the artistic gesture, for example in the construction of a web, is surely present in animals. Now, in the plant kingdom one finds the artistic gesture as *an intentional gesture* because life establishes a continuity that makes it possible to define a sensibility in the Biological not reducible to mechanic reaction. A peculiar continuity between the biological basis – the «vegetative basis» of *Les sens artistique des animaux* – and artistic activity is established: «We see that the animal individually exerts an organizing, creating, instaurating action; but in doing so, the animal obeys excitements that come from the depths of life itself» (Souriau [1965]: 26). The sense of intentional gesture acquires a renewed sense: It is not what actively guides a making as the result of a mechanism of *stimula-control* solely, but an activity that supposes a form of environmental awareness and sensibility. The excitements, a kind of instinct – comes, as we shall see, from life itself. For their side, the gestures are now «instaurating action[s]».

With this definition of the instaurating action, Souriau shares common philosophical ground with Valéry, who in his famous reflections of the aesthetics of seashells affirms that «the making of the shell is lived, not calculated» (Valéry [1936]: 77). The instaurating of forms is here a synthesis of action and being. A continuity establishes the consistency of the biological life that attains human life: «Between me and the original cell, beyond which there would be nothing but biological nothingness, a positive series of living beings

⁷ An idea still relevant today (see Papapetros [2012]: 125-128).

supports me and lends a plenitude and consistency to the interval that separates me from nothingness (the biological and evolutionist thesis)» (Souriau [1943]: 119-120). Therefore, novelty and creativity gain a renewed sense and importance within continuity. The whole of nature is the realm of the variety of forms that do not only guarantee survival for the «best» by «preserving» or reproducing life according to the changes in the environment, but instead, it is «the best of all possible worlds» for it is the space of the continuous novelty, creativity, variety (Deleuze [1988]: 79). It is in this sense that Souriau's reflections on the instauration of forms are important in the philosophical inquiry into the relationship between the variety of forms and the animal's «biological creativity» for evolution and perfection (Merleau-Ponty [1995]: 59-60). The problem with the form of organisms is interpreted in the continuities of time and matter, but especially with respect to «the progress of beings towards perfection in their infinite multiplicity» (Foucault [1966]: 165; Cfr. Mazzocut-Mis [2003]: 104).

In the same vein, Souriau reinterprets the artistic gesture of animals, i.e., the fact that certain biological structures are used for the making of the artwork. In the case of spiders, we find this sort of continuity between the spiderwebs and the complex of silk gland and spinneret. The variety of organs allows variety in the instauration of forms. Still, it is not possible to exclude *intention and will* in the setting up of such appearances. It is impossible to ignore the fact that certain movements and actions are explicitly performed, in the execution of choreography and mime, in a manneristic fashion to generate exemplarity. «One could not have any doubts», about «the gibbon's intention to perform a show, as well as the character voluntary execution likely to arouse emulation, to serve as a model, to awaken the [cubs'] desire for such a beautiful exercise» (Souriau [1965]: 32).

The attention is drawn again from the supposed goal of preserving the species by all the means to the actual gesture performed by the animal. Animals maintain the pure form of the movement in mimicking the movements they

would perform for avoiding the attack of a predator (short runs, sprints, changes of direction). That brings light on the fundamental change of attitude that makes us think about the movements as embraced into an artistic operation. That is even more clear when the change of attitude by performing certain movement does create a playful situation or trickery to avoid some danger. Here we have the «instinct for theatricality» (Evrinoff [1927]: 7f). This theatricality is expressed «for the Being and towards the Being», that is, the play that is performed by the animal, is meant to generate a «show» and an aesthetic and affective reaction in the «audience» (Souriau [1965]: 102). It is the existence of the animals in itself that is aesthetic, because it is now lived as such by the animals. Only, there is no self-affirmation of such aestheticity – there is no lyricist for the Lemmings' tragedy – but a *modality* of awareness.

