



# **PATHS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART TO EVERYDAY AESTHETICS**

**EDITED BY OIVA KUISMA, SANNA LEHTINEN AND HARRI MÄCKLIN**



## Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics

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PATHS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF ART TO EVERYDAY  
AESTHETICS

Eds. Oiva Kuisma, Sanna Lehtinen and Harri Mäcklin



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OIVA KUISMA, SANNA LEHTINEN & HARRI MÄCKLIN  
**INTRODUCTION: FROM BAUMGARTEN TO  
CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS**

Contemporary philosopher-aestheticians with varying backgrounds such as Arnold Berleant, Richard Shusterman and Wolfgang Iser have drawn attention to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten as a thinker still worthy of scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> Generally, Baumgarten is known as the person who invented, or rather formulated, the term aesthetics and introduced it to the academic world: first in the Greek form *episteme aisthetike* (sensory knowledge) in his brief academic dissertation *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*, § 116 (1735)<sup>2</sup> and later in the Latinized form *aesthetica* in his systematic but unfinished *Aesthetica* (two volumes published: I 1750; II 1758).<sup>3</sup> The introduction of a methodically useful term and concept is an achievement in itself,<sup>4</sup> but what Berleant, Shusterman, and Iser want to emphasize is the content of Baumgarten's definition of aesthetics: aesthetics is a science surveying "sensory cognition", "scientia cognitionis sensitivae" (*Aesthetica*, prolog. § 1). Noting that along with sense-perception sensory cognition also covers imaginary sense-perception (or simply, imagination), Baumgarten's definition is a conspicuously wide one. It does not, in principle, rule out anything perceptible from the scope of aesthetic research.

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1 Cf. Iser, *Undoing Aesthetics*, 39–41; Tr. By Andrew Inkpin. London: Sage Publications 1997. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 263–267. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2000. Berleant, *Sensibility and Sense: The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, 12–13; 20–21. imprint.academic.com 2010. E-book.

2 Baumgarten, Alexander G. *Reflections on Poetry: Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus*. Text and translation by K. Aschenbrenner and W. B Holther. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1954.

3 Modern edition with German translation: Baumgarten, Alexander G., *Ästhetik I–II*. Herausgegeben von Dagmar Mirbach. Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag 2007.

4 The introduction of the term aesthetics (*episteme aisthetike*) was a significant achievement especially in the sense that Baumgarten (born 1714) was only 20 when he used the term in his thesis *Meditationes* in 1735.

Baumgarten formulated the *episteme aethetike* on the basis of the Greek term *aistheta*, signifying things perceived in distinction to objects of intellection, *noeta* in Greek (*Meditationes* § 116). To recognize, analyse, and classify objects of perception, however, is not what primarily is at stake in aesthetic research. That would be the objective of, say, biological research, which aims to survey objects and phenomena objectively, i.e. as physical objects and phenomena. In distinction to this, *aesthetica* in Baumgarten's derivation does not aim only to the survey of *aistheta*, objects of perception, but also and eminently to the study of the subjective side of perception, i.e., to personal experience and its advancement. Aesthetic cognition does not signify only neutral registration of objects of perception but also the emotional and cognitive tone attending sensory perception. A simple example may clarify this point: if a person recognizes that a bird singing in a tree is a blackbird, s/he is making an observation belonging to the domain of ornithology. But if s/he looks with admiration at the beauty of the blackbird and listens with enjoyment to its singing, s/he has entered the domain of aesthetics. In this sense, Baumgartenian aesthetics does not aim at the truth of cognition – which is the end of *logica* in Baumgartenian terminology – but at the beauty of sensory cognition. In Baumgarten's own words: "The end of aesthetics is the perfection of sensory cognition. And this is beauty (*pulcritudo*)." (*Aesthetica* § 14). In distinction to properties studied by natural sciences such as height, breadth and weight, beauty is not a character or property to be recognized by neutral observation but through personal experience.

The introduction of beauty as the fundamental value of sensory cognition is not, however, a thoroughly innocent move in determining the domain of aesthetic research. It has various consequences, of which one is that it is a step toward narrowing the broadness and openness of Baumgarten's own definition of aesthetics as the science of sensory cognition. The notion of beauty narrows the scope of aesthetics for the simple reason that beauty as a value so easily comes to be attributed only to the cognition of visual and audible objects of perception. This means that objects of olfaction, physical taste and sense of touch tend to fall out of the scope of aesthetic research. A consequence, though by no means a necessary one, of the neglect of

these “lower” senses is that aesthetic research focuses on artworks at the cost of also attending to and surveying nature’s multi-sensorial aesthetic features. This is what in practice happened in aesthetic research after the age of Baumgarten. In this regard, G. W. F. Hegel’s influence was to be of crucial importance: he defined the domain of aesthetics as the philosophy of fine art, “Philosophie der schönen Kunst” (*Ästhetik* I, 13).<sup>5</sup> Hegel explicitly removed natural beauty from aesthetic research because in nature there is no self-consciousness apart from human activity. In contrast to natural beauty, artistic beauty addresses human beings because it is produced by human beings characterized by self-consciousness. (*Ästhetik* I, 13–15.) Human beings can understand artistic beauty produced by other human beings, and one of the tasks of the philosophy of fine art is to help people cultivate the ability to understand art.

Hegel’s great predecessor, Immanuel Kant, did not underrate the value of natural beauty but neither did he make of it the prime subject of aesthetic research, since his focus in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* was on the general analysis of judgements concerning beauty, sublimity, and teleology. Kant’s notion of the aesthetic judgement, especially because of his emphasis on disinterestedness (*Kritik der Urteilskraft* § 2),<sup>6</sup> was easily adapted to art critical discourse, having repercussions even in the promotion of the art for art’s sake ideology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But from the standpoint of promoting the appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of one’s environment, both natural and cultural, the notion of disinterestedness has been criticized because it demands distancing oneself from the object of appreciation.<sup>7</sup> Disinterested distance-taking does not work practically in the case of one’s environment, because we are necessarily in some place and environment. We can change our position with regard to particular objects such as trees, stones and animals, but we cannot move away from the environment surrounding and permeating both us and trees, stones and animals. In the case of art (excepting environmental art), the situation is the other

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5 G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* I–III. Werke 13–15, red. E. Moldenhauer und K. M. Michel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2001–2004 (1970).

6 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Werkausgabe X. Herausgegeben von W. Weischedel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1990 (II. Aufl.).

7 Cf. Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 12–31. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1991.

way round: we cannot move into the world of an artwork, be it a painting, film or poem, even if we attempted it with all the force of our imagination. We can imagine being in the Ithaca of Homer's *Odyssey* or in the Dublin of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, but we cannot enter those imaginary worlds in reality. From the opposite point of view, we can imagine not being in this or that environment, but we cannot imagine being absolutely nowhere. We necessarily are somewhere and we necessarily imagine being somewhere, even if the environment were an imaginary empty space.

Conscious attention to the fact of being necessarily situated in some place and environment has been one of the motives that have led to a growing scholarly interest, first, in environmental aesthetics from the 1960s onwards and, secondly, to everyday aesthetics from the 1990s onwards. This broadening of the scope of aesthetic research accords well with the original idea of Baumgarten's project of the science surveying sensory cognition. However, as noted above, Baumgarten himself narrowed the domain of aesthetics by adjusting it to the traditional aesthetics of beauty. Moreover, much of his *Aesthetica* is dedicated to traditional humanistic and art theoretical issues. He, for example, demands from aestheticians erudition in matters concerning God, universe, and man (*Aesthetica* § 64). This is certainly a very grandiose goal for any scholar; so grandiose, that Baumgarten a couple of paragraphs later moderates it in saying that he does not demand polymath (*polyhistora*) or pansophic (*pansophum*) learning from aestheticians (*Aesthetica* § 67). But in any case, aestheticians seem to be very learned persons in the Baumgartenian view.

Contemporary aesthetics does not aim – at least, not usually – to such heights of learning which would comprise not only man (humanities) but also the universe (cosmology) and even God (theology). Contemporary aesthetics has become more secular compared with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but on the other hand it has broadened its domain to cover not only the traditional subjects of art and beauty but also, in the spirit of Baumgarten's broad definition of aesthetics, the most common and ordinary phenomena of the environment and everyday world. This broadening does not lead only to theoretical discussion but also to some kind of practical benefit: proper attention to the aesthetic dimension of our everyday world may enhance

the quality of our everyday life. The aesthetic quality of our everyday life receives an opportunity to grow when we pay attention to the aesthetic dimension of our everyday world and when from this attention grows an ethical responsibility to take care of our aesthetic environment. Hence, one might say that aesthetics is a very practical branch of learning.<sup>8</sup>

The possibility of improving our everyday aesthetic life can also be linked to Baumgarten's original project of aesthetics, especially to his notion of *felix aestheticus*, the happy aesthetician (*Aesthetica* §§ 27–37, etc.). *Felix aestheticus* is literally a very positive notion, referring to the growing happiness or well-being to which learning and practice in aesthetics can lead aestheticians. The happy aesthetician is a learned person, who knows much about art and beauty as well as about the aesthetic dimension of our everyday world. Thinking about this optimistic prospect, we got the idea of editing a collection of new surveys showing some aspects of the paths leading from the aesthetics of art to everyday aesthetics. We dedicate these surveys to a *felix aestheticus*, Professor Arto Haapala, on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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The intriguing interlacing of the central themes of art and the everyday is one of the guiding lines of this collection of invited essays. As the title of this collection – *Paths from the Philosophy of Art to Everyday Aesthetics* – indicates, the following essays represent the way in which the traditional emphasis on art is giving way to a more all-encompassing aesthetic investigation in which the aesthetic issues of everyday life are gaining prominence alongside questions related to art. In the first part of the collection, the essays by Morten Kyndrup, Lars-Olof Åhlberg, Markus Lammenranta, and María José Alcaraz León all in their turn outline a series of contemporary issues in the philosophy of art. In addition to discussing art philosophical issues using terms such as the modern and the commonplace, these essays

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<sup>8</sup> From this practical point of view, aesthetics can be compared to ethics in the Aristotelian sense: the aim of ethics is not only to study virtues but also to become personally good, agathos (Nicomachean Ethics 1103b26–29). Nicomachean Ethics. Tr. by H. Rackham. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press 1990.

refer to our lifeworld, to the everyday, which is discussed more thematically in the second part of this collection.

The collection begins with Morten Kyndrup's essay "Were We Ever Modern? Art, Aesthetics, and the Everyday: Distinctions and Interdependencies", in which he argues intriguingly that the answer to this question might not be as obvious as it might seem. By "we" Kyndrup refers to the community of aestheticians and by "the Modern" a process of division where individual systems of knowledge gain increasing autonomy. Using the theories of Jacques Rancière and Bruno Latour, Kyndrup traces the way the notions of "art" and "the aesthetic" emerge within the overall development of modernity and argues that from the start, art and aesthetics have been intimately linked together, though the effects of this co-determination have not been sufficiently understood. In Kyndrup's view, art and aesthetics are still in the process of "becoming modern", where they are increasingly understood separately from one another. Kyndrup proposes that an interrogation of the interdependence of art and aesthetics in modernity can open up unthought of possibilities for a broader notion of the aesthetic that exceeds its determination in relation to art. In this way, Kyndrup suggests, we can get a clearer picture of what is at stake in our aesthetic theories.

Lars-Olof Åhlberg takes a critical look at Arthur Danto's seminal work *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981) in "Everyday and Otherworldly Objects: Dantesque Transfiguration". Åhlberg focuses on Danto's use of the term "transfiguration" as well as other theological terms, arguing that Danto's analogies to Christian religion are based on conceptual misunderstandings. Most importantly, Åhlberg argues that Danto's central term "transfiguration" actually refers to *transubstantiation*, thereby introducing a confusion into the heart of his theory of art. By contrasting Danto's writings with theological literature, Åhlberg examines how Danto's mistaken analogies affect his theory and how these analogies, when properly amended, can illuminate his theory in ways that his own writings fail to articulate. A deeper understanding of Danto's theory can shed light on the way art can transform the commonplace – the ordinary, the everyday – into something extraordinary.

In “How Art Teaches: A Lesson from Goodman”, Markus Lammenranta inquires if and how artworks can convey propositional knowledge about the world. Lammenranta argues that the cognitive role of art can be explained by revising Nelson Goodman’s theory of symbols. According to Lammenranta, the problem of Goodman’s theory is that, despite providing an account of art’s symbolic function, it denies art the possibility of mediating propositional knowledge. Lammenranta claims that Goodman’s theory can be augmented by enlarging it with an account of direct reference developed by Bertrand Russell and contemporary philosophy of language. On this basis, an expanded version of Goodman’s theory can explain how artworks can express propositions even without being linguistic, representational, or non-fictional. Lammenranta explicates his theory by explaining how abstract paintings and literary fictions can mediate propositional claims about the actual, everyday world.

In addition to propositional knowledge, engagement with artworks can afford other kinds of cognitive value. One of these is discussed by María José Alcaraz León in her article “Aesthetic Intimacy”. She surveys aesthetic intimacy as a notion that aims to offer a deeper understanding of important features of encounters with art and other aesthetic phenomena. However, as Alcaraz León shows, the notion of aesthetic intimacy proves to be difficult to define satisfactorily. After analyzing several ways of defining the concept, she concludes that aesthetic intimacy affords a special kind of understanding of someone else’s aesthetic choices. When this kind of intimacy is experienced in the case of art, we become aware of the aesthetic choices of an artist in a way that affords us a possibility of feeling togetherness with the artist’s work.

In the latter part of the book, the emphasis of the essays turns from the sphere of art towards the realm of the everyday. In this transition, Maritta Heikkilä’s and Knut Ove Eliassen’s essays function as a bridge between the philosophy of art and everyday aesthetics.

Knut Ove Eliassen’s “Quality Issues” focuses on the notion of quality in its contemporary and ubiquitous use. Continuous assessment and concern about measurable or experienced quality seems to have taken a central place in the prevailing discourses of affluent contemporary societies.

Eliassen pays close attention to the historical development of the quality discourse. He depicts the implicit and increasingly debatable ideology behind the fixed focus on quality assurance, which in itself is symptomatic of the self-defeating yearning for total control.

In her article “Work and Play – The Built Environments of Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil*”, Martta Heikkilä discusses how Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive notion of architecture can help us rethink the way buildings sustain our everyday lives. Built environments are often understood in terms of their way of supporting our everyday lives and our meaningful engagement with the world. By studying how a totalitarian society is portrayed in the cinematic environments of Terry Gilliam’s dystopian film *Brazil* (1985), Heikkilä shows how easily the functionality of ordinary places, such as apartments, offices, and streets, can become dysfunctional, meaningless, and oppressive. Heikkilä argues that Heidegger’s well-known analyses of the notion of dwelling do not exhaust our possible relationships to the built environment. Turning to Derrida, Heikkilä claims that every place harbours within itself the possibility of inverting its presupposed meaning and becoming antithetic to meaningful human dwelling. By way of a detailed analysis of Gilliam’s *Brazil*, Heikkilä demonstrates how Derrida’s deconstructive notion of architecture can offer a new possibility of thinking about the relationship between architecture and everyday life in a way that exceeds the notions of functionality and dwelling.

Finally, the remaining essays by Kalle Puolakka, Ossi Naukkarinen, Mateusz Salwa, and Francisca Pérez-Carreño concentrate more specifically on the problematics of the everyday.

Some aestheticians, such as Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen, have argued that the ordinariness, routines, and familiarity which constitute the “everydayness” of our everyday lives are integral and fundamental aspects of human existence. In his article “Does Valery Gergiev Have an Everyday?”, Kalle Puolakka opposes this “restrictivist” account of everydayness by taking a look at the hectic life of the Russian conductor Valery Gergiev. Puolakka argues that Gergiev’s extraordinary lifestyle, which is filled with constant travelling and conducting the leading orchestras of the world, lacks the ordinariness that the restrictivists take as a necessary and unavoidable



dimension of human life. By showing how Gergiev's everyday life cannot be accommodated by the restrictivist account, and thereby arguing that ordinariness and familiarity are not necessary components of everydayness, Puolakka makes way for an "expansionist" account of everyday aesthetics, where the aesthetic value of everydayness is found by learning to see the extraordinary hidden in the ordinary itself.

Francisca Pérez-Carreño pays attention to the less obvious facets of everyday aesthetics in her essay "The Aesthetic Value of the Unnoticed". Pérez-Carreño uses a rich array of examples to illustrate her argument and makes evident how aesthetic pleasures of all kind are intrinsically present in the everyday life of human beings. Taking a different point of view, i.e. the standpoint of garden aesthetics, Mateusz Salwa in "Everyday Green Aesthetics" sets out to investigate the aesthetic value of everyday nature surrounding our everyday life. According to Salwa, this has been a largely neglected area of inquiry, which nonetheless has obvious potential to unite more concretely environmental aesthetics with everyday aesthetics. Salwa applies Rosario Assunto's notion of garden aesthetics to show how and when, in the form of gardens, nature is intentionally appointed the object of aesthetic attention instead of serving as a mere background for quotidian activities.

The contributions of Ossi Naukkarinen and Richard Shusterman widen the scope of inquiry to include topics that have so far been of only marginal interest in philosophical aesthetics. Naukkarinen aims at introducing contemporary technologies into the discussions on everyday aesthetics with his "Feeling (With) Machines". The theme is approached through focusing on how networked computers are changing the sphere of the everyday and how this, in turn, affects the study of everyday aesthetics. Naukkarinen speculates on the likely possibility that taking everyday technologies into proper consideration might ultimately affect the whole academic discipline of aesthetics.

