

June 14, 2020, 10.00 am

Introduction to Prof. Vittorio Gallese

Paolo Migone

It is a great pleasure for me to introduce Vittorio Gallese, who is a friend and lives in the same town where I live, Parma. As you know, he belongs to the team of researchers who in the 1990s discovered mirror neurons. However, he will not talk specifically of mirror neurons, but of a topic he is investigating right now and he is more involved with. I had tried to invite him already in past years, but he could not come because he had other commitments; originally I had in mind to ask him to talk of an interest he had at the time, namely of the application of mirror neurons discovery to films, visual art, and literature, but later he moved on to new interests, and it is on these interests that he will talk today.

It is impossible to mention the many aspects of Vittorio's professional career. I will mention only few things. He was graduated in Medicine at the University of Parma, Italy, where he is now Full Professor of Psychobiology at the Unit of Neuroscience. He is currently also Einstein Fellow at the Berlin School of Mind & Brain of the *Humboldt University*, and is also Adjunct Senior Research Scholar at the Department of Art History and Archeology of *Columbia University* of New York.

He received many Honors, impossible to cite them all, I mention only the *Sloan-Menninger-Shevrin Prize* given to him last year in Brussels from the *International Neuropsychoanalysis Society*, an award where the priority is given, I quote, "to research paradigms that connected to empirically testable areas of Freudian classical metapsychology". In 2013 he received an important award, the *Musatti Prize*, from the Italian Psychoanalytic Society, and in 2010 in New York the *Arnold Pfeffer Prize for Neuropsychoanalysis* from the *International Neuropsychoanalysis Society*, and in 2007 he received, for the discovery of mirror neurons, the *Grawemeyer Award for Psychology* from the *University of Louisville*, Kentucky (this is an important award, in past years it was received for example by Antonio Damasio, Albert Bandura, Aaron Beck, and Daniel Kahneman who came to our meeting last year).

Vittorio Gallese's main interests are in Cognitive Neuroscience, Experimental Aesthetics, Neuropsychology, Psychopathology, and Philosophy of Mind.

He is in the editorial board of several journals (among them, *Neuropsychoanalysis*, *Cognitive Neuroscience*, *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, etc.).

The research activity of Vittorio Gallese since the beginning focused on the relationship between the sensory-motor system and cognition, and on the way the brain represents space, the visuo-motor processes presiding over reaching-to-grasp actions and action understanding. In more recent years he broadened his research interests to the neurobiological basis of intersubjectivity, empathy, aesthetics, language and theory of mind. He also applies neuroscientific methods to study autism and schizophrenia. He has been involved in multidisciplinary collaborations with other disciplines, like philosophy of mind, cognitive linguistics (he collaborated with George Lakoff, among others), aesthetics, narratology, and psychoanalysis (with Morris Eagle and me, for example, he co-authored some papers, two of them in JAPA). He developed the "Embodied Simulation Theory", which is a unified model of basic aspects of intersubjectivity.

Finally, I want to say that one aspect of Vittorio that I admire is his being a real intellectual, by this I mean that he has wide interests also in other fields, such as art, music, literature and the humanities in general. To this regard I want to mention another prestigious honor, that is outside our field. In Parma, our city, there is an exclusive club, called "Club of 27", where 27 is the number of the operas by Giuseppe Verdi, who was of Parma. In that club there are 27 men, each named with the title of one of Verdi's 27 operas. When one of them dies, another one is elected in these prestigious club. Well, Vittorio has been elected to be part of this elite of Verdi's fans, and he represents the opera *The Lombards on the First Crusade*.

So, I introduce to you the "Lombard on the First Crusade", Vittorio Gallese. His paper is titled "Habits, Social Practice and Symbol-making. A Just-so Story".