What kind of awareness this is, is now a complex question. First of all, the artistic character of animal life is not traced back to the single existence of the specimen that performs the «show». As has already been seen, what is artistic and aesthetic is the biological life itself. The birds' beauty is not the result of work or an action undertaken by the specimen but by biological life as a whole. This interpretation holds also for higher levels of artistry, where sensibility becomes a form of environmental awareness of the species. For instance, in the case of the construction of a termite mound, the process must be adapted by the termite according to climate, meteorological changes, and astronomical conditions, something cannot be explained in the terms of a mechanistic tropism, a «mere mechanistic reproduction of instincts». The observation of the process shows that the entire enterprise is conducted according to a form of «intelligence» that is «fossilized intelligence» of the species. The fossilised intelligence characterizes the entire animal kingdom as such and it concerns the «fundamental traits of animal operating». This intelligence is no mere response to external or internal stimuli. To support his argument, Souriau highlights how animals correct or even destroy their work if it does not combine

with a sense of perfection. Also the sequence of gestures performed with absolute precision indicates the intellection of a model, a form. In other words, what is degraded to the simple execution of a «genetic program» of action, is, rather, the legacy of a «natural intelligence» that was a true form of inventiveness originally (Souriau [1965]: 72-74; see Crist [2000]: 180). In this way, Souriau avoids the danger of reducing creativity to instinct in a very Humean fashion, while this idea is still present nowadays (Cf. Hume [1739]: 118-120; Hansell [2007]: 156f). But animal activity is not the result of a natural, fossilized intelligence alone. Souriau considers fundamental also the sensibility that underlines the gestures and work:

It is enough to say that the insect is sensitive to good form, the more or less good outcome of its work. We still do not know if such sensitivity is carried out with the vision, the sense of touch and movement, or with a little of all the senses together. But Plato's Demiurge (such a reference is not surprising: the *Timaeus* represents the metaphysics of the potter's art), the Demiurge does not give a spherical shape to his artwork «without implementing a divine model». In our insect's hereditary program of action there is implicit, in one way or another, a model. (Souriau [1965]: 74)

Souriau defines this sensibility «aesthetic». The aesthetic sensibility is, on the one hand, an intuitive appreciation of the «good/beautiful form» and, on the other, an evaluation of the outcome of the work, in accordance with a certain model of perfection (Souriau [1974]: 76). According to what we have already seen, the aesthetic sensibility is the «deepest aspect of life itself» that is present in the whole of biological nature, while it is its participation in the form that is instaurated in an environmental awareness.

3. AESTHETIC SENSIBILITY AND THE FORM IN THE BIOLOGICAL

The reference to an artistic sense immediately gives question about the origins of a specifically

aesthetic «feeling» in the animal kingdom. Ethnological studies have offered different insights into the evolutionary and adaptative role of an aesthetic feeling (taste), especially beauty, in plants and animals as a psychological phenomenon that may span all species and the history of the Biological (Grammer et. al. [2003]: 387f; Etcoff [1999]). But ethologists have often also excluded a specific «aesthetic taste» from the animal kingdom in stimulations, courtship rituals etc., saving it for humans alone (e.g. Hirn [1900]: 188). Souriau is now more interested in the aesthetic sensibility of animals in the processes of instauration of forms; but he also takes on again two reductionistic ways of understanding animal sensibility: First, the reduction of animal sensibility for aesthetic features to a pure receptiveness functional to reproduction and survival⁸; Second, the anthropomorphisation of the animal sensibility or the zoomorphisation of human taste.

Souriau defines the aesthetic feeling very broadly as a form of sensibility towards the qualitative evaluation of certain features characteristic of species as simple hints of fitness (e.g., the blue pigmentation of the *Lophorina niedda*'s plumage), or constitutive of the production of animal artifacts (e.g., the craftsmanship of the *Ptilonorhynchidae* bird). The problem with this definition is, however, how to correctly establish the correlation between the form of sensibility involved in the aesthetic appreciation of animals and humans, focusing on the way in which animals relate to their sensibility in such appreciations. The question addressed by Souriau is double: How we understand animal sensibility without, on the one hand, falling back on an anthropomorphism that sees in animals the same sensibility of humans; and, on the other, establishing a form of zoomorphism that degrades also the aesthetic sensibility in humans as functional to reproduction, adaptability, etc.