From the promises and perils of technology, Richard Shusterman directs his attention to the human body. His "Pleasure, Pain, and the Somaesthetics of Illness: A Question for Everyday Aesthetics" concludes the selection of essays with a reflection upon the experiences of pain and

illness. Shusterman shows how somaesthetic awareness in particular could help to face the inevitable pains and ailments that everyone must at some point of their life encounter. The somaesthetic project is thus proven to show its potentiality for soothing instead of solely focusing on optimizing pleasure.

The collection of essays is followed by an epilogue by Jos de Mul. “These Boots Are Made for Talkin’: Some Reflections on Finnish Mobile Immobility” is an exhilarating depiction of how national qualities are paid close attention to by philosophers working in the field of aesthetics. Full of lively reminiscences of an academic visit to Finland, de Mul’s narrative demonstrates practically how aestheticians see and experience the everyday world – and sometimes a little bit different world – around us.

## WERE WE EVER MODERN? ART, AESTHETICS, AND THE EVERYDAY: DISTINCTIONS AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the conceptual and historical preconditions of the notions of aesthetics in a “broader” sense, i.e. thus also including “aesthetics of the everyday”, “environmental aesthetics”, etc. This implies a critical re-description of backgrounds, contexts, and functions of the initial, early Modern developments of the two concepts, “art” and “aesthetics”, respectively. Approaches and interpretations by Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière, among others, are discussed in that connection. In conclusion, the paper argues that a distinctive acknowledgement of the initial interdependency between “art” and “the aesthetic” is the decisive precondition for subsequently separating them properly – the latter being what seems to be needed in order to eventually becoming Modern.

**W**e all know that “art” and “the aesthetic” are inextricably interconnected concepts and phenomena. They are connected in their historical backgrounds of engendering in a modern sense, especially during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and they are connected in their subsequent histories of development, respectively. However, the question about *how* they are connected, and how they have developed in relation to one another, leads to a difference of opinions. Both in aesthetics, in the singular art sciences, and in the disciplines connected to the history of ideas, there is anything but consensus about how this connectedness is based, and how it has developed. This especially means that the question about, whether dealing with “aesthetical” qualities outside the area of art makes any sense, is approached under utterly different premises, and accordingly, provided with extremely diverging answers.

We probably also all of us know that we are living at a civilization

historical stage, which may rightly be referred to as “Modern”, in an overall sense. By Modern in this sense, we understand, above all, a qualitatively higher level of the societal divisions of work, the steady increase of which characterizes all developments in the history of civilization. In the Modern, these developed divisions of labour get a qualitatively different character of becoming real differentiations, even into relatively independent ways of understanding and naming the world, and ourselves. In the Modern, e.g. politics, ethics, religion, science – and art, are separated to becoming autonomous areas or systems with each their own rules of exchange and delimitation. And above all, by the Modern, the basis for legitimation of everything is switching towards the mundane, towards what we call immanence. In Modernity, any phenomenon, approach, or difference needs to be legitimized from below, in and by themselves. Substantiations can no longer take place with reference to powers or authorities outside the world, in which we live.

But beneath this general consensus at a supreme level, we here also find several utterly different notions about how to understand this Modern space, especially about how it has developed, and where we are actually situated today, in relation to this space. Is the Modern chapter done with, as it has been claimed by voices among the so-called Postmodern? Has the Modern been a sort of conceptual illusion or utopia, which we have actually never been able to reach, and perhaps never wanted or ought to reach, so that we have actually never been Modern, luckily or unfortunately? And this to an extent that perhaps we never can nor will become Modern in this sense? Anti-Modern, non-Modern, alter-Modern, para-Modern? The concepts swirl around, and along with them the attitudes to where we actually are situated in relation to this allegedly Modern space, modally, mentally, historically.

But in spite of the differences in approaches, there is more or less agreement about the fact that the constitution and extension of “art” and “the aesthetic”, concepts as well as phenomena, are intimately linked with the entire complex of problems of the Modern. In general, this consensus also includes the fact that the development of differences, of areas, and of the complex horizon of the Modern as a whole, are *emergents*, using

a metaphor from biology. This means that what is at hand cannot be reduced to its components, to the stages or phenomena from which it was developed. Modern natural science can no longer be thought of within a unified system of “arts” based on defined, learned skills, which were the horizon of the Middle Ages. The court of Louis XIV would be unable to acknowledge John Cage’s “4’33” as legitimate music of *divertissement*, as “art”. Therefore, even if de-differentiations may take place here and there, the overriding picture is absolutely the opposite. Differences develop, they are deepened, and they are consistently irreversible.

This essay attempts to critically redescribe the general development of “art” and “the aesthetic” within this Modern. Its particular purpose is to qualify the discussion of potentialities and boundaries of a possible so-called broader concept of the aesthetic, i.e. a concept that includes our dealing with the phenomena also outside the specific area of art. This will take place in five paragraphs. First, we will have a look at the complex mutual interdependence of art and the aesthetic in their histories of engendering, dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From there, we will outline the main elements of the history of development, since then. Next step will be an inclusion of some important positions within theory and history of modernity in an analysis of the situation today, within this problematics. On that background, the extension of an adequate, analytically productive, broad concept of the aesthetic will be outlined. Finally, this discussion will be added to the contemporary stance of the question about where we are in relation to the Modern – and where we seem to be heading.

## THE GENESIS

**T**he history of genesis of the modern concepts of both art and aesthetics is fairly well known.

In the case of art, it is about its gradual detachment from crafts and from its defined functions in terms of representational symbolic character, towards constituting its own completely particular sphere,

as described in e.g. Paul Oskar Kristeller's influential scholarly studies.<sup>1</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this development eventually leads to a situation, where "art" may be described and conceived of as a collective singular of a quite distinct character. Above all, as something so historically peculiar that, by definition, it has no purpose outside itself. Art in that sense has become *autonomous*. With this new general concept it also becomes possible and natural to operate with a system of "artforms" with a joint reference to a supreme substance, c.f. Batteux's famous treatise from 1742.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, differences and similarities may now be discussed in a comparative ranking, as done by G.E. Lessing in 1766.<sup>3</sup>

Aesthetics as a concept, equally well known, is named by A.G. Baumgarten in the 1730s, and is codified as the discipline about (a particular kind of) sensuous cognition in his *Aesthetica* from 1750.<sup>4</sup> But prior to Baumgarten's specific definition of the concept, still more widespread considerations about the preferences of an audience had arisen, about good and bad taste, and in general, about the specific functions in the sense-based perception of distinctive types of phenomena, as e.g. in Hume.<sup>5</sup> And shortly after Baumgarten's work, the "aesthetic relation" and the particular conceptual physiognomy of the judgment of taste is analysed by Immanuel Kant, in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* from 1790, an important work which is basically still adequate.<sup>6</sup>

It has, however, been less known, or at least less recognized that the separation of the two conceptual fields of "art" and "the aesthetic" not only takes place in the same process, but that the two concepts, in addition, actually presuppose and precondition each other. Jacques Rancière, in his *Aisthesis*, 2011<sup>7</sup>, accurately analyses how the very separation of production from reception, of poiesis from aisthesis, constitutes the possibility for their respective independence and thus for their diverging directions of

1 Paul Oskar Kristeller. 1980. See also Larry Shiner. 2001.

2 See Charles Batteux ("Abbé Batteux"). 1746. *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*.

3 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. 1766. *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*.

4 Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. 1750. *Theoretische Ästhetik. Die grundlegenden Abschnitte aus der "Aesthetica"*, 58. Translated by Hans Rudolf Schweizer. 1988.

5 David Hume. 1757. *Of the Standard of Taste*.

6 Immanuel Kant. 1790. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. See also Morten Kyndrup 2018.

7 See Jacques Rancière. 2011. Jacques Rancière. 2013.

development to come. Historically, this separation takes place during a long process. In aesthetics, it is about the gradual formation of an audience, including the subjective feeling or experience of being a part of/ belonging to an audience like that – and by this, the legitimation of being able to experience and to express oneself on behalf of this audience. This new independency of the perception side and the receiver position can also be detected for instance in language. Raw nature may now become a landscape, i.e. something that is clearly experienced as addressing somebody. And such a landscape may even be positively characterized as picturesque (that is as something, which looks like a picture of a landscape). The addressedness is made explicit, and anybody's feeling of oneself being the target of this address is strengthened, and eventually resulting in an increased inclination towards personal evaluation, judgment of taste.

On the production side, the artists are gradually changing orientation towards the production of works, no longer referring to specific commissions for predefined purposes by a materially privileged client/patron, but now towards a still more generalized (art)market, in which the preferences of an anonymous audience are becoming materially significant too. This means that artworks are now produced in anticipation of a subsequent judgment (of taste), the outcome of which the artist is unable to know during the creating process. The break or the detachment between production and reception therefore becomes absolute in a completely new sense, historically. The artist is unable to produce according to anything but his/her own feeling of quality (a feeling, which then soon after comes to be characterised as an inner necessity). Art, which panders to the supposed taste of an audience, is downgraded because it violates the dictum of art as “purposiveness without a purpose”. In that way, the separation seems absolute, although, historically, to a high extent, the two sides have produced each other. The artistic genius, according to Rancière, becomes the hazardous bridge stretched between two heterogeneous kinds of logic – the concept implemented by art, and beauty without a concept.<sup>8</sup> “And” he continues, “it is exactly this separation between the reasons of art and those of beauty, which makes art exist as such, as its own world, and not simply as a skill of the artist.”

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<sup>8</sup> Rancière. 2011, 30. 2013, II.

From the beginning, the mutual complex interdependency of these concepts is thus completely literal and concrete. The modern concept of an autonomous art would not have arisen without the segregation of a historically new particular approach to this art from a “somebody” to which it addresses itself, i.e. without a distinctively separate aesthetic relation. No art without aesthetics. Conversely, no aesthetics without art either. The nurturing and the development of a specific area, “art”, that can offer us an arsenal of singular artefacts, created for no other purpose than for being purposeless objects for our judgment-oriented perception, historically becomes the greenhouse of aesthetic relationality. From being mainly just a passive registration of the fact that something may be to one’s taste, it develops into the concise evaluative relation, which establishes an actual passage from “me” over “that” to (the notion of) a “we” – the way we have known it since Kant.<sup>9</sup>

It is, however, also important to notice that, in its point of departure, this sensuous perception – which later was to become the aesthetic one – was not limited to art only. This is true already of Baumgarten’s very definition of the concept.

In general, the basic separation of production and reception could evidently never have taken place outside the space of a developing Modern, in which differentiation of access and values, in terms of independency and interrelationship, made it possible at all to conceive of that kind of differences also asymmetrically. The good, the true, and the beautiful are no longer parallel values. A system of differing regimes is about to be created, making e.g. the beautiful not necessarily true – nor good.

The creation by the Modern of an independent area of “science”, during the same process and time, opens a new flank in the complicated interplay between art and the aesthetic. By now, the art sciences too are born, both in terms of independent areas concerning especially visual arts and literature, but later concerning all the art forms, one by one. On top of that, a scientific

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<sup>9</sup> Concerning the “passage”, see Morten Kyndrup. 2008, esp. p. 36; 105ff. Parts of this book’s points of view have been published in English. See Morten Kyndrup. 2013. “Art, Aesthetics – Divorce?” in: *Site*, no. 33, 107–118. And in German, see Morten Kyndrup. 2012. “Ästhetik, Kunst und Kunstverständnis. Die Kunst und das Kunstwerk”, in *Neue Rundschau* Heft 1. 187–200.



approach to the general concept of “art” is created, thus paving the way for general theory of art and comparative arts as perspectives. As we will see, the rise of the art sciences implies an even more complex system of theoretical boundaries in the history of development to come, in particular as regards the boundaries of aesthetics as a discipline.

## THE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENT

**B**orn during the same process and possibly out of the same *topos* but irrevocably separated thereafter: art and the aesthetic are now historically going to refer to something different. At least to two different aspects of the “same” – if the production by an artist, and the perception by a receiver of an artwork can be designated as one and the same. Decisive, however, is the difference in *modus*.

“Art” comes to designate an area (system, institution) which, above all, contains artworks, each and every one singular. This area basically has its own rules and its own (absence of) purpose in relation to society as a whole. It is exempted from the general purpose rationality of the Modern. Its inhabitants are creating artists, but also acting intermediators, critics, and even a number of permanent institutions, such as museums, concert halls, etc. The area has boundaries (and accordingly, keepers). Its boundaries separate it from other, discursive areas.

“The aesthetic”, on the other hand, refers to a distinctive kind of evaluative subject-object relation, to a specific kind of relationality. In principle it is always singular, but of course this singularity includes the fact that aesthetic appreciations do produce (and are produced by) history and tradition, which thus form part of the actual properties of any given relation. The aesthetic has its boundaries as well, but they are separating it from other types of relation. An aesthetic relation is a potentiality; an offer to every one of us, among other kinds of relations, we may enter into.

The separation, as it were, did not result in two “similar” or even congruent formative concepts in terms of mode or logical extension. This

observation is important to maintain, also when analysing the long-term consequences of the separation of both sides. For example, as noted by Jacques Rancière, it is important to recognize, that the previous alliance or harmony between *poiesis* and *aisthesis* in the premodern was what provided mimesis with its necessary space of function.<sup>10</sup> And conversely, the mimetic operation was able to guarantee this harmony or close connection. The separation breaks down this representative order in favour of a new “opposition” between individuality (the artist) and collectivity (the audience). However, it also marks the end of any mimetic commitment of the artwork, and in the long run, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this, in extreme cases, leads to the end of the expectation that an artwork should possess any immediate sensuous appeal, and even have any (permanent) character of a stable object at all.

During the further historical development, the profound character and irreversible consequences of the separation, however, were not always respected by the dominating traditions of understanding, or perhaps rather: in many cases, the separation was referred to and made use of for other kinds of purposes.

It would take us too far here to just even outline the genesis and development of the varying traditions of understanding within aesthetics, from late 18<sup>th</sup> century and up to now, or to analyse the complex reasons for the widespread, non-stringent understanding of the physiognomy and consequences of the original separation. This absence however, of consistency and stringency, is evidently not coincidental, and it is intimately linked to a general ambivalence towards the Modern differentiations, an ambivalence which is and has been true of greater parts of societal thinking, ever since the Enlightenment.

However, one tradition worth mentioning here is one, which subsequently was to become the by far most dominating one in the thinking of art and the aesthetic, in the western Modern. Namely the one, which, based on the quest for unity in Romanticism, makes art and aesthetics reconcile in a particular “marriage” (as it has been called in another

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<sup>10</sup> See Rancière 2013, II.

context<sup>11</sup>). In this tradition, aesthetics becomes “philosophy of art” schlicht und einfach, i.e. it becomes the discipline about what art is, so G. F. W. Hegel in his lectures on aesthetics, from the 1820s.<sup>12</sup> Aesthetics is here made the servant and the master of art, at the same time. It becomes the master ratio, which, on the one side, is able to reinscribe art into the societal standard discourse (by being capable and willing to describe it philosophically). On the other side, it serves by helping to keep art outside and “autonomous”, by formulating and thus representing its unbridgeable particularity. But up against the original modal separation and our question here about a broader concept of aesthetics, this tradition is surprisingly blind. It is blind when it comes to developing a further understanding of what aesthetic value and relationality actually is and is able to, and it is particularly blind to the mere thought of even considering aesthetics as something, which might refer to anything but the area of art.

This “speculative” tradition, as it has been critically characterized by e.g. Jean-Marie Schaeffer in his crusade against it, remains dominating during the centuries to follow, and it is still immensely influential – probably also where the development patterns of art itself are concerned. Schaeffer even asserts that this tradition has ruined important qualities of art by imposing on it a permanent cognitive bias. This aesthetics’ demand for (true) cognitive content has historically resulted in an overload of artworks aiming at exactly this.<sup>13</sup> A good example is the entire tradition within art, which is feeling evoked to primarily reflecting the question about what art basically is, culminating e.g. in the gesture of conceptual art, completely devoid of any immediate sensuous qualities.

Probably, this development cannot be conceived of as simply as narrated by Schaeffer. No doubt, this continental tradition (as it was eventually called, in the broadest sense) for one thing has been able to contribute decisively to the analysis of what art, within the Modern, is capable of. And on top of that, in many cases it has incarnated a broader substantial critique

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<sup>11</sup> See Morten Kyndrup. 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See Hegel, G.F.W. 1986. *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Marie Schaeffer. 1992. *L'Art de l'âge modern*. Translated into English as *Art of the Modern Age. Philosophy of Art from Kant to Heidegger*. 2000.

of society and modernity with art as its privileged perspective (as in e.g. Theodor W. Adorno).

However, this tradition has not been capable of setting aesthetics free of its partnership with art, let alone of aesthetics' (inadequate) status of being "only" a philosophy (about art). It has even actively tried to resist any attempts of understanding aesthetics in a broader sense and in a different modal position towards art. As late as in 1993, and with contemptuous arrogance, Karl-Heinz Bohrer characterises the attempts to broaden out the concept of aesthetics like this, "Ein Terror liegt über dem Land: Die Acceptanz des Ästhetischen".<sup>14</sup> And, accordingly, in e.g. his considerations about a general "aestheticization", Wolfgang Welsch carefully distinguishes between bad (surface) aestheticization, and phenomena, where the aesthetic qualities are supposed to lie deeper (in accordance with the Hegelian "depth model").<sup>15</sup>

In the perspective of theories of modernity, this "speculative tradition" in aesthetics may be characterized, with some justification, as anti-modern, although probably 'wider Willen'. It has refused to take the initial separation seriously, and thereby refused to conceive of the differentiation in terms of something, which also necessarily produces actual emergent and irreversible differences: different perspectives, different analyses, and different discourses. The ambition of being able to survey and thus "own" art, by verbalizing its properties, may be construed as a lack of real acknowledgement of the particularity of art, of its autonomy. Concordantly, the rejection of investigating aesthetic relationality in its singularity, through analyses of artefacts, within as well as outside art, has contributed to a weakening of the separation itself. From time to time, this weakening has led said tradition into a dead end of critical self-sufficiency, in which the artworks themselves became reduced to mere examples of the adequacy of theory and critique.

Against that, the art sciences have worked intensely and successfully on developing the analyses and the understandings of the potentials of

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<sup>14</sup> See Bohrer, Karl Heinz. 2–5 Sept., 1992. "Die Grenzen des Ästhetischen", in *Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen* [Der Kongress „Die Aktualität von Ästhetischen“]. Hrsg. von Wolfgang Welsch in Zusammenarb. mit Ivo Frenzel. 1993. München: Fink.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Wolfgang Welsch. 1997.

singular artefactual functions, ever since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This has resulted in radical improvements of the analyses of the functional mechanisms of artworks, but has also implied a further increase of the distance between aesthetics and the art sciences, respectively, concerning what art is and does. This distance is an important component of the complex scenery within theory today.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION

**T**his scenery includes a significant number of different agencies, some of which are in close mutual dialogue and corporation, others not in contact with each other at all. Besides art itself (with the inhabitants of the art system from artists to mediators, and administrators) this scenery includes a wide range of aesthetic traditions led by the continental “speculative” one, but the analytical tradition with its background in the particular Anglo-Saxon founded philosophy is also important. In addition, we have the art sciences, traditionally focusing on each of their own art form, but many of them steadily working themselves into problems that are more common; from general theory of art, and i.e. comparative arts, to more substantial transversal issues, such as political art, post colonialism, feminism, and many others.<sup>16</sup>

One might ask, whether considering these agents as inhabitants of the same general landscape of theory actually makes sense at all? Does a basic notion of a Modern space of signification make sense in terms of a shared point of departure?

This is evidently a matter for discussion – and it is indeed being discussed. A philosopher, such as Bruno Latour, resolutely claims that we have actually never been modern, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, is the title of his influential book from 1991.<sup>17</sup> To Latour, the notion of the

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16 For specific institutionally historical reasons, this centrifugal motion away from the individual art form particularly took place within literary science. See Morten Kyndrup. 2011.

17 Bruno Latour. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*. Transl. by Catherine Porter

Modern is an illusion, with which we should settle. From his perspective (the notion of) the Modern introduces “a constitution”, with the intent of realizing a purification, a sort of ‘clean-up’, meant to sort out everything as belonging either to the social (the human beings), or to the nature (the things). This illusion is nourished by the claim of being able to understand and to market the Modern project in terms of an ongoing process, through which everything can be assigned, gradually, to these poles of distinction. Meaning that anything not included, is something that has just not *yet* been assigned to its pole.

But this constitution, Latour points out, is unable to realize its totalizing pretention, because it leaves large amounts of so called hybrids. The constitution does not want to conceptualize these hybrids as such, but hybrids do in fact make up a substantial part of our lifeworld. The Modern, in Latour’s interpretation, is thus a primitive and tendentially repressive/reductive framing. Instead, we should see ourselves as non-modern, in a world leaving space for the hybrids in their own right. Towards the conclusion of his book, Latour even proposes a systematic distinction between those values and approaches, which we should, respectively should not, include (in our understanding) from the various modern, postmodern, premodern, and anti-modern positions.<sup>18</sup>

The space of signification that Latour’s preferences suggest is, however, hard not to interpret as Modern in a broad sense, a fact already documented by his reflexive discussion of that space. The basic notion about a totalizing Modern, with which he intends to settle, is actually rather narrow *per se*, and to some extent, it appears to have been outlined rather rigidly for the actual purpose of his critical discussion.

But Latour’s point about the hybrids is important. Although the Modern may produce distinctions and differentiations, phenomena in real life are still composite and not necessarily observing the institutionalized differences. If we go back to the problem of separation in the relation between art and the aesthetic, and to the above theoretical scenery, one might ask whether this is not characterized by exactly that kind of hybrids? Hybrids, which perhaps should not necessarily be purified in order to

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<sup>18</sup> Latour. 1993, 142.

make themselves assignable to the poles of a claimed distinction?

On the one hand, the hybrid traditions within aesthetic thinking have undoubtedly one by one produced valuable contributions to the understanding of our world too. None of these hybrids have been coincidental. Therefore, history and its achievements could by no means be rolled back. On the other hand, though, the theoretical scenery of today is characterized by almost absurd procrastinations and by an absence of dialogue to such a massive extent that at least some cleaning up seems absolutely appropriate.

Examples are plentiful. One can meet philosophers from various aesthetic traditions who 'from above' categorize and evaluate the entity of meaning-engendering components within a single art form, completely without addressing the relevant art scientific discourse, and obviously without any scholarly insight into the art form in question. Shortly after the turn of century, the influential American art historian, James Elkins, found it appropriate to arrange a dialogue between art historians and aestheticians under the title, "Art History versus Aesthetics" (resulting in a book of the same title from 2006).<sup>19</sup> This initiative turned out to demonstrate, above all, a considerable absence of insight into the respective disciplinary paradigms on the other side. In the American context, aesthetics was of course primarily represented by the particular analytic approach, which is already, by its view on history, quite far from that of most art historian platforms. However, a real inclusive point of view in Elkin's roundtable discussion remained almost solely represented by Thierry de Duve, who has a foot in both art history and aesthetics. De Duve is quoted for a point of view, which considering the object identity should be self-evident, "art history without aesthetics is inconceivable to me" – and adding, "...because art history is first of all constituted by the evidential record of previous aesthetic judgments".<sup>20</sup>

The absent dialogue between aesthetics and art sciences is partly caused by the unresolved scientific status of that "philosophy", in which greater parts of the aesthetic traditions today are rooted. Different notions

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<sup>19</sup> James Elkins, ed. 2006. *Art History versus Aesthetics*.

<sup>20</sup> Thierry de Duve quoted in Elkins. 2006, 60.

exist about the extent to which philosophizing is committed to empirical contextualization and documentation, in the same way as other sciences. But in itself this should not necessarily hinder dialogue and exchange of results.

Especially within the art sciences, a considerable theoretical armament of direct relevance, also to the aesthetic traditions, has taken place since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is of course true, not least of the so called “Rezeptionsästhetik”; theory of reception, which in spite of its pleonastic name in German, is anything but self-evident and self-repeating in its uncovering of genuinely aesthetic function potentials within the singular artworks. Although it developed through literature, it has subsequently spread out to the other art forms too. Semiotics, especially its further development into a pragmatic semantics in Émile Benveniste, among others, constitutes another important contribution. The analysis of the very act of engendering meaning in an artwork, “enunciation”, encompasses all the acting communicative instances around the work, including the embedded impressions in the work of both its sender and its receiver. This is of relevance to aesthetics too, and in an overall sense, it is also an important contribution concerning the initial separation of art and the aesthetic, which we are pursuing here. Substantial contributions in theory and analysis and altogether within comparative theory of mediality (as in W. J. T. Mitchell) should be mentioned in this connection, as well.

All this could and should of course be made productive, jointly, and through dialogue between the traditions. There are good reasons for accepting differences in approaches, and this is also true, for instance between the aesthetic traditions. Varying focal lengths in the approach to the “same” phenomena may be extremely profitable.

This, however, presupposes the presence of the will and the ability to establish dialogue. The closure around itself, which many traditions, especially among the aesthetic ones, establish by insistently defining their own private playground, is not fruitful. Immunizing oneself against dialogue and exchange, and establishing even formalistic demands to empirical data, in order for these to be accepted as valid basis for



argumentation, leads to “camp-thinking”. And that, once again, leads to situations, where potentially obsolete and inadequate constructions and approaches to concepts are defended to the last drop of blood on behalf of “one’s camp”.

## A BROADER CONCEPT OF AESTHETICS?

Concerning the original question about the separation, about the relationship of the concept of aesthetics to art: Is there actually a *space* for a broader concept of aesthetics, one to include something more than just our relationship to art? “Space” here understood both in terms of the architecture/logics of the concept *and* empirically, measured against the disparate theoretical landscape. Is there a *need* for such a concept, scientifically and pragmatically? Do *out there* phenomena exist which we would be able to better understand and describe, if we had such a concept? If so, how should such a concept be coined? What should it include? Which analytical potentials should it possess? Which negative as well as positive consequences would it have concerning the current bunch of understandings of the aesthetic? And finally, how would it cope with the notions of a developed, respectively worn out Modern?

To start out with the concept itself: it seems appropriate to reach back to the notions of the aesthetic the way these originally arose, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They arose (i.e. in Baumgarten and Kant) on the basis of the initial separation of the production of art and its reception. And already then, “the aesthetic” explicitly exceeded the boundaries of “art” – a concept which, at that time, was only about to be formed and therefore had a completely different character from the one it has today.

On that basis, “the aesthetic” today might designate a distinct *kind of relation*, being at disposal for us in our dealings with our surroundings. A kind of relation distinctly connecting me with a perceived object to make me assess the value of this object, for-me, all the while I conceive of this value as something referring to a community concerning that

kind of values, as if everybody else shared or ought to share this assessment with me – knowing that this is not the case. And relating me in a way so that this value for me has no other motivations than the sheer existence of the object for-me, i.e. independent of all other kinds of value, ownership, practical needs, etc. Aesthetic value, the way it is engendered in this judgment of taste, is consequently singular in its substance – but still, it is a part of the community to which it appeals. In that way, an aesthetic judgment is also always connecting us to our surrounding world. It creates a passage from an “I” over an “it” to (the imagination of) a “we” – a passage, in which the arrows of implication may point in both directions.

Although, in principle, aesthetic value is generated singularly and contextually, pronounced judgments of taste of course create traditions, conventions, and communities, all of which become part of the dispositive of any judgment of taste under pronouncement – just like the objects themselves offer specific possibilities; cf. the analysis of their embedded, implied, or enunciated enunciation.<sup>21</sup>

In such a concept of aesthetics, the status of the object is imperative. On the one hand, the concrete object is always decisive. However, on the other hand, it is decisive for-me exclusively, and through its sheer existence, exclusively. There can be no aesthetic judgment without exactly the object, against which it is directed. Just like there can be no aesthetic judgment without the very “I” pronouncing it.

This status of the object is not least interesting in connection with the so-called de-objectualization of art in our times, the fact that an artwork may be just a situation, may be something completely unmanufactured, or even objectually simply absent. The aesthetic judgment may, in these cases (as noted by Thierry De Duve<sup>22</sup>), be transformed more in the direction of an assessment of whether or not the (non-)object in question belongs to “art”. The mechanism however, appears to be basically the same.

Would such a concept be useful and functional outside art as well? Are

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21 A thorough discussion of this would take us too far in this connection. See Morten Kyndrup 2008, 92ff.

22 Thierry de Duve. 1996, 301ff.

that kind of relations to be found empirically in our dealings with objects outside the area of art too?

The answer is affirmative. Relations outside art are not completely similar to the artwork-oriented ones, the distinct area of art guarantees a kind of double autonomy. The similarities, however, are more significant than the differences: objects of perception, from say design, do call for similar relations in our dealings with them. We are quite easily able to separate the aesthetic value of objects from their utility value (or their financial value) – even in cases of obvious contradiction. We may actually buy a beautiful car, although we know that technically it is very bad. To an exponentially increasing degree, the world of objects surrounding us is actually produced (“designed”) directly in order to engender aesthetic relations and, consequently, judgments of taste. This is what we call the general aestheticization.<sup>23</sup> However, this extension is not just true concerning actual artefacts. Landscapes, scenic beauty, sunsets, are also still evoking relations, and consequently, calling for aesthetic judgments of this type. In those relations, nature is perceived as exactly “addressing” me, and its beauty as being there for-me. Apropos nature and landscape, our physical surroundings are also in general to an increasing degree being designed, being created in order to establish calculated “meetings”, definite produced ‘addressednesses’ in relation to us. Here as well, aesthetic analysis based on the act of enunciation may be helpful.

There is, however, a lower limit to when relations may be called aesthetic, held up against other kinds of preferences in our dealings with things. Reflexivity might be a criterion, not only do I enter into this assessment for-me, I also see myself as the one doing this here and now.

Relations, which might be labelled as aesthetic in this sense, thus undoubtedly do exist also outside art. So there is a distinct need for a concept like that and not least for an associated analytics as well.

Aesthetic value and aesthetic relations inside and outside the area of art are not totally alike, though. They appear similar in terms of structure, mode of unfolding, and not least exactly in their explicit “purposelessness”. However, as said, the autonomy of art constitutes a further guarantee of the

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<sup>23</sup> See Morten Kyndrup 2016, 419–438.

distance between its aesthetic value and the ordinary rules of conduct of our world. On that background, will a broader concept of aesthetics entail a risk of flattening out the aesthetic value of art? Perhaps even to a serious weakening of the position? After all, distinct approaches and values are drawn into a community of things and objects that has been made with completely different intentions than those of the artworks, which, as we know, have no intentions beyond themselves.

This of course is a relevant question, and especially within the continental aesthetic tradition there has been reactions of consternation against and protest towards such a profane or secular, broader conception of the aesthetic. Admittedly, there may be reasons for those kinds of worries. On the other hand, we should not exaggerate. First of all, as stated above, what is at stake is the installing of a concept of the aesthetic into the very position that it already held during the initial separation of the production of art from the reception of art. That separation was one of the possibility conditions of even developing the autonomy of art in a modern sense. Contrary to being extraneous to the constitutive basis of art, this concept is thus actually part of its original possibility conditions. Secondly, the art system today has such institutionally strong boundaries that it appears as being anything but threatened in its particularity.

Finally, the intention with a broader concept of aesthetics is not to cancel the general reflection over the constitution and unfolding of art – a reflection, which in certain traditions has taken place under the disciplinary headline of aesthetics. If so, such reflection of course would be missing. But instead we might choose to call it what it is: theory of art. By that, we might also bridge the gap between the perspectives and results of philosophy and the art sciences, respectively.

## MODERN?

**W**ere we ever Modern? Are we ever going to become Modern? Is the notion of a Modern space of signification in fact just a suppressive effort to establish order, to clean up the mess of mixed forms and contingencies, i.e. a project about power, as Bruno Latour apparently believes in his critique?

There is a difference between criticizing certain paradigms of understanding, the way Latour does it, and rejecting the entire basic notion about a self-secularizing, immanent, mundane modern space – a space in which we are unconditionally thrown back on ourselves, and in which meticulously differentiated systems of understanding are matching a still higher societal division of labour, at all levels. We are beyond any doubt part of a Modern like that. Without differentiations and division of labour within this space, our material wealth had never developed the way it has. The space includes science, politics, religion, justice – and art, among others.

The separation of “art” from the “arts” of the Middle Ages, the distinction between the material production of art from the perception of art, the creation of substantially different ways, by which we can relate to our world: all this is part of the Modern. The differentiation as a whole of course makes our lives complicated. It forces us into constantly making specific choices as individuals. We may freely choose to acknowledge a work of art as a cognitive contribution to our understanding of the world; as a political statement about how the world should be; as a document of illuminating an individual experience of life. Or aesthetically, as a produced artefact which in its own right, in itself, for me, is of a distinctive value. In some sense, any work will of course be all of this at the same time as well, but our very capability of distinguishing, by means of differentiated systems of understanding, should basically be conceived of – not as a problem, but rather as a privilege. This privilege makes it possible for us to appreciate a work of art as outstandingly good, even if we deeply disagree with e.g. its political attitude, its moral stance, or maybe its evidently false statement about the world. The differentiation

provides us, both as individuals and on a societal level, with the possibility of *negotiating* the meaning of phenomena, and to *negotiate* not just as an either-or, but also as a both-and, leading to possible assignments of endlessly complex character as well.

Yet, this possibility and this privilege include a commitment as well, because our space of meaning is a joint condition. For one thing, we have a commitment to acting communicatively distinct among these differentiations and to taking seriously their framings and the negotiation as such. But we also have a commitment to approaching critically the framings themselves. Are they productive? What are their capabilities? Are they keeping us locked up in obsolete connotations with implied resistance against taking the differences and their perspectives seriously, thus blocking up exchange and development? In the Modern space of signification, everything is potentially subject to negotiation. But obviously, we do not choose our own world individually; it is created and populated by human beings, it is modelled, and it is under constant change. But still, it exists as a historically produced condition.