Souriau's answer to the first issue concentrates on the fact that sensibility has to be conceived in

⁸ This topic was already introduced – although only hypothetically – by Darwin (1871: 99).

the form of an intentional taking part in every step of the aesthetic performance. Does the animal experience the movements involved in an «artistic performance» (e.g., a reproductive ritual) in the same way as humans experience the intentionally artistic movements of an athlete or actor? Souriau underscores that, in the animal which executes the movements as well as in the case of similar movements by humans, we find an «affective control» or guidance over such gestures, and therefore, there is a control that «is rooted in feelings». Souriau's distinction between an emissive and a receptive sensibility is crucial here. The emissive sensibility is dominant in the execution of the movements of the artistic performance⁹. By contrast, the receptive sensibility is involved in the sensible reception of the movement and, more importantly, its aesthetic impact. The two aspects of sensibility work in conjunction. Even when the animal is performing a movement, the receptive sensibility is present, guiding the execution according to the aesthetic desired impact not only on other specimens, but also on the very same specimen performing the gesture (Souriau [1965]: 49f; see Mazzocut-Mis [2003]: 122f).

By defining the sensibility in such terms, Souriau calls attention to the fact that, if aesthetic sensibility in animals implies feelings, it also requires a controlled/controlling intentionality of movements, but even more, a form of collective experience of the whole performance. And that is in addition to its sexual character, the scope of showing dominance, etc. In other words, he stresses animal *expressivity* in addition to the expression of genetic characters (Souriau [1965]: 40). Moreover, expressivity in animal aesthetics is central to understanding aesthetic sensibility as such.

In the first place, the description of the relationship between animal movements and artifacts (see the case of the multi-celled mud nests created by the hymenoptera *Sceliphron spirifex* species) in terms of expressivity, hallows to high-

light the *symbolic relevance* of this relationship¹⁰. «Here, the aesthetic character is devoured, so to speak, by the intelligible value of the symbol it is carried with. The meaning dominates over the movement's formal qualities» (Souriau [1965]: 46-48). Souriau, then, refers to artistic sensibility in these symbolic terms to avoid an error common to ethology and animal cognitivism. Both tend to attribute all animal behavior to pure communicative functions. It is correct to affirm that the birds' song has a specific function in the life of these animals: it signals the territory that belongs to a certain community, communicates sexual attraction, danger, etc. But his community of birds that lives in a certain portion of the environment, is not only performing a communicative behavior, but is rather «listening to itself» and, by that means, it «acquires a sort of collective awareness of itself as a community in a situation» (Souriau [1965]: 56). The individual bird is listening to her own performance and, at the same time, she brings together the collective performance that acquires an artistic sense in the choral participation. Human rituals imply a similar collective sharing. The collective performance is in both cases not a pure mechanical repetition of sounds. Nor is it mere communication: as a symbolic behaviour, the performance fully uses its aesthetic features for elevating the community in a ritual. The individual birds put into action their own «aesthetic potentialities» that are now connected to corresponding «feeling movements»: first, the «free impulse» bounded to «bodily enthusiasms»; second, the feeling of rivalry experienced by the specimen in the sharing of the performance with her competitors or the past generations (both pushing towards an aesthetic ideal and the search of variations); finally, we find the excitement that the single bird receives from listening to her own singing with the others. In this sense, «the energetic persistence in singing may be sustained by a feeling, however primitive, for the beauty (i.e.

⁹ Souriau is not explicit on this point but we could think of an emissive sensibility also in the case of the development and use of certain bodily features in animals.

¹⁰ For the hypothesis of an interspecific community based on similar conditions, see Skonieczny (2014: 101-102).

the unity in contrast of the sounds they are making)» (Hartshorne [1973]: 10; see Davies [2012]: 12-15).

All these aspects of animal sensibility show also that the aesthetic feeling is present where a *spirit of ostentation* is present. The recognition of such a feeling of ostentation is needed to make sense of the natural phenomena. In fact, this feeling is a privileged form of aesthetic sensibility as explained above. Ostentation in the animal kingdom presupposes the specimen's self-awareness of its own aesthetic appearance (for example, the disposition of the plumage for a peacock) and the awareness, in the form of an as-if, of the foreseen effect it will exert over the other birds. Here, aesthetic sensibility shows a double aspect: the specimen is not insensitive towards her own aesthetic appearance – all other specimens are also not insensitive to the latter – and through such sensibility there emerges a form of affective discernment that is called by Souriau «a certain picturesque consciousness of herself» (Souriau [1965]: 65).

In its very nature, we can now affirm, animal sensibility is essentially about *how* things are done and must be done (Souriau [1965]: 74). The wasp doesn't know anything about why the nest has to be made in a certain way; still, she follows certain criteria that are implicit in the materials she uses, the environmental rules that force her to do things in a certain way and in accordance with to her own organs. Hence, the animal work shows a sensibility for *the materiality with its implicit «affordances»*, that are assumed by the animal – similarly to the work of the artisan – as suggestion which force paths for the realization of the cells (Formaggio [1953]: 346f).