Bruno Latour is right in criticising a system of understanding, which he finds narrow and inadequate. That we have never ever been Modern, however, is only partly true. The entire modern times from the Renaissance and up through the Enlightenment and the establishing of the societies we know today, may perhaps most precisely be characterised as a constant *becoming-modern* through a process of permanently increasing divisions of labour and self-motivated differentiations. Still, admittedly, also with insistently visible lacunas or even overtly anti-modern approaches and backlashes in all spheres, religiously, politically, and socially. The Modern, in the sense in which we understand it here, is an ongoing process and it will never ever be completed or concluded (or for that matter “surpassed”<sup>24</sup>). On the other hand, though, the separation of forms and levels of understanding within the individual and the societal spheres cannot be rolled back just like that. Individuals may one by one choose to see the whole world from e.g. a

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<sup>24</sup> As it was proclaimed by post-Modern proponents, at some point. In this connection, ‘post-Modern’ should be understood as a critique of certain totalizing tendencies in the Modern, i.e. critique of Modernity.

fundamentalist religious perspective (but may also choose to change their choice). One may choose to disregard the separation between art and the aesthetic, between production and reception, and thus e.g. choose to believe in a frictionless transition between the production and the signification of artefacts. But this does not change the fact that the societal systems overall support and reconfirm this separation, including those at the institutional levels (museums, the critique, the market). Specific shortcuts, however, are flourishing – also in the societal debate. Like for instance, when someone proclaims that white artists should no longer be allowed to make use of topics concerning a black tradition, because this would be a violation of the historically suppressed people of this tradition. Or like when a heterosexual cis-gendered actress cannot be allowed to play a movie character as transgendered, also here because this would potentially violate the actual trans-gendered persons by marginalising their proper experiences.<sup>25</sup> There are good reasons for criticising that kind of conflation, not only based on individual disagreement, but also more generally by pointing out their implied contradictions and their anti-modern perspectives.

So we are, by all means, Modern indeed, or: we are situated helplessly in a permanent state of becoming-modern. This also applies to science, including art science and aesthetics. Also here, Modern means to take on ourselves this condition. We could be better at that. Among other things by more precisely, more distinctively taking into account the supreme framings of the space of science to which we belong. And in that connection, in particular by critically addressing all kinds of non-modern fundamentalism – including those in the landscape of theories.

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<sup>25</sup> See Artnet News. Summer 2018. “Dana Schutz’s Painting of Emmett Till at Whitney Biennial Sparks Protest.” <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dana-schutz-painting-emmett-till-whitney-biennial-protest-897929> about the protests against Dana Schutz’s painting. The actress in question was Scarlett Johansson.

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LARS-OLOF ÅHLBERG

## EVERYDAY AND OTHERWORLDLY OBJECTS: DANTOESQUE TRANSFIGURATION

### ABSTRACT

Arthur Danto's treatise *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (1981) is one of the most influential contributions to the philosophy of art in the past thirty years. "Transfiguration" in the title of Danto's treatise refers to the biblical notion of transfiguration. This notion, while not just employed as a vague metaphor, has theoretical and explanatory import in Danto's theory. Danto invokes the notion of transfiguration in explaining how an ordinary everyday object such as the commercial Brillo box can attain arthood and become Warhol's *Brillo Box*, which is ontologically radically distinct from its non-artistic counterpart. The essay argues that transfiguration is an inept and misleading metaphor for explaining the attainment of arthood. The theological notion of transubstantiation and the liturgical practice of consecration would have provided somewhat more adequate analogies.

*"To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry"*

Arthur Danto 1964

*"With me, what you see is what you get"*

Tracey Emin 2002

*"Words might bless everything"*

Graham Swift 2016

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he *Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is generally recognized as “one of the most important works of philosophical aesthetics of the twentieth century”, Hans Maes and Kalle Puolakka note in their presentation of Danto’s treatise (Maes and Puolakka 2012, 161). Danto’s trilogy, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981), *After the End of Art* (1997) and *The Abuse of Beauty* (2003), is according to them, “one of the most ambitious philosophical accounts of art within any strand of contemporary aesthetics”, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* offering “a general philosophical theory of art” (Maes and Puolakka 2012, 164). True, Danto claims to offer a general philosophy of art, including an essentialist definition of art, but it would be more correct, it seems to me, to say that what he offers is an account of a particular and peculiar state in the *visual* artworld, which by no means is to be identified with the artworld as such, or with art in general. Hans Maes exaggerates when he claims that Danto in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* manages to make “a game-changing contribution” to the debates about art (Maes 2017, 49); it is true, however, that Danto’s philosophy of art is admired by many and is regarded as a major contribution to contemporary philosophy of art. Paul Guyer, for example, devotes considerable space to Danto’s philosophy of art in his magisterial history of modern aesthetics, *A History of Modern Aesthetics* (2014).

## TRANSFIGURING THE BRILLO BOX

**T**he *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, was, Danto admits, in a sense a celebration of Pop art, which he interpreted as “a transfiguration of the commonplace”, Warhol’s *Brillo Box* being “Brillo box transfigured”. Pop art, he claims, “was the transfiguration of the everyday

world” (Danto 2013e, 668). Clearly, the notion of transfiguration plays an important role in his account of art although it does not enter his definition of works of art as symbolic expression embodying their meanings (Danto 1992, 41). Transfiguration has, however, a role to play in constituting an object as a work of art. An object is, he says, a work of art only under an interpretation, where the interpretation is a “sort of function that transfigures” the mere thing into a work (Danto 1981, 125).

Warhol’s *Brillo Box* has been important to Danto’s philosophy in a way that Duchamp’s readymades never were because “[i]t entered my life and thought and transformed them both”, as he explains (Danto 2012, 309). *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* is the record of such an existential encounter with art. He appropriated the title from Muriel Spark’s novel, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), where one of the characters, Sandy Stranger, who becomes Sister Helen of the Transfiguration, wrote “an odd psychological treatise on moral perception”, entitled “The Transfiguration of the Commonplace” (Spark [1961] 2000, 35). Danto’s “revelatory moment in art” came when he went to the Stable Gallery on Manhattan in 1964 and saw Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Box* (1964). Here was, at last, he says, “a philosophical question raised from within the art world” (Danto 1994, 6), that is, the question as to why Warhol’s *Brillo Box* is a work of art whereas a Brillo box in the supermarket isn’t. The answer, Danto claims, cannot be in terms of the perceptual properties of the *Brillo Box* in the gallery and the Brillo box in the supermarket. The eye, says Danto, “is incapable of determining the answer to this question” (Danto 1994, 6). The eye is of no value whatever, he says, when it comes to distinguishing art from non-art. If the *Brillo Box* is a work of art, it is a work of art in virtue of the prevailing theories and opinions in the artworld, the artworld being “an atmosphere of theory and of historical beliefs, relative to which things get constituted artworks” (Danto 1994, 7).

What is so special about Warhol’s *Brillo Box* that so fascinated and impressed him, and what is the challenge to the philosophy of art that it presents? Warhol painted stacks of plywood boxes to resemble the cardboard cartons of Brillo scouring pads. The Warhol *Brillo Box* resembled the commercial Brillo box, but was not as Danto noted in his

original article, “The Artworld” (1964, 580), totally indiscernible from the commercial Brillo box. Warhol’s box(es) had been silk-screened by hand whereas the text on the ordinary boxes had been machine printed. A closer look at Warhol’s box and the commercial ones designed by the artist James Harvey would have revealed these minute differences between them. Danto’s point, however, is that the art status of the Warhol box is not due to any perceptible differences between his *Brillo Box* and the ordinary Brillo box. The commercial boxes could have been made out of plywood, and Warhol could have made his box out of cardboard without the *Brillo Box* ceasing to be art, Danto claims. The more general point is, that a definition of art in Danto’s view cannot be based on any perceptible properties of the works, but rather on certain relational and contextual properties. Danto’s discussion of perceptual properties seems, however, to privilege the visual arts, and casts doubt on the generality of his conception and his definition of art (Carrier 2012, 236). What are the perceptual properties of literature and architecture, we may well ask?

Danto’s many critics and commentators have discussed and argued about most aspects of Danto’s philosophy of art offering thorough and thoughtful criticisms of his views, but very few have treated Danto’s notion of transfiguration at length. Several conferences and collections of essays have been devoted to Danto’s philosophy of art (Haapala et al. 1997; Carrier 1998), and more recently, *Danto and his Critics* (Rollins 2012) and *The Philosophy of Arthur C. Danto* (Auxier and Hahn 2013). The surprising thing is, given that practically every aspect of Danto’s philosophy of art has been examined, nobody, or, almost nobody, has questioned the adequacy and relevance of Danto’s notion of transfiguration and its use as a metaphor in regard to art. The only exceptions are to my knowledge two essays by Christel Fricke (one co-authored with Steinar Mathisen) in rather inaccessible publications (Fricke and Mathisen 2008 and 2010; Fricke 2008/9), and the present essay.

The very title, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, of Danto’s first book in the philosophy of art, suggests according to Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, “the centrality of religious images” in his philosophy of art. “Terms and concepts from theology”, they claim, “are also central to Danto’s account [of art]” (Solomon and Higgins 2012, 182), likewise Richard

Shusterman, who claims that “the metaphor of art as transfiguration” is of central importance in Danto’s philosophy of art (2012, 252). Danto declares himself a totally non-religious person, although he believes that “the concepts that come out of religion are just astonishing” (Maes 2017, 78); apparently he has in particular the biblical notion of transfiguration in mind. Many critics take, like Maes in his interview with Danto, his talk of transfiguration at face value, for Maes claims that Tracey Emin and Carl Andre “are still transfiguring commonplace objects into art” (Maes 2017, 72). In his “Replies to Essays”, in *Danto and his Critics*, Danto underlines that he has been impressed by the extraordinary degree to which Christianity is imbued by the most abstruse kind of essentialist Greek metaphysics. He finds the fusion of “Greek essentialist metaphysics and Jewish historicism” irresistible and apparently of great value not only in the philosophy of art (Danto 2012, 310).

The title of Danto’s first book in the philosophy of art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, is indeed catchy and suggestive as everyone interested in contemporary philosophy of art knows about the book, but very few realize the import of the term “transfiguration”.



## TRANSFIGURATION VERSUS TRANSUBSTANTIATION

**D**anto has appropriated, he says, the term “transfiguration” for forging his notion of the transfiguration of the commonplace, his use of “liturgical language is a *façon de parler*” (Danto 2012, 309). But talk of the transfiguration is hardly liturgical, but rather biblical. But what is the role of transfiguration in Danto’s theory of art and what does it mean? Let me begin with a quote from his seminal essay “The Artworld” (1964). Is the world full of “latent artworks waiting, like the bread and wine of reality, to be transfigured, through some dark mystery, into the indiscernible flesh and blood of the sacrament?”, he asks (Danto, 1964, 580–1). His point is that the original, ordinary Brillo box, which was designed

by the abstract expressionist painter commercial artist James Harvey as a container for soap pads has a “transfigured” and all but indiscernible counterpart, Warhol’s *Brillo Box*, which is a work of art, a transfigured Brillo box. In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* and later writings Danto explicitly refers to the biblical narrative of Jesus’ transfiguration as a model for artistic transfiguration.

It is, however, abundantly clear that “transfiguration” in the biblical narrative means a change in visible appearance, it is not a question of two perceptually indiscernible persons. Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ is the same person whose face and clothes underwent a perceptible change, referred to as “the transfiguration” in St. Matthew and St. Mark. In the gospel of St. Matthew it says that Jesus’ “face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light” (Matt. 17: 2–3), similarly in Mark 9:3 his clothes became “dazzling white”, and St. Luke writes that “the appearance of his face changed and his clothes became dazzling white” (Luke 9: 29–30). Danto refers explicitly to this passage in St. Luke as a narration of “the original transfiguration” (Danto 1981, vi), although the term “transfigured” occurs only in St. Matthew and St. Mark. The Latin in the first two places has “transfiguratus est”, and the Greek “metemorphothe”, from “metamorfoo”, to transform. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists under “transfiguration”, “[t]he action of transfiguring or state of being transfigured; metamorphosis” and “[t]he change in the appearance of Jesus Christ on the mountain”; “Transfiguration” refers more generally to a change in the outward appearance of something as well as the Church festival commemorating the transfiguration of Christ. Similarly the general meaning of the verb “to transfigure” is to change or transform the outer appearance of something. The biblical as well as the non-biblical figurative use of the notion of transfiguration does not imply a fundamental change in the nature or the substance of something; it does not suggest a change in ontological status. What the biblical narrative suggests is that the three privileged disciples, Peter, James and John, received, as it were, a visual confirmation of Jesus’ divinity, in particular since a voice from high proclaimed him to be his Son (Matt. 17:5 , Mark 9:8, Luke 9:35). According to common Christian belief Christ’s transfiguration is a confirmation of his

divinity, the “dazzling brightness which emanated from His whole Body was produced by an interior shining of His Divinity”, as one theologian puts it (Meistermann 1912). According to orthodox Christianity Jesus was the Son of God, the Second Person in the Trinity, from the beginning of time, quite apart from the transfiguration. Whereas transfiguration is in a sense accidental and instantaneous, transubstantiation is not: “Thus from the concept of Transubstantiation is excluded every sort of merely accidental conversion, whether it be purely natural (e.g. the metamorphosis of insects) or supernatural (e.g. the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor)” (Pohle 1909).

If one believes that the notion of transfiguration provides an apt analogy for the change in ontological status between an ordinary everyday object and its perceptually indiscernible artistic counterpart, one should note the following disanalogies. Even if an ordinary object acquires, by being taken up in the artworld, new contextual and relational properties, e.g. being a certain kind of work of art, making a statement, referring to something, being about something, being commented on by art critics, being seen as witty or provocative, giving rise to debates about the definition of art, there is no change in its perceptual properties (Davies 1991, 66–69). And that, of course, is the starting point for Danto’s analysis. Transfiguration in Danto’s analysis does not affect the perceivable properties of the objects in question, but by transforming their ontological status they acquire properties their untransfigured counterparts lack. For Danto it is a question of ontological change, not of “transfiguration”, taken in its biblical and ordinary sense. Now, it might be said that the notion of transfiguration can be used in new untraditional ways, but that is not the case with Danto since he explicitly refers to, and relies on the biblical notion of transfiguration. Danto’s talk of “the transfiguration of the commonplace” is not just misleading, as Christel Fricke and Steinar Mathisen have pointed out (Fricke and Mathisen 2008 & 2010), it is based on a rather elementary confusion between the biblical notion of transfiguration and the theological concept of transubstantiation. In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* Danto claims that to learn that something is a work of art “means that it has qualities to attend to which its untransfigured counterpart lacks”, consequently our responses will

be different; “this is not institutional, it is ontological”, he claims as if transfiguration could affect the ontological status of something (Danto 1981, 99).

Danto’s confusion about transfiguration and his conflation of the notion of transfiguration with transubstantiation is apparent already in his essay “The Artworld”, as can be seen from the passage already quoted (Danto 1964, 580–1). What happens in the sacrament of the Eucharist (the Last Supper) according to Catholic theology is that “by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1376). Now the appearance of the wafer that becomes the hostia and thus the body of Christ and the appearance of the wine that becomes the blood of Christ through transubstantiation does not change, there is no change in their visible properties, in other words, they are not transfigured.

The transubstantiated elements of the sacrament have, of course, as do Danto’s “transfigured” works of art, other properties than their untransubstantiated and “untransfigured” counterparts. That transubstantiation has occurred cannot be perceived by the senses, it is, to use Danto’s phrase about the art status of an everyday “transfigured” object — “something the eye cannot decry” (Danto 1964, 580), or, as Thomas Aquinas puts it regarding the Eucharist: “That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood” is something “that cannot be apprehended by the senses”, it can be apprehended “only by faith, which relies on divine authority” (Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, III, 75, 1). Perhaps the recognition of an everyday object as a work of art does not require faith, but belief in Dantesque transfiguration; one critic has, however, argued that Danto needs a leap of faith in his approach to art, a mysterious “transfiguration” for his theory to work (Rougé 2013, 296). Be that as it may, Danto’s view requires us to accept that artistic theory and artistic interpretation have transfiguring powers in turning ordinary objects into works of art (Danto 1986, 44). Yet, in transfiguration something remains the same in essence



but not in appearance and in transubstantiation something remains the same in appearance but not in essence. The metaphor of transfiguration in regard to art is thus an infelicitous and misleading metaphor.

In *After the End of Art* (1997) Danto claims that it is characteristic of pop art as such that it transfigures “emblems from popular culture into high art”, Warhol “transfigured” according to Danto Marilyn Monroe “into an icon” (Danto 1997, 128). There may be some truth in this if we take “transfigured” in the second, and wholly figurative sense listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. “To transfigure” in a figurative sense means “[t]o elevate, glorify, idealize, spiritualize”. Warhol’s silkscreen paintings of Marilyn Monroe have a certain lustre that the original photograph they are based on lack, she is thus glorified or idealized, elevated into an icon. Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*, however, are not transfigured in this sense. That would have been the case had he painted the *Brillo Boxes* in fluorescent colours, or in brighter colours than the original colours of the commercial Brillo boxes, but he didn’t. The commercial Brillo boxes and Warhol’s art boxes look (almost) the same, whereas the photograph of Marilyn Monroe is markedly different from Warhol’s triptych. In any case, transfigurativeness is for Danto a fundamental characteristic of pop art. He then goes on to explain what transfiguration means; it is a religious concept, he says, it means “the adoration of the ordinary, as, in its original appearance, in the Gospel of Saint Matthew it meant adoring a man as a god” (Danto 1997, 128–9). This is actually one of the very few places where Danto explains what he means by “transfiguration” — according to the index this is even a definition of transfiguration. Many things have gone wrong here. In the first place, the notion of transfiguration is above all a biblical one, not a common religious notion; what is more serious, the biblical notion of transfiguration has nothing to do with adoration of the ordinary, in fact, it has nothing to do with adoration at all. The three disciples present at the transfiguration on the mount did not adore “a man as a god”, they didn’t adore anybody at all; according to the biblical narrative they were in fact terrified during the transfiguration (Matt. 17: 6–7). It is, however, true that they later adored Jesus as the Christ, that is, as the Son of God; from a secular and non-

Christian point of view one may of course say that they actually adored a man as a god, but adoring Jesus as the Christ, or, adoring the man Jesus of Nazareth as a god has nothing to do with the transfiguration. Danto has commented on Raphael's *Transfiguration* on several occasions (Danto 1964, 573; Danto, 2003, 89; Danto 2013b, 164; Danto, 2013d, 254). A closer look at that painting might have put Danto on the right track, for in the *Transfiguration* it is there for everybody to see — at least if one knows the biblical narrative of the transfiguration — that Christ is represented as having been temporarily transfigured. Biblical transfiguration is transient whereas Dantesque transfiguration is permanent; also in this respect transubstantiation shows more affinities with the conversion of ordinary things into artworks, although transubstantiation is not an altogether felicitous metaphor, as I shall argue below (section VI).

#### IV BAPTISM VERSUS CONSECRATION

Clearly transfiguration is the dominant religious metaphor that informs Danto's theory of art. In one place he also employs baptism as a metaphor when speaking of interpretation as a transformative procedure bestowing a new identity on an object. The ordinary thing which has been taken up in the artworld is like the baptizand taken up in "the community of the elect". Danto speaks here of a "religious analogy" which will deepen as the analysis proceeds (Danto 1981, 126), yet he does not return, as far as I remember, to this supposed analogy. Solomon and Higgins claim that Danto describes the "is' of aesthetic identification on the model of baptism" (Solomon and Higgins 2012, 182), which is not quite accurate, for it is rather interpretation as "a transformative procedure" that he likens to baptism which bestows a new identity on an object. When a "transformative procedure", consisting of what Danto dubs "constitutive interpretation" (Danto 1986, 39–46; Danto 2013c, 187–189), has been performed something becomes a work of art, constitutive interpretation

being “transfigurative”, transforming objects into works of art (Danto 1986, 44). Now this transformation, which in Danto’s view is analogous to baptism, “depends upon the ‘is’ of artistic identification” (Danto 1986, 44–45). It seems therefore that there must first be “artistic identification” and then constitutive interpretation which transfigures (Danto’s term) the object in question into a work of art (Danto 1986, 41–42); therefore Solomon and Higgins seem to be confused about the relation between interpretation and artistic identification in Danto’s theory. If so, that is perhaps not their fault since Danto’s pronouncements on the matter are far from clear, and may even be contradictory. Danto actually admits that he has not expressed himself very clearly about the notion of interpretation and its role in his theory (Danto 2013c, 187); this admission, however, does not concern the relation between constitutive interpretation and the “is” of artistic identification, which to my mind is obscure. Be that as it may, Solomon and Higgins should not talk about “aesthetic identification” when Danto speaks of “artistic identification” since there is in Danto’s thinking a radical difference between the artistic and the aesthetic, these terms not being synonymous for him (Danto 1986, 30–31; Danto 2003, 1–15; Danto 2013a, 47). Solomon and Higgins also perpetuate Danto’s confusions concerning transfiguration and transubstantiation, for they believe that “Danto’s image of the artwork as [. . .] something that is transformed by means of theory, also recalls the doctrine of transubstantiation” (Solomon and Higgins 2012, 182). But Danto does not speak of transubstantiation here, objects are transfigured by theory and constitutive interpretation: “Interpretation in my sense is transfigurative” (Danto 1986, 44). Danto never says that a theory or constitutive interpretation affects the transubstantiation of anything. As we have seen that is the role of transfiguration in his philosophy of art. Solomon and Higgins know full well that theory has a transfigurative role in Danto’s theory (Solomon and Higgins 2012, 182), so why bring up the question of transubstantiation without considering the difference between transfiguration and transubstantiation? Since Danto wishes to use religious and theological language in analysing and explaining the arthood of works of art, he would have done better to ponder the possible relevance of the metaphor of transubstantiation for his endeavour. Incidentally baptism as a

metaphor may, in fact, be more apt than any other religious and theological concept. For “[b]aptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* § 1280), without changing the person’s outer appearance. In Danto’s transfiguration an ordinary object is imprinted with an invisible and indelible spiritual sign, the sign of arthood. Danto has appropriated, as he puts it, the term “transfiguration” for forging his notion of the transfiguration of the commonplace, his use of “liturgical language is a *façon de parler*” (Danto 2012, 309). Well, the Feast of the Transfiguration is celebrated in most Christian churches, but talk of the transfiguration is not liturgical, in contrast to words of consecration in rituals of consecration. Also Danto’s references to the transfiguration amount to much more than a *façon de parler*, it has an important theoretical role to play in his theory of art. The important point, however, is that the uses of metaphors and analogies can be misleading, and even wrong, if they are based on weak or non-existing analogies, and that is the case with Danto’s discourse on the transfiguration of the commonplace. The Catholic notion and practice of consecrating images would have provided a more apt analogy. According to the *Rituale Romanum* (XI, ch. VII, § 16) an altarpiece has to be consecrated before it merits veneration and becomes capable of channelling the intercessory powers of the represented figures in the painting or sculpture. There is thus a necessary relation between the consecration and the effectiveness of an image. Whereas a religious image is consecrated by a bishop sprinkling it with holy water, perhaps an ordinary everyday object or a pop image is elevated into the Realm of Art by being sprinkled with artistic and philosophical theory. The consecration of pictures and sculptures is an ancient practice in all cultures (Freedberg 1989, ch. 5). It is only in the fifteenth century in Western Europe that paintings and sculptures gradually became de-sacralized assuming new personal, social, political and “aesthetic” functions (Belting [1990] 1994). Danto’s theory of art is in a sense a secularized version of religious rituals of consecration.

V  
"IMMANENT TRANSFIGURATION" AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

**R**ichard Shusterman is one of the few critics who has taken Danto's use of religious language seriously. His contribution to *Danto and His Critics* is tellingly entitled "Art as Religion: Transfigurations of Danto's Dao". There is, he claims, a "profoundly transcendental tonality" in Danto's philosophical discourse, the "metaphor of art as transfiguration" being of central importance (Shusterman 2012, 252). It is of course true that the term "transfiguration" occurs in several texts by Danto and although it does not form part of his definition of art, it is easy to get the impression that for anything to be art it must have undergone some kind of transfiguration. Be that as it may, as regards Warhol's *Brillo Box*, Danto's thought seems to be that the box becomes art by being transfigured, and this is also Shusterman's interpretation of Danto's "transfiguration", since he attributes to Danto the view that common cultural objects are transfigured into "otherworldiness, that is, artworldiness" (Shusterman 2012, 255). Shusterman speaks here of Warhol's *Brillo Box* as Danto's "inspirational icon of miraculous artistic transfiguration — in terms of the Catholic mystery of transubstantiation" (Shusterman 2012, 253), thus repeating Danto's confusion in the "Artworld". The Catholic dogma of transubstantiation does not mean that the elements in the Eucharist are transfigured, nor does the transfiguration on the mount to which both Danto and Shusterman allude imply ontological transubstantiation. Nor is it correct to speak of the "Catholic transcendentalism of Danto's transfiguration theory" (Shusterman 2012, 255), since transfiguration is not a specifically Catholic notion; it is a biblical notion and belief in Christ's transfiguration is a common Christian belief. If one wishes to speak of Catholicism in this context, one should speak of the specifically Catholic dogma of transubstantiation and its purported relevance for Danto's conception of art. Nor do I believe, as Shusterman does, that the discourse of Danto's art theory is "distinctively theological" (Shusterman 2012, 257); what we find in Danto's text is an indistinct and misleading use of the biblical notion of transfiguration.

It is not surprising that Shusterman as a pragmatist, is critical of the “otherworldly dimension of [Danto’s] aesthetics”, which he believes to be “deeply Christian” (Shusterman 2012, 254). To claim that Danto’s philosophy of art — Danto himself avoids using the term “aesthetics” — is deeply Christian seems to me to be an overinterpretation of his views. It is, however, true that there is in a sense an otherworldly character to his approach to art, for he posits an unbridgeable ontological gap between real things and works of art, between the real world and the artworld. Although critical of Danto’s “transfiguration”, Shusterman himself speaks of “immanent transfiguration”, but in a non-art context (Shusterman 2012, 260, 262). He recalls an experience of immanent transfiguration, which he underwent while engaging in Zen meditation; he fixed his contemplation on the beautiful sea, but after losing his concentration he turned his glance on some rusty barrels, which “suddenly transfigured into a vision of breathtaking beauty” (Shusterman 2012, 264). It was the overwhelming presence of the objects that he *saw* as it were for the first time that impressed him. Shusterman recalls that he himself felt transfigured without either the barrels or himself having undergone ontological change. The metaphor is apt in so far as the original biblical notion of transfiguration does not imply ontological change, as Shusterman seems to suppose. He could, equally well, or better, have talked about a transforming experience. There are to be sure such life-enhancing, even life-changing experiences to be had not only in our encounter with art, but also with natural phenomena, and perhaps even with plain everyday objects. As Nietzsche said, “bei tiefen Menschen dauern alle Erlebnisse lange”, “for deep persons experiences last long” (Nietzsche 1882).

When some aspect of the world, or some particular object, as the case may be, suddenly appears in a timeless instant, out of context, by itself, as such as it were, without relating to other things, it can appear in a transfigured light. I am not suggesting that Shusterman’s experience and his account of his “transfiguring experience” was in any way inspired by Schopenhauer, it was as he said, evoked by Zen meditation. Nevertheless a “transfiguring experience” of the kind described by Shusterman is in some ways akin to Schopenhauerian aesthetic experience. Any object can,

in principle, give rise to this kind of disinterested, “objective” experience, Schopenhauer maintains, but it is the special office of art to facilitate this sort of contemplative, disinterested aesthetic experience (Schopenhauer [1819] 2010, § 37, 218). One becomes absorbed, Schopenhauer, says, “in a steady contemplation of the object presented, aside from its interconnections with any other object” (Schopenhauer [1819] 2010, § 34, 201).

## VI BRILLO BOX VERSUS BRILLO BOX

Danto is obsessed with the so-called indiscernibility problem, the question as to why and how perceptually indiscernible objects can belong to completely different ontological realms. In regard to art it is “the *Brillo Box*/Brillo carton problem”, in Christianity it is, he says, “the Christ/Christ problem” — actually the Christ/Jesus problem — because to all outward appearances Jesus of Nazareth is a human being, but at the same time also the Christ, *Christos*, “the anointed one”. The difference between a human being and an incarnated god, Danto claims, is invisible, and Jesus’ divinity a matter of faith (Danto 2013f, 706).

Religious language, or, rather “religious description”, as Danto puts it, has had an “immense appeal” to him, particularly in discussing works of art, he confesses in a text written at the very end of his life. Here he again draws a parallel between transfiguration in religion and in art. “The transfiguration of the commonplace”, is, “a transformation of an ordinary thing into a work of art”, and in religion (rather in Christianity) it is, “the moment when an ordinary human being is disclosed to his followers as a divine being” (Danto 2013f, 707). However, the analogy between the transfiguration of Christ in the biblical narrative and the transfiguration affecting Warhol’s Brillo Box limps badly. As regards the biblical transfiguration Danto claims that a human being is revealed — “disclosed” to his followers, as he puts it — as a divine being, whereas in the artistic case an ordinary thing is transfigured or transformed into a work of art;

but there is no question of an ordinary thing suddenly being “disclosed” as a work of art. That would be the case if Harvey’s commercial Brillo box were suddenly revealed to be a work of art, but the whole point of Danto’s theory is that there is a radical ontological difference between Harvey’s box and Warhol’s box. So, the Harvey box is certainly not transfigured, whereas the Warhol box, which is perceptually (almost) indiscernible from Harvey’s box, is. In the biblical narrative one and the same person, that is Jesus of Nazareth, appears first in an untransfigured state and then for a short instant in a transfigured state, whereas in the artistic case there are two objects, an ordinary untransfigured Brillo box and a Warhol’s *Brillo Box*, which has presumably been permanently transfigured into a work of art. Perhaps the most important disanalogy between biblical transfiguration and Dantoeseque transfiguration is this: transfiguration in the biblical case did not change Jesus’ ontological status, it did not transform a human being into a divine being, the transfiguration simply revealed him as the Son of God to three disciples, whereas in the artistic case the transfiguration is supposed to affect the ontological status of an object, transforming an everyday object into a work of art. I don’t think, however, that any transfiguration occurred in Warhol’s “Factory” when he had his *Brillo Boxes* made, for his boxes were not everyday things, they were just very similar to everyday objects, to wit, to Harvey’s commercial Brillo boxes. It seems to me that Warhol’s boxes were from the very beginning intended to be exhibited as works of art, and were perhaps works of art as soon as Warhol made them; if some sort of transfiguration took place in Warhol’s workshop that would not in the least have affected the ontological status of the objects, since transfiguration in the biblical sense — and it is the biblical sense Danto relies on in his philosophy of art — reveals a previously acquired ontological status.

In the text I have discussed above Danto offers a succinct summary of the role of transfiguration in his conception of art: “artworks are transfigured into a higher, sacred ontological realm wholly different from mere real things from which they may be visually or sensorily indiscernible” (Danto 2013f, 707). We should note that this is an exceedingly general claim about *all* works of art, or, perhaps it is intended to apply



only to works in the visual arts. In any case the overwhelming majority of his analyses and his examples are taken from visual art. As I have already remarked, it is not always easy to see whether Danto is speaking of art in general, of works of art in *all* artforms, or, whether he is thinking only of the visual arts. Leaving that question aside, I think it is not difficult to see that transfiguration cannot achieve what Danto claims it can, namely to transform the ontological status of a thing into a work of art. If there is a radical change in ontological status without a change in appearances — as is the case with indiscernibles belonging to different ontological categories — it is a question of transubstantiation. Danto's conflation between transfiguration and transubstantiation runs through his whole *œuvre*. Now it might be said that I have taken Danto's notion of transfiguration too literally, "transfiguration" after all being a metaphor in Danto's texts. There is, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a figurative sense of the verb "to transfigure", it means "[t]o elevate, glorify, idealize, spiritualize", and *The Oxford English Dictionary of Difficult Words* says that "transfiguration" refers to "a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful spiritual state" offering the following sample sentence: "in this light the junk undergoes a transfiguration; it shines". Incidentally, this sentence has been used as a motto for an internet photo exhibition by the Indian photo artist Kunaal Bose (<https://www.behance.net/gallery/19740427/transfiguration>). Danto's transfiguration, however, does not involve a change in appearance but in essence; after Dantesque transfiguration a piece of junk does not begin to shine, it still looks like a piece of junk but is elevated to the spiritual category of art.

What transfiguration achieves, according to Danto, is something that only the miracle of transubstantiation is capable of achieving. I have argued, and so have Fricke and Mathisen, that when Danto speaks of transfiguration he should have taken transubstantiation as a more apt metaphor for art. Yet, that does not seem to be quite right. Consider the following: in the biblical transfiguration Jesus is revealed to be what he was and is, the Christ; in Dantesque artistic transfiguration something that was an ordinary thing is supposed to be transfigured into a work of art; but it is not the case that an ordinary thing is suddenly revealed to be a work

of art. There is thus no *Brillo Box*/Brillo box, or, Warhol/Harvey problem as a parallel to the Christ/Jesus problem. Warhol did not, nor did anybody else, transfigure the Harvey box into a work of art. What Warhol did, it seems to me, was to represent a Harvey Brillo box, to produce an artistic representation of a Brillo box. He did not present an ordinary Harvey box to the artworld. The fact that a thing that looks almost identical to an ordinary thing can be a work of art has nothing to do with transfiguration, nor is the metaphor of transubstantiation strictly speaking apt, since Warhol did not consecrate an ordinary Harvey box by presenting it to the artworld, thereby affecting a transubstantiation of the ordinary box into a work of art. He presented a thing almost identical to the Harvey box as a work of art. But the Harvey box and the Warhol box were not numerically identical, they were just more or less perceptually indiscernible or qualitatively identical. In contrast to Warhol's *Brillo Box*, which is not the real Brillo box, Duchamp presented a real bottle rack as a work of art; similarly Tracey Emin exhibited her real bed as *My Bed* as a work of art at the Tate Modern in 1998, the bed that was in her bedroom is numerically identical with the bed in the Tate Gallery. To use Danto's terminology, one might say that there is the problem of Tracey Emin's *Bed*/Tracey Emin's bed, one and the same thing being an ordinary bed and a work of art. In one of his last texts, a reply to criticisms, Danto says, in relation to the transfiguration of Jesus that "[t]ransfiguration is metamorphoses [sic], a change of form — but the transfigured has to be recognizable" (Danto 2013d, 253), thereby recognizing that the notion of transfiguration presupposes that the transfigured person or thing is recognized as identical with the previously untransfigured person or thing. When in Strauss' tone poem, *Death and Transfiguration* (1889), the dying poet is finally reconciled with his fate, his consciousness is "transfigured", but he is still identical with the person with a previously untransfigured consciousness, and in Schoenberg's string sextet, *Transfigured Night* (1899), later scored for string orchestra, the lovers are "transfigured" in forgiveness and reconciliation, but the whole point is that they are the same individuals previously unreconciled. When Danto claims, quite rightly, that the transfigured has to be recognized as the previously untransfigured, this claim seems to be in stark contradiction with his central thesis to the

effect that ordinary untransfigured objects are perceptually indiscernible from their transfigured counterparts. The Brillo box is not *the Brillo Box*. In mentioning Christ's glowing face and blindingly white garments during the transfiguration, he adds somewhat curiously that "[i]t is possible to think that art has always been the transfiguration of its subject" (Danto 2013d, 253). Curious, because now it is the subject, or theme, in a work of art that is being transfigured, not an untransfigured everyday object.