In light of what has been said, it is now clear how animal artistry is an instauration of forms. The latter are more than external *design*. The form is interpreted by Souriau as the «universal idea» which every animal (and also plant) is always part of and *virtually* aware of. In this case, every termite is immersed in the *situation*, i.e., in that special environment which represents the piece of the whole mound that is a fragile instauration of a form. Every termite is aware of it in the form

of an environmental consciousness that is surely transmitted genetically by becoming the collective intelligence that comes from the deepest aspect of their biological nature (Souriau [1965]: 83). The reference to the animal's situated experience as the horizon of possible interaction with the Others, shows how the relationship between the organisms and their environments is more than merely «causal or mechanistic» (Toadvine [2007]: 42). Rather, it is the recognition that the relationship between animals and creations is the establishment of a «relationship which generates meaning» with the piece of environment they share with other animals (Souriau [1965]: 96; Toadvine [2007]: 41). By means of the reference to the institution of the meaning relationship, the symbolic aspect of the instauration of forms is indicated. The animal sends a message with the construction of a furnished «garden» that calls for other birds to join in with the collective ritual; but the message has a symbolic aspect also in the response by the female to the «call». The message is not *immediately* the communication of a biological necessity, but is an invitation to a performance they must put in action. The latter is not the necessity of the survival of the species which, for itself, would not need any show, any performance, any artifact, but a different type of necessity.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, from Souriau's reflections on animal aesthetics, an important topic emerges: in biological life we find *the necessity of aesthetic manifestations* that are, at every level, implicit in the existence itself of the Biological as a realm of sensible Beings. However, Souriau's thesis does not simply affirm the intrinsically aesthetic essence of biological nature. By stressing how the artistic and aesthetic characters of biological life cannot represent some sort of «surprising» and «astonishing» operations performed by nature, but rather that «they are essentially rooted in organic life, *in which the aesthetic fact was already present*», Souriau is criticizing the idea that everything artistic and aesthetic is

a surplus in life, something which is added purposively (Souriau [1965]: 26). Arguably, the idea that the aesthetic sense (e.g., the sense of beauty) arises in a context of utility wasn't even present in Darwin's theory¹¹. In this sense, Souriau's aesthetics is independent of any uncritical positivism, a need that is felt even nowadays (Cfr. Lestel et. al. [2014]: 141-143; Welsch [2004], O'Hear [1997]).

In his own fashion, Souriau implicitly addresses different debates. But a question remains unanswered: How do we show the existence of the necessity of aesthetic manifestation in Human art without reducing it to pure «animal instinct»? Human Beings can understand «how “nature” works», especially when they «take the place» of nature to translate its mechanisms into art: not only when the artist imitates the style of nature, but even more when humans understand the natural mechanisms that are represented in art (e.g., the dynamic of movements) and the biological laws determining certain behaviours (Caillois [1960]: 14). But Souriau stresses an even more striking point: «From a certain viewpoint, man does not create anything. Not even nature creates anything. The blossoming of the bud does not create the rose. All of its material and causal conditions were already there. The form alone is new» (Souriau [1939]: 73-74). The concept of instauration reformulates the sense of «creation» that encompasses life itself and the creativity and novelty reach, in continuum of time and matter, human art. In this way, we may accept a «healthy» zoomorphism that makes it possible to trace humans' artistic inclinations back to the original animal characters of humans. But that does not mean recognizing common features between humans and non-human animals. Rather, it means recognizing behavioral features of biological life which are not excluded from certain realms in favour of others, because such behavioral features are common to all expressions of biological life that implies an artistic action *functional* to the emergence of «appearances». In this sense, looking at the seagull's movements helps us understanding the

process of art learning in the human. If we do not reduce art to genius art alone, we find the elevating value of artistic behaviour and aesthetic sensibility that is not simple communication and reception of a genetic message but a symbolic relationship with an environment and a community.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study and conception: Mazzocut- Mis, Scanziani; draft manuscript preparation for *Introduction* and Section 1: Mazzocut-Mis; draft manuscript preparation for Section 2, 3, and *Conclusion*: Scanziani. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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¹¹ Attention has already been drawn to this point by Welsch (2004).

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