## VII CONCLUDING REMARKS

Interestingly enough Danto actually foresaw in 1981 the possibility of Emin's own bed being presented as a work of art. In discussing Rauschenberg's and Oldenburg's beds and their relationship to Plato's bed in the *Republic* and to real beds, Danto fantasizes about the fictional artist J, who exhibited his own bed as a work of art thereby going the full distance in closing the gap between art and reality, as he puts it (Danto 1981, 12–13). The artist J., says Danto, "constituted his bed as *Bed* and transfigured it into art" (Danto 1981, 133), but since the appearance of the bed would not have changed in the least, the metaphor of transfiguration is out of place. If J's constitution of his bed as *Bed* had been successful his bed would have undergone a change in status; it would have been removed from the everyday world into the artworld, not by transfiguration but by being constituted by the artist, or the critics, or the theorists, as the case may be, as a work of art. As Tracey Emin put it, "This is my bed. If someone else installs it, it's just dirty linen, if I do it, it's art" (*Evening Standard* 12 September, 2000).

It seems to me that the only transfiguration that occurred in regard to Warhol's *Brillo Box* and Emin's *Bed* is the transfiguration of the figures on the price tag on the materials of Warhol's box and Emin's bed. Warhol's *Brillo Box*, signed by Warhol and authenticated by the Warhol authenticating board, was sold at Christie's in New York in 2010 for over 3 million dollars

(<https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/andy-warhol-1928-1987-brillo-box-3-5371695-details.aspx>), and Emin's *My Bed*, now on permanent loan at Tate Britain, was bought by a German businessman and art collector in 2014 at Christie's in London for over 2,5 million pounds (van de Walle 2017). "There is transfiguration for you", as Humpty Dumpty might have said.

I offer these reflections, which form part of a more extended farewell to Danto, as a tribute to Arto, wishing him success and satisfaction in investigating untransfigured aesthetic phenomena in the years to come.

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## HOW ART TEACHES: A LESSON FROM GOODMAN

### ABSTRACT

It is often thought that art teaches us and that we can learn from it. To learn that p is to come to know that p. So, art can teach us only if we can gain knowledge through art. How is this possible? Nelson Goodman tries to explain it by his theory of symbols. However, his theory just explains how works of art can refer to the world, and referring to the world is not enough for having knowledge about the world. Because knowledge is a matter of having true beliefs, in order to give us knowledge, works of art must say something that is true. It is argued that we can explain how they can do this, if we revise and supplement certain aspects of Goodman's theory of symbols. Furthermore, we can even explain how our built and natural environment can teach us.

### INTRODUCTION

Artists typically think that they are doing research. They study the world and want to say something about it through their art. For example, in a recent documentary,<sup>1</sup> Martin Scorsese was asked why Woody Allen has made so many movies. He answered: “Because he has so much to say.” One hears this sort of statement every day—even from abstract artists. They think they do research, study reality. If this is what artists do—if they say things through their art—then at least sometimes what they say is true, and we can know that it is true. So, art can teach us, and we can learn from it. We can attain knowledge through art.

Sometimes, philosophers seem to concur with this view, even enthusiastically, as Nelson Goodman does:

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<sup>1</sup> *Woody Allen: A Documentary – Manhattan, Movies & Me* (2012), directed by Robert B. Weide.

[T]he arts must be taken no less seriously than the sciences as modes of discovery, creation and enlargement of knowledge in the broad sense of advancement of the understanding.

(Goodman 1978, 102.)

However, it is very difficult to explain how art can advance knowledge. For example, Goodman is forced to concede that it is not knowledge in its ordinary sense that he has in mind but understanding. I think we should not yet give up. Indeed, we can learn from Goodman how art can give us quite ordinary propositional knowledge if we make some changes in his view.

Goodman's attempt to explain how art can teach consists of three steps: The first is to explain how works of art can refer to the world, how they can work as symbols. Goodman does this in his influential book *Languages of Art* (1968). In this work, he provides a general theory of symbols and explains how works of art can refer in terms of it. It seems clear that they must refer to the world to give knowledge about it.

He takes the second step in *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978), where he considers all uses of symbols—in art, science and everyday perceptions—and argues that all our access to the world comes through the use of symbols, and that symbols are not devices for describing the world waiting to be discovered, but ways of making the worlds referred to. There is no ready-made world that exists independently of our ways of describing it. We make the world when we correctly describe it through symbols. Furthermore, because there are alternative and incompatible ways of doing this, there are many worlds if any, says Goodman.

The third step, which he takes in his book with Catherine Elgin *Reconceptions in Philosophy & Other Arts & Sciences* (1988), is to replace our ordinary concept of knowledge with the broader concept of understanding. The problem with our ordinary concept of knowledge is that it applies only to declarative sentences that can be used to say something about the world, something that is true. The concept of understanding is supposed to cover also non-declarative uses of symbols—symbols that refer but do not say anything and therefore lack truth-value. So, because the scope of the



ordinary concept of knowledge is so narrow, we need the wider concept of understanding to explain the cognitive significance of all uses of symbols.

I think that the second and third steps are unnecessary, and it is best to avoid them. We can be realists and monists and believe that there is only one world that exists largely independently of us, and that art can give us knowledge about it in its quite ordinary sense. We can avoid these steps if we revise and supplement certain aspects of Goodman's theory of symbols.

## GOODMAN'S THEORY OF SYMBOLS: THE BASICS

**G**oodman's theory has only two primitive (undefined) terms: "reference" and "denotation". The term "symbol" is defined in terms of reference:

A is a symbol for B if and only if A refers to B.<sup>2</sup>

An important type of reference is denotation. Denotation is illuminated by giving examples of it. The paradigm examples are singular terms and predicates of ordinary language: Proper name and singular term "Johnny Depp" denotes Johnny Depp. Predicate "tiger" denotes tigers. And predicate "red" denotes red things.

Goodman (1968, 3–19) argues that pictorial representation or depiction is a form of denotation. It is not a matter of resemblance or imitation. Pictures do not copy the world. They are symbols that denote their subjects. He thinks also that a picture can work, like a proper name, and denote uniquely one particular thing. For example, the picture of Johnny Depp denotes Johnny Depp. But he also thinks that a picture can work, like a predicate, and denote multiply each of a whole group of objects. For example, the picture of a tiger in a dictionary denotes all tigers.

Symbols belong to a symbol system, which connects the symbols of the

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<sup>2</sup> There are symbols that do not refer, such as letters, syncategorematic terms and symbols in fiction. In their case, we use the word "symbol" as a one-place predicate. This is a derivative use of the term, because even these symbols belong to symbol systems that have a referring function.

system with their referents (objects referred to). When we know the system, we know what its symbols refer to. Goodman takes symbol systems to be kinds of conventions. They are based on our practices of using symbols of different kinds. For example, styles in the visual arts, such as impressionism, realism and cubism, are examples of pictorial symbol systems (Goodman 1968, 127–173).

## || EXEMPLIFICATION

A great innovation of *Languages of Art* is its explanation of how purely abstract works, such as abstract paintings and pieces of instrumental music, can refer and thus symbolize. Goodman calls this symbolic function exemplification (Goodman 1968, 45–95).

Because abstract works represent nothing, it is their own properties that are important. Goodman's idea is that these works refer to their own properties. They exemplify their properties. The idea is not trivial, because objects do not exemplify all their properties.

As an example of exemplification, Goodman (1968, 53–54) gives a sample in a tailor's sample book. It exemplifies color, weave, texture and pattern but not size, shape or weight. In the same way, an abstract painting exemplifies forms, colors, structures and feelings but not weight or value. It only exemplifies properties that are important to it as a work of art.

As a nominalist, Goodman (1968, 54–57) thinks that strictly speaking there are no properties. So, in careful language, we must replace the talk of properties with the talk of predicates or other denoting symbols, which he calls labels. We can therefore define exemplification in terms of denotation and reference.

A exemplifies label B if and only if B denotes A and A refers to B.

For example, instead of exemplifying the property of blueness, a painting exemplifies the predicate "blue" that denotes it. Or, if the painting is sad, it exemplifies the predicate "sad" that denotes it. Of course, the predicate

“sad” cannot denote a painting literally. A painting is a physical object that lacks feelings, yet it can be metaphorically sad. The predicate “sad” denotes paintings and other works of art metaphorically. When a painting exemplifies the predicate “sad” metaphorically, Goodman (1968, 85–95) says that it expresses sadness. Expression is a matter of metaphorical exemplification.

There are also complex referential relations that consists of steps of denotation and exemplification. For example, when a painting exemplifies the predicates “blue” and “sad” that, in turn, denote other blue and sad things in the world, the painting indirectly refers to those things. Therefore, even abstract works that represent nothing can refer to things outside them and contribute to worldmaking (Goodman 1984, 61–63).

### III KNOWLEDGE AND SYMBOLS

**N**ow we can understand why Goodman wants to replace our ordinary concept of knowledge with the concept of understanding. Knowledge—in its ordinary sense—is a propositional attitude. It has a propositional content that is expressed by a that-clause. For example, I know that it is summer. I know that we are in Helsinki. “That it is summer” and “that we are in Helsinki” express propositions or thoughts (as Frege called them). Let’s assume that *S* stands for a person and *p* stands for a proposition. We get the following definition.

*S* knows that *p* if and only if  
*S* believes that *p*,  
*p* is true and  
*x* (justification, reliability, sensitivity, safety or . . .)

There is a debate about *x*—the condition that converts true belief into knowledge—among epistemologists, but we need not worry about that. We can just assume that, if the first two conditions are satisfied, the third condition is often satisfied as well. If art can give us true beliefs, it can most likely give us knowledge as well.

According to Goodman, works of art refer to the world, but they do not say anything true about the world. What is said is a proposition. Some works of art do not express propositions or thoughts about the world: Pictures, abstract paintings and musical works do not have propositional contents at all. Though fictional literary works have propositional contents, their contents are false according to Goodman (1984, 123–126), because there are no fictional entities. So, art cannot give knowledge, because it does not give us true propositions that are necessary for knowledge.

A further problem is that Goodman (1972, 221–238) does not accept propositions at all. They are abstract and intensional entities that he does not accept into his worlds. For him knowledge is an attitude toward declarative sentences or statements rather than to the contents of sentences—propositions. The scope of knowledge is therefore restricted to what can be articulated in language, which already rules out visual arts and music as sources of knowledge.

Goodman's (1988, 153–166) move is to suggest that the concept of knowledge should be replaced with the broader concept of understanding and to argue that merely referring, non-declarative, symbols can advance understanding. As I said, we should avoid this move.<sup>3</sup> The problem is not in our concept of knowledge. It is part of Goodman's philosophical program, which does not allow propositions. If we can appeal to the existence of propositions, we can explain how art of all kinds can express propositions and say something and advance knowledge. Propositions, unlike sentences, are non-linguistic. So, also nonverbal symbols, in visual arts and music, can in principle express propositions. We just need one further move.

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<sup>3</sup> It may also be useless, because understanding appears to be a propositional attitude as well. For example, I understand why John is angry. Anyway, Goodman does not provide sufficient explication of his concept of understanding.

## IV DIRECT REFERENCE AND SINGULAR PROPOSITIONS

John Hawthorne and David Manley write in their *Reference Book* (2012, 4): “The discovery of the twin categories of [direct] reference and singular thought [proposition] is widely felt to be one of the landmark achievements of twentieth-century analytic philosophy.” Both categories derive from Bertrand Russell’s philosophy, and they are widely accepted in current philosophy of language. The problem of Goodman’s project is that it rejects both categories. I suggest that we follow Russell and contemporary philosophers of language and add an account of direct reference to Goodman’s theory of symbols and that we also accept propositions, properties and relations. Then we can explain how all art can express propositions and thus advance propositional knowledge.

The Russellian idea is quite intuitive. The content of a sentence is a proposition. This is what we say or assert when we utter the sentence. The content of a proper name is the object it refers to. Its semantic role is simply to pick out the object we want to talk about. So, this is what it brings to the content of a sentence. The content of a predicate is a property or relation it expresses. The role of a predicate is to express what we say about the object—what properties we attribute to it. This is what it brings to the proposition. Thus, a singular (Russellian) proposition consists of objects and properties or relations. For example, the sentence “John is tall” expresses the proposition that John is tall, which consists of John and the property of tallness. The sentence “John loves Mary” expresses the proposition that John loves Mary, which consists of John, Mary and the loving-relation.

Russell (1956, 201) thought that only demonstrative pronouns “this” and “that” are genuine proper names (or singular terms). Contemporary philosophers of language typically take directly referring expressions to include also ordinary proper names, like “John” and “Mary”, and indexicals, such as “here”, “now”, “you”, “I”, “he”, and “she”. (What indexicals refer to depend on the context, in which they are used).

There is a dispute about what direct reference is based on. Russell (1956, 201) thought that it is based on direct awareness of the object referred to. Saul Kripke (1980) thinks that there must be a causal or historical connection between the object and our use of the term. At least, when it comes to art, we can be rather liberal: it is something in the context, in which we use the symbol, that determines the referred object—perhaps it is some causal relation to the object or just our intention to refer to it. So, in order to know what a symbol refers to, it is not enough to know the linguistic conventions or the symbol system, as Goodman thinks. We must also know the context, in which the term or symbol is used.

We can now see that propositions are non-linguistic: they consist of real objects and properties or relations that are bound together. So other symbols than sentences can in principle express propositions and thus say something.<sup>4</sup> This is possible, if we could just find the semantic roles of singular terms and predicates in the symbols. I think we can.

## V THE PROPOSITIONAL CONTENTS OF PICTURES AND ABSTRACT WORKS

**B**ecause propositions are non-linguistic, there is no problem for non-verbal symbols, such as pictures and samples, to express propositions and to say something about their objects. Instead of Goodman's single symbolic function, denotation, we just need a double function: each symbol must both pick out an object and attribute properties to it (both refer to an object and describe or characterize it). Then the referred object and attributed properties constitute the proposition that the symbol expresses. I think that our ordinary practice of using symbols supports this view of their content.

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<sup>4</sup> This is true even if propositions are understood as sets of possible worlds rather than Russellian structured entities. See, for example, Lycan (2008, 126–129).

Suppose there is a photograph of one of two identical twins. Nobody can distinguish the twins from each other just by looking. Which of them does the photograph depict? It seems that Goodman would have to say that it denotes both, because both have the properties that the photo attributes to its object (or, in Goodman's words, both are denoted by the photo according to the relevant symbol system). This cannot be right. Of course, we say that the photo is only of one of them, the twin whom it is taken of. It is of the one who was present when the photo was taken and reflected the light that went through the lens of the camera. We must therefore distinguish between the object that the photo directly refers to and what the photo tells or shows about that object. So, we have here the double symbolic function of referring and describing that determines the proposition expressed by the photo. It is the causal relation to the object that determines the referent.

With paintings, things are somewhat different. It may be plausible that a portrait refers to the person who sat for the artist and tells something about her. However, the object (or subject) of a painting is not always the sitter. For example, an artist may use a prostitute as a sitter for a painting about Virgin Mary. Yet, the painting represents Virgin Mary rather than the prostitute. It seems that here it is the artist's intention that determines the depicted object. Typically, this is also disclosed in the title of the work. Once again, we have the double function of picking out an object and saying something about it and thus a proposition expressed.

A picture, like a sentence, can therefore have a propositional content. The content is just much more complex and fine-grained than the content of a sentence. The number of properties that a picture attributes to the subject is huge, and we cannot completely express them in words. We simply lack words for all those properties. A picture is worth of thousand words.

The same is true of samples—Goodman's exemplifying symbols. For example, swatches of cloth in a tailor's sample book do not just exemplify certain of their own properties. They also refer to the ready suit and say that it will have those properties. This is the whole point of the sample. It gives information about the suit that does not yet exist.

Also, abstract works of art can express propositions. It is just required that they somehow pick out objects, to which they attribute the properties

they exemplify. Sometimes the title of the work discloses the object. Sometimes artists themselves tell us what their works are about. For example, Dmitri Shostakovich tells that all his symphonies beginning from the fourth are about Soviet life under the rule of Stalin (Volkov 2004).<sup>5</sup> Even purely instrumental music can exemplify feelings and other properties that it attributes to an object. It can express propositions, which once again are hard or impossible to express in words or in any other way.

So, pictures and even abstract works can express propositions and advance our knowledge about the world. However, there is a problem. Works of art, not only in literature but also in other arts, are typically fictional. There are no objects referred to, because there really are no fictional entities, such as Sherlock Holmes or Anna Karenina. Neither are typical abstract works thought to refer to anything: the artist gives no hints about the referred object; neither do the receivers look for it. I have two solutions to these problems: First, the use of a symbol that expresses an incomplete or false proposition can pragmatically implicate a proposition that is true. Second, abstract works that do not refer to the world outside of them can refer to and say something about themselves.

## VI FICTION

**B**ecause there are no fictional entities, fictional names are empty or meaningless and fictional sentences (and pictures) do not express complete propositions. A part of the proposition, the object referred to, is missing. Fictional sentences say nothing; they are neither true nor false. This is a problem, if we think that fiction can teach us something about the real world.

Kendall Walton (1990) suggests a solution. By using fictional sentences, we do not really say anything, but we pretend to say something. Fiction is a

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<sup>5</sup> I don't deny that we can listen to those symphonies without knowing this and without taking them to say anything about matters outside music. See below!



matter of make-believe. However, this solution does not yet answer our core question: How can fictional works say anything about the real world? I think they do tell about the world. They just do not say it directly or literally. They pragmatically imply or implicate it. This is a common feature of ordinary language. Suppose somebody asks me about my student Tom, whether he is good in philosophy, and I reply: "He has a nice handwriting." Even if I don't say it literally, I implicate that he is not good in philosophy (Grice 1989, 22–40).

Not only true sentences—or the utterances of these sentences—can pragmatically implicate something. Uttering a false sentence can implicate something that is true. Metaphors are like this. They are literally false, but can implicate something true. For example, if I say, "My love is a rose", I literally say something that is false. My love is not a plant. But this is not what I want to convey to you. I want to inform you about some of her characteristics.

If a false sentence can be used to pragmatically implicate something that is true, so can sentences, by which we pretend to say something and which lack a truth-value. Though fictional sentences and pictures do not literally say anything, they can pragmatically implicate something that is true about the real world.

The Bible gives a nice example of this: King David saw beautiful Bathsheba, seduced her, slept with her, and made her pregnant. After failing to get her husband, Uriah, to think he was the father of the child, David arranged for Uriah to be killed. Then the prophet Nathan came to David and told the following story about a rich man and a poor man:

The rich man had many flocks and herds; the poor man had only one lamb, which grew up with his children, ate at his table, lay at his bosom and was like a daughter to him. The rich man had an unexpected quest. Instead of slaughtering one of his own sheep, he slaughtered the poor man's only lamb and served it to his guest.

King David exploded in anger: "The man who did this deserves to die!" Then Nathan turned to David, pointed to him and declared: "You are that man!"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This version of the story is from Alvin Plantinga (2000, 452) who uses it for a different purpose.

This is a fictional, make-believe, story, but it is supposed to tell or implicate some truths about David. It does not explicitly say what those truths or propositions are. Perhaps, it is something obvious (that David did something morally wrong). Perhaps, it is difficult or impossible to put into exact words. Anyway, the story tells David something about him: it conveys a singular proposition about him (perhaps a moral proposition). He attains new knowledge about himself. Fiction is here used as a source of self-knowledge. This is surely an important kind of knowledge that fiction can give us.

The story also illustrates the fact that what fiction implicates is context-sensitive. To somebody else, the story may tell something different—perhaps some general propositions about rich people and poor people or about life generally. Aristotle thought so. He said in *Poetics*: “Poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal, while history relates particulars” (Aristotle 1995, 1451b).

People have a strong tendency to generalize on the basis of a few particular cases, perhaps just one. Some psychologists and philosophers take this tendency to be irrational, but if nature works in a law-like manner, this way of forming beliefs may very well be quite rational and reliable (Kornblith 1993, 87–96). This tendency extends to merely imagined cases and explains how and why we can learn not just singular but general truths from fiction. It is equally important that fiction can give counterexamples to generalization and prejudices that we already have. Fiction advances knowledge also by correcting our mistakes.

## VII

### LEARNING FROM ABSTRACT WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT

**I**t is true that many abstract works—paintings, pieces of music and buildings—are not thought to refer. Goodman says that also these works refer by exemplifying their own properties. This is true, if exemplification is a form of referring, but this does not explain how such works can say something. However, it is quite natural to understand these

sorts of exemplifications as a form of saying. We interpret these works as referring to themselves and saying that they have these properties. For example, sad music does not just refer to sadness; it says that it is sad. Of course, the properties need not be so obvious as sadness. They can be very complex and delicate, and it can require expertise to detect them.

So, some works of art teach us something about themselves. We learn that they have certain properties. This can hardly be denied, but does this not trivialize the idea that art teaches or advances knowledge? It does not, if the truths that art teaches are important. A work of art does not say about all its properties that it has them. It only says this about some of its properties—the important ones.

To Monroe Beardsley's criticism that the whole idea of exemplification might be dropped without loss, that mere possession of properties is all that matters, Goodman gives the following response:

Surely he does not suppose that critical comment consists of random listing of properties a work possesses, or that understanding a work amounts to noting such properties indiscriminately. A vital part of aesthetic understanding, especially but not exclusively in the case of abstract works, is determining which among its properties the work not only possesses but also conveys. The significant properties of a work, we might say, are those it signifies. This must be taken fully into account in one way or another, and my way is in terms of exemplification.

(Goodman 1984, 84.)

We can follow Goodman and say that understanding a work does not consist of noting random facts about it. It consists of grasping what it says. This is something that we learn when we understand the work. Moreover, this is not restricted to worldly facts represented, but includes also some facts about the work itself. It is these facts that, according to Beardsley (1981, 530–531) himself, are the source of aesthetic value: recognizing them causes

us to have experiences that have intrinsic aesthetic value.<sup>7</sup> This should also satisfy the toughest formalists, who insist that only the form matters in a work of art, not its content. The form can constitute the only content that the work has.

When I take works of art to say and tell things or to speak to us, I don't mean that it is the artist that does these things through his or her art, though this may be true. I follow Goodman by thinking that it is not always the intention of the artist that determines what his or her work tells us. Neither does the work itself, independently of us, say anything. It is we who use works of art to tell things to ourselves. It is something in us, something in the way we use works of art that gives them the power to speak to us.

This being the case, there is no need to restrict these insights to art. In addition, even the built and natural environments can speak to us. Perhaps, it is art that has taught us to look at our environment in this way.

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<sup>7</sup> I said in an earlier paper that Goodman's response is unilluminating, because it does not tell why the exemplified properties are the significant ones (Lammenranta 1992, 344–351). Now, I think that those properties may have a purely aesthetic significance in Beardsley's sense, and that this does not compromise the idea of art saying things. I want to thank Hanne Appelqvist for this change of mind. She also pointed out that Wittgenstein may have something similar in mind. See her discussion of the relevant passage from Wittgenstein (1958, 166) in Appelqvist (forthcoming).

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MARÍA JOSÉ ALCARAZ LEÓN

## AESTHETIC INTIMACY<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Aesthetic intimacy has attracted little attention compared to other sorts of aesthetic experience. However, specially when dealing with literary works, it seems that this experience is not only easily acknowledged but also highly valued. Arto Haapala, whose attempt at understanding aesthetic experience in connection to existentialist concerns is well established, has tried to clarify this experience and to expand the range of artworks with respect to which one can experience aesthetic intimacy. In this chapter, I explore some alternative ways of understanding aesthetic intimacy, and I aim at providing a narrower but, in my view, a more precise conception of this form of experience and of the value we attach to it.

**W**hile not every significant and valuable experience with artworks is accompanied by a sense of intimacy with the author or the work's perspective, it seems that at least sometimes this experience of proximity or closeness may endow artistic appreciation with a particular tone. As Arto Haapala has noted (2006), aesthetic intimacy is rare, but when it occurs it seems that a particular work or author becomes to play an important role in the appreciator's life. Among other things, the encounter with some particular artworks or authors seems to enhance the reader's self-understanding and her awareness of having a particular perspective.

In what follows, I would like to expand on our understanding of this

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experience and to clarify what makes it aesthetically important. In order to do so, I will try to examine different ways in which we can think of aesthetic intimacy. Some of them do not, in my view, provide a sufficient characterization of this experience; I will try to offer a tentative explanation based on the expressive<sup>2</sup> character of art. This approach can, in my view, provide a better explanation of the aesthetic worth of this peculiar experience and its role in our life as aesthetic appreciators.

## ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE AND AESTHETIC INTIMACY

**A**rto Haapala (1995, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2003) has devoted some attention to aesthetic intimacy and to the connection that it reveals between aesthetic and ordinary experiences as part of his approach to art and aesthetic experience from an existentialist concern.

But how exactly should we understand aesthetic intimacy? What is the specific value afforded by this form of intimacy? And, finally, what can we say about art and aesthetic experience more generally from the fact that it sometimes can provide this kind of experience? Haapala's contribution to these questions is the starting point of my own attempt at clarifying an issue that, in spite of its clear importance, has not been the focus of much philosophical attention. Albeit I will at some points depart from Haapala's own perspective on this issue, I think it is crucial to keep in mind one of his insights with respect to aesthetic intimacy. As I see it, Haapala's approach is dominated by an overall interest concerning the place this experience occupies in our constitution as aesthetic appreciators and subjects more generally. In this sense, his concern is not merely aesthetic. He aims at making explicit the relevance that this particular aesthetic experience

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<sup>2</sup> By the expressive character of art, I refer here to the aspects of the artwork that are to be grasped as expressing the artist's or the intended author's mind. I will expand on this issue in section 2.

has within our conception of life experience more generally understood. In this sense, he has paid much attention to the importance of aesthetic experience in its capacity for providing certain patterns of experience that, in turn, constitute our relationships to the world and to those who inhabit it. My aim will be, thus, to offer some further thoughts on aesthetic intimacy while keeping what I regard as one of Haapala's clear contributions to this issue: the acknowledgment that a proper understanding of aesthetic intimacy has to provide some elucidation of its significance within those practices conducting to making the world and our life intelligible.

I will proceed by exploring three different modes in which aesthetic intimacy can be understood<sup>3</sup>. Although each seems to provide some insight into this experience and can partially explain the sense of proximity that typically accompanies it, I will try to show that neither can offer a comprehensive explanation of aesthetic intimacy. In my view (section 2), a better way to approach this experience is by locating it within an expressivist understanding of art practice. According to this approach, we feel aesthetic intimacy with a particular work or artist when we relate to the expressive world<sup>4</sup> that the work affords in a certain way. Finally, I will conclude with some tentative suggestions about the broader importance that this experience has.

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<sup>3</sup> The first two can be found in Haapala's own approach to this experience. They point to a particular mode of knowledge or understanding afforded by art in its experiential and aesthetic dimension.

<sup>4</sup> Although I will develop this claim in section 2.1., the idea I would like to introduce at this stage is that we experience aesthetic intimacy when in the process of appreciating a particular work we feel a certain proximity with the expressive character of the work, that is with the way in which the artist or the intended author of the work expresses herself in the work. The expressed content is understood here in a broad sense encompassing different sorts of mental states such as emotions, beliefs, attitudes, desires, etc.



# I.1 AESTHETIC INTIMACY AND THE EXPERIENTIAL NATURE OF ART

**A** first way of characterizing aesthetic intimacy is by appealing to the experiential nature of art and the way we understand it. Artworks have been often conceived of as affording a particular, experiential, form of understanding. Particularly, when considering the representational arts, it seems that engagement with artworks characteristically affords a special way of grasping certain perspectives and of experiencing what it is to be in a particular situation. We can become acquainted with certain scenarios or with the experiential dimension of certain situations by ‘entering into’ a particular artistic or fictional world or by visually experiencing certain scenes. Thus, it is often said that we do not only learn about a particular situation through engaging with a novel or a film, we also come to see or experience how that situation evolves and which aspects become relevant for its proper understanding. This experiential quality is often put in terms of a contrast between propositional knowledge and practical knowledge or know-how. We experience a certain intimacy with the characters – their personalities, motivations and thoughts – and their situations thanks to the kind of presentation that mimetic artefacts typically afford. We come to know about the aspects that govern the fictional characters’ behaviour and to understand their relationships by directly seeing them in play. In general, we can endow mimetic representations with a certain cognitive value due to their experiential dimension; that is, to the fact that they prompt certain experiences as part of their proper understanding<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Although there is an on-going discussion concerning the epistemic validity of the beliefs we can form out of our engagement with artworks, I will assume for the sake of the argument that we can obtain some form of experiential knowledge from engaging with (fictional) artworks. What is important with respect to the issue of aesthetic intimacy so understood is not so much whether the beliefs formed are epistemically valid as the kind of experiential access we have to certain contents. On the problem of getting knowledge from literary appreciation see, among others, Haapala (2014), John (1998, 2007, 2013), Mikkonen (2015, 2018), or Stock (2016). For a recent defence of the possibility of gaining knowledge from imagination see Dorsch

Haapala (2006) has rightly pointed out that both physical and imaginative factors are involved in this form of aesthetic intimacy. Typically, our imaginative engagement with a fictional work allows for the sort of intimacy we may experience with respect to a character. But other forms of non-representational art, like architecture, may engage us in a more physical way. Our actual physical responses to the spatial patterns, the play with the light, or the material qualities displayed by the architectural work may be the source of a special form of intimacy with it. This does not mean that imaginative engagement and physical involvement are mutually exclusive modes of aesthetic intimacy. Sometimes, both forms of engagement may cooperate. For example, in a theatrical play certain aspects related to the stage setting and the way in which the dramatic space is presented may invite certain responses with a strong physical component; but the play can also engage us imaginatively in displaying a character's actions and psychological evolution. Alternatively, in attending to a musical performance there may be aspects of the concert space that invite a certain form of attention one may describe as physically intimate<sup>6</sup> and aspects of the musical work we may attend to imaginatively and that can, in their own way, also contribute to an overall experience of intimacy.

Thus, we can locate a specific source of aesthetic intimacy in artworks' capacity to experientially engage us both imaginatively and physically with certain representational and non-representational contents. However, we might be drawing conclusions too fast. If aesthetic intimacy simply followed from the experiential dimension of engagement and appreciation of art, we should conclude that aesthetic intimacy is a much more general experience. In fact, we should expect that any artwork would – in its own way – afford an experience of aesthetic intimacy. But I think that when we talk about this sort of experience we do not think of a general aspect of artistic experience, but of a much narrower experience. Something that only certain artworks seem to be able to provide.

Thus, the experiential sort of engagement that some artworks typically afford may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for aesthetic

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(2016).

<sup>6</sup> For example, the performers may be located very close to the audience or in a space that prevents the sense of frontality that often characterizes the concert house.

intimacy. It seems that we need something more than the mere capacity of art to engage us both physically and imaginatively, something that helps us identifying the special character of that experience that only certain artworks seem to provide.

## 1.2

### AESTHETIC INTIMACY AS LIVING WITHIN AN AESTHETIC PERIOD

**A**nother way in which aesthetic intimacy could be approached is by paying attention to Hegel's conception of Art as a mode of expression or manifestation of the Idea or Spirit (*Geist*) and to the special immediacy that artistic forms had for those who belong to the period of their production. Two aspects of Hegel's view on art are relevant for this way of understanding aesthetic intimacy. Firstly, Hegel regarded artistic forms as expressions of the Spirit in its dialectical relationship with matter or sensible reality. Artistic forms are not thus arbitrary, their validity was given by their intimate relationships with the Idea they were a manifestation or expression of.

Secondly, thanks to this expressive role, Art also contributed to self-understanding and, therefore, to the evolution and constitution of the Spirit. By providing the Spirit an image of itself, the Spirit could recognize itself and, as a result of that recognition, develop towards a different stage on the way to its own self-knowledge.

An important aspect of Hegel's understanding of the expressive role of art is that art forms are to be regarded as manifestations of the Spirit. It is this spontaneity which guarantees the expressive and constitutive value of those forms. They are not produced out of reflection or thought; nor are they resulting from capricious choice. They convey the spiritual content in a direct, spontaneous manner. This spontaneity also explains that certain forms possess a certain vitality and immediacy at the moment in which they are produced that is no longer available once the Spirit evolves into

a further stage of development. Those forms are so to say 'transparent' to those who first produced them and they only become proper 'forms of expression' – that is, expressive options among others – for those that no longer live within them.

Thus, we can distinguish at least two forms of understanding and relating to art within Hegel's view on Art. On the one hand, there is a more immediate but also, to some extent, unreflective way of engaging with art forms. On the other, there is a mediated form of understanding according to which we perceive certain artistic forms as expression of a culture we no longer belong to. Also it seems that, after this view, the genuine mode of understanding art coincides with the perspective of those who lived in a particular period and therefore were familiar with the artistic forms produced at that period. The art forms produced within a particular period were grasped and understood with an immediacy that is no longer available for those who contemplate them from a different historical perspective. The sort of understanding that an appreciator that belongs to a different time can aspire to can only be indirect or mediated. We can maybe understand Greek or Medieval art but we cannot feel at home within those forms: they have lost their vitality, naturalness or spontaneity. These forms were once the very representational and aesthetic constellation through which Spirit understood – or, following Hegel's jargon, acknowledged – Itself, but they are mere objects for aesthetic contemplation once the Spirit has evolved and distanced itself from them.

This view about artistic and aesthetic understanding has survived to our days and many art historians still endorse a similar view of the symbiotic relationship between aesthetic forms and the historical and social milieu from which they arise<sup>7</sup>. As a consequence, aesthetic and artistic understanding is conceived of in a way that distinguishes between the producer or participants' perspective and the mere observer's perspective. Although we approach those forms with certain tools that can make them intelligible to us, the way in which we relate to them is different.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Baxandall (1985). In chapter IV he elaborates the differences in understanding that arise between the participant and the observer of a cultural period and its products.

After Hegel's view of art in its historical role, we could characterize aesthetic intimacy as a matter of feeling at home within a certain aesthetic constellation<sup>8</sup>. Thus, the notion of aesthetic intimacy that one could derive from Hegel's understanding of Art is a strong one for it invokes the possibility of living in or through certain aesthetic forms not as something one can freely accept or reject but as the very condition for (aesthetic) intelligibility. The notion of transparency will both serve to explain aesthetic intimacy and to emphasize the fundamental role that certain aesthetic or conceptual forms may play at a particular time. Those forms are transparent to those who live within them because, at least for some time, they cannot be substituted or translated into something different. They provide the very medium through which understanding takes place. The subjectivity they serve to express is not something distinct from the very forms through which it is embodied. They play in that sense an expressive and constitutive role.

As we have seen, one immediate consequence of this mode of understanding aesthetic intimacy is that it seems no longer possible to feel it unless one actually belongs to the corresponding period or culture. Aesthetic intimacy can be thus crafted in terms of a particular form of aesthetic understanding that is only available to those who actually inhabit an aesthetic world. But it could not be possible to enjoy this experience when appreciating artworks that belong to a different time or to a different culture<sup>9</sup>. One could be at most an artistic tourist looking at others' aesthetic patterns with wonder and curiosity, but without being able to enter into an intimate relationship with those forms.

In "Existential Aesthetics and Interpretation" (2003) Haapala explores the notions of artistic understanding paying attention to the kind of misunderstanding that can be grounded in our distance<sup>10</sup> from the aesthetic

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8 Albeit for Hegel that possibility was no longer available once art's historical development had reached its end, it is possible to explore the implications of Hegel's way of understanding artistic forms with respect to the issue of aesthetic intimacy.

9 The relative currency of this idea can be identified within a recently developed debate concerning the wrongdoing implied in cultural appropriation. The underlying idea has to do precisely with this way of regarding certain cultural manifestations or forms as intimately linked to a particular cultural or group identity. For some recent philosophical reflection on this issue see Young and Brunk, 2012, Nguyen and Strohl, forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*.

10 We understand here the notion of aesthetic distance not as it is normally understood in

constellation to which the object under appreciation belongs. Even if there are limits to a possible scepticism with respect to our ability to aesthetically understand artworks that are remote to us, it seems that we cannot simply address these works as we do when appreciating the products of our own cultural environment. There may be key aspects that are crucial and basic for properly aesthetically understanding a work that may be missing in our current situation or of which we may be ignorant.<sup>11</sup> Still, Haapala thinks that aesthetic understanding can be possible with respect to works whose original environment is now remote. However, given this picture of aesthetic understanding, it may be more difficult to defend that our experience could be possibly described as an experience of aesthetic intimacy. Even if we accept that aesthetic understanding is possible across different times and cultures, it seems that the undeniable specificity of each period will introduce a distance that could likely undermine one's possible sense of proximity with respect to those works.

In relation to this way of conceiving aesthetic understanding, Haapala has also noticed a more fundamental role that aesthetic forms play in our lives. Following Heidegger's characterization of "existentials"<sup>12</sup>, Haapala (2003) pays attention to what he calls the "existentials" of the artworld, or of the practice of art considered as a mode of being. As well as "existentials" play, in Heidegger's view, a certain transcendental role in our understanding of any form of human practice or existence, the so-called "existentials" of the artworld are to be considered as the minimal requirements or conditions without which the practice of art would not be possible as it is<sup>13</sup>.

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the philosophical literature concerning the proper conditions for aesthetically appreciating an object, but as a temporal and cultural distance that may negatively affect our aesthetic understanding.

11 For example, one may not get the expressive force of a particular inflection of a *Nô* actor unless one is familiar enough with that practice and with the world it belongs to.

12 Haapala also uses the term 'existentialia'. Some of these *existentialia* are the notions of 'being-in', 'being-with-others', 'being-alongside' and 'care'.

13 Haapala identifies those 'existentialia' with the notions of 'artist', 'artwork', 'interpreter' and 'artworld'. These notions will be differently instantiated and developed within different artistic practices but without them our most basic approach to art as an intentional practice wouldn't even be possible.

Although Haapala does not expand much on the Heideggerian idea that it is in the actual and concrete practices that those *existentials* become normatively constituted<sup>14</sup>, we can draw, following Haapala's own initiative, an analogy between the way human practices become normatively constituted and the artistic case. What in each artworld or practice becomes normative – setting the pattern for the continuation of a particular artistic practice – is not given *a priori* or from a reflective consideration of that practice, but by its very constitution within the practice itself. In this sense, deep aesthetic understanding requires being aware of the contingency and fragility of each aesthetic proposal, as well as of the importance of its role in determining future aesthetic possibilities. An important aspect of this way of understanding aesthetic intelligibility is both its temporality and its self-constituting character. Nothing can grant that a particular, contingent, aesthetic development will speak to those who receive it. Its normative character, its persuasiveness as an aesthetic achievement, can only be confirmed within the very practice that produces it.

Aesthetic intimacy may be, in this light, understood as the experience of deeply understanding the normative appeal or proposal that a particular aesthetic attempt offers. The intimacy involved here has deeply to do with the fact that the work's aesthetic proposal succeeds in reaching the audience although there might be no explanation or rationale that can explain its actual achievement. And yet, the appreciator feels the aesthetic form is accomplished, that it is an aesthetic achievement.

However, this way of understanding aesthetic intimacy may be undistinguishable from a characterization of aesthetic understanding *simpliciter*. So, as we saw with the first way of understanding aesthetic intimacy, we seem to require something more in order to be able to provide a more refined characterization of aesthetic intimacy.

I would like now to explore a third form of aesthetic intimacy that may be linked to the aforementioned experience of aesthetic understanding. That is, with the experience that one correctly responds to a particular artistic form, or responds to it with understanding.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Pippin (2005).

1.3  
AESTHETIC INTIMACY AND THE (IM)PERSONAL  
EXERCISE OF OUR REFLECTIVE ABILITIES

A third distinctive way of understanding aesthetic intimacy can be cashed out in terms of sharing a taste or finding one's judgements of taste to be echoed by others' judgements. Aesthetic intimacy in this sense will not so much refer to a common, shared worldview or perspective – be it conceptual or aesthetic – as to sharing certain aesthetic preferences or judgements.

Sharing a taste seems to be an especially bonding phenomenon. We feel at home with those who share a similar taste. This intimacy can be explained precisely in terms of certain features that are peculiar to the aesthetic judgement. That one finds oneself sharing her aesthetic judgement with others enhances one's sense of proximity to them because the judgement is supposed to be based not on reasoning or on the following of a certain rule, but upon a sentiment of pleasure which arises freely – without conceptual determination – out of the spontaneous exercise of one's reflective capacities. That we precisely concur in those judgements that are supposed to result from the free spontaneous exercise of our abilities to judge reinforces the sense of commonality with those who issue the same judgements that we do. If our agreement had been based on a conceptual determination or in the acceptance of a rule, we would not feel as united. So, the intimacy experienced is deeply connected to the kind of judgement involved<sup>15</sup>.

However, following this mode of understanding aesthetic intimacy, a certain paradox seems to appear once we bring into consideration the alleged universality of the aesthetic judgement and, hence, its anti-parochialism. Aesthetic intimacy, insofar as it invites the adoption of a

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<sup>15</sup> It is not merely a matter of shared feeling. Sentiments can be educated, promoted and manipulated, but aesthetic judgements – albeit grounded upon a sentiment – are not merely a matter of being disposed to emotionally react to certain things in a certain way, but a matter of freely exercising our judgemental abilities and, hence, of determining autonomously whether something merits our applause.



personal perspective<sup>16</sup>, seems contrary to the universal character that aesthetic judgement aspires to. Something in the acceptance of this view of aesthetic judgement – which I am invoking in order to characterize aesthetic intimacy as a matter of shared judgement – runs paradoxically against the idea of aesthetic intimacy.

As I see it, the aspect suspect of causing the air of paradox has to do with Kant's view that aesthetic judgement is in some sense impersonal.<sup>17</sup> The aspiration to universal validity that accompanies one's judgement has precisely to do with the fact that its grounding is not determined by one's idiosyncratic features; the judgement could have been issued by anyone who had disinterestedly and freely exercised her judgemental capacities. Since it is a requirement for the correct exercise of the aesthetic judgement that it is based in a disinterested pleasure, my judgement is not 'mine' as much as anyone else's. Kant rendered this aspect of aesthetic judgement in terms of its aspiration to universal validity. Our aesthetic judgements are thus ones that anyone who freely exercised her reflective abilities would expectedly have come to. So the idea of a community of taste becomes so inclusive – and, hence, so universal – that there seems to be little room for talking about the experience of aesthetic intimacy in this context.

Thus, it seems that the very source of a special sort of intimacy in the exercise of aesthetic judgement – its free, spontaneous, nature – leaves us

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<sup>16</sup> I think that this personal dimension is also reflected in the fact that when we experience that a work is aesthetically intimate, we do not expect that everyone else shares that experience.

<sup>17</sup> In § 6 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant emphasizes the idea that the aesthetic judgment is not the expression of personal taste and that, when properly issued, it aspires to universal validity. In Kant's words: "For one cannot judge that about which he is aware that the satisfaction in it is without any interest in his own case in any way except that it must contain a ground of satisfaction for everyone. For since it is not grounded in any inclination of the subject (nor in any other underlying interest), but rather the person making the judgment feels himself completely free with regard to the satisfaction that he devotes to the object, he cannot discover as grounds of the satisfaction any private conditions, pertaining to his subject alone, and must therefore regard it as grounded in those that he can also presuppose in everyone else; consequently he must believe himself to have grounds for expecting a similar pleasure of everyone. Hence he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a property of the object and the judgment logical (constituting a cognition of the object through concepts of it), although it is only aesthetic and contains merely a relation of the representation of the object to the subject, because it still has the similarity with logical judgment that its validity for everyone can be presupposed." (5:211; pp. 96–97)

simultaneously unable to accommodate the phenomenon we are trying to clarify. If we focus on the universality of the aesthetic judgement, it seems that nothing personal and, therefore nothing intimate, can be really at stake. Our sense of proximity with those with whom we share our judgement is not with anyone in particular but with anyone *simpliciter*<sup>18</sup>. Although I think there might be ways to get out of this impasse<sup>19</sup>, I will try to look at a different aspect of artistic appreciation that may offer a more promising way of dealing with aesthetic intimacy.

## || AESTHETIC INTIMACY AS INTIMACY WITH AN ARTIST'S EXPRESSIVE REPERTOIRE

**S**o far, we have explored aesthetic intimacy as (i) imaginative involvement or physical participation with a particular (fictional) character or work; (ii) a transparent relationship between a certain community and the aesthetic forms they spontaneously produce; and (iii) a convergence in our aesthetic judgements and, consequently, a feeling of commonality with those who share our judgement.

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<sup>18</sup> I think Haapala (2006) is very much aware of a similar tension between acknowledging the possibility of aesthetic intimacy and the problematic assumption that aesthetic appreciation involves some kind of (psychological) distance. In his view, psychological distance is not only innocuous with respect to the possible emotional engagement that certain works prescribe or demand, but a requisite for this emotional engagement to take place. Psychological distance properly understood merely involves preventing that certain personal stories, desires, or motivations interfere with our aesthetic engagement and with a proper appreciation of the work. However, psychological distance does not preclude that the appreciator engages with the work in an emotional way or that she emotionally responds to it.

<sup>19</sup> I suggest, that the apparent tension between the universal aspirations of aesthetic Judgements and the possibility of aesthetic intimacy can be solved by paying attention to the importance of the first personal character of aesthetic Judgement. In "Beauty and the Agential Dimension of Taste" (Philosophia Verlag, Munich, forthcoming) I have tried to show that we can give due place to the personal dimension of the aesthetic Judgement without giving up on its intrinsic universal aspiration. In my view, if we do not take into account the first personal character of aesthetic Judgement, certain phenomena, such as aesthetic alienation or the importance of aesthetic coherence, cannot be fully explained.

Although these alternative ways of explaining aesthetic intimacy have the virtue of clearly focusing on certain distinct aspects of aesthetic experience and creativity, they seem to point to a form of proximity or familiarity that falls short of an accomplished and more refined characterization of aesthetic intimacy. It may be true that the aforementioned phenomena are to some extent involved in the experience of aesthetic intimacy, but my impression is that we refer to something more specific, and more exceptional, than the phenomena referred above. Aesthetic intimacy seems to be related to a form of deep understanding that goes beyond the forms of proximity examined so far.

In this section, I would like to offer an alternative or complementary view of aesthetic intimacy. I will first locate aesthetic intimacy in relation to a particular way in which appreciators relate to the expressive world of an artist. That is, I will try to defend that aesthetic intimacy occurs when we feel a certain familiarity, correspondence or affinity with a particular artist as she expresses herself in her work. Secondly, I will reject that the best way to understand this experience requires anything like identifying with the artist or empathising with her in any substantial sense. Finally, I will revise Haapala's considerations concerning the role that one's personal history allegedly plays in the occurrence of aesthetic intimacy. Although there is a sense in which one's personal history is relevant for this experience, I claim that its role is much less prominent than Haapala thinks; or, rather, the personal dimension involved plays a different role.

As a final remark I would like to clarify, taking as a starting point this view on aesthetic intimacy, the specific value that this kind of experience has both from an aesthetic point of view and from a more general consideration on its value.

## II.1 INTIMACY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF EXPRESSION

I began this chapter with the remark that aesthetic intimacy is not a pervasive experience within art's appreciation. We certainly experience art with different degrees of proximity and I think some of the phenomena pointed out above can illustrate how our relationship with art can sometimes require a special sort of involvement. However, I think that the experience of aesthetic intimacy is unusual and does not necessarily involve the senses of proximity that we have referred to above. As I see it, aesthetic intimacy takes place when we feel certain proximity and esteem with respect to an artist's expressive repertoire or world.

Aesthetic intimacy is not merely a matter of particularly liking an author or an artistic genre<sup>20</sup>, but a more prized and personal experience. My suggestion is to consider it as an episode in which we experience that the artist as she is present in her work – that is, in her way of constructing a fictional world or in producing a visual image, or in putting together an aesthetic whole – is someone we feel as close, or as someone whose mode of being and of looking at things we would share. Her expressive world is one we feel particularly close to.

Although this way of characterizing aesthetic intimacy does not presuppose that the artist actually expresses herself in her work, I think this may be possible and that when it occurs our sense of intimacy is even greater or deeper. I have no space to expand on the issue of artistic expression as a distinct phenomenon and on the right way to understand

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<sup>20</sup> Haapala (2006) considers at some point that each appreciator may be conditioned in her experiences of aesthetic intimacy by certain tendencies or dispositions to enjoy certain artistic forms or genres over others. I think that this is an important remark because it is necessary to consider the role that our familiarity or knowledge of a particular art form, genre, or style may play in the occurrence of the experience of aesthetic intimacy. However, I think we must be careful not to reduce aesthetic intimacy to this kind of familiarity or disposition towards certain objects of appreciation.

the relationship between the work and the artist, but I will assume that it is possible that an artist expresses herself through her work<sup>21</sup>.

Albeit I think aesthetic intimacy should not be understood as pertaining only to certain art forms, I believe it may be more clearly exemplified by looking at our understanding of an artist's expression in literary works<sup>22</sup>. In literature it seems much easier to have the feeling of encountering a specific person who talks and thinks in a particular way and who offers us a specific mode of dealing with the world. Her expression is directly given through her linguistic behaviour and this makes the literary case very much like ordinary expression<sup>23</sup>. We can become acquainted with the particular mental set of the writer (or, less problematically, of the implicit narrator) by paying attention both to her explicit judgements and statements and to her implicit choices and modes of linguistically organizing the events. Tone, detail in describing a particular setting, or the way in which that setting determines the character's mood, poetic resources, ways of construing a character, and so on, permit the reader to become acquainted not merely with the contents of a particular fictional world but with the author's way of building it up<sup>24</sup>.

Assuming that aesthetic intimacy has its home in a certain experience of the artist as expressed in her work, how should we characterize this

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21 This does not imply that there can be cases where a work's expressive tone is something construed by the artist and that, therefore, it does not express the artist herself. In those cases, what we experience as the expressive character of the work is analogous to the implicit narrator in a literary work, where the perspective through which we enter into a particular fictional world is part of the artistic artefact and does not need to be the artist's own. This must be granted because there are many occasions in which an artist's working conditions do not allow for enough space to make artistic decisions that would be truly constitutive of an act of expression. However, I think that when an artist's choices are her own, it is part of the understanding of her work that we grasp it as resulting from those choices and hence as manifesting or expressing the artist's mind.

22 I cannot offer any conclusive argument or data to support this claim and it may be that I just take my own personal experience as paradigmatic in this respect. In any case, and if my suggestion that aesthetic intimacy is rooted in a certain relation to the artist's expressiveness is on the right track, there is room for other experiences of aesthetic intimacy beyond the literary case.

23 Ordinary expression, at least in its simplest cases, relies to a great extent on linguistic behaviour. Other important expressive resources are non-linguistic behaviour – such as gesturing – or simply acting.

24 Haapala's view on the possibility of seeing the artist in her work is elaborated in 2003.

experience? Is aesthetic intimacy a matter of sharing the artist's expressive perspective or attitude? Is it necessary that one identifies with that particular mode of expression or, at least, that one feels some kind of empathy towards it? How shall we understand the appreciator's relationship with the expressive dimension of the work for it to count as a case of aesthetic intimacy?

In a sense, aesthetic intimacy seems like intimacy with another person in that a feeling of proximity is involved. However, it is not clear how shall we understand this proximity. One natural place to look at could be identification or empathy. Aesthetic intimacy will be thus understood in terms of identifying oneself with the artist as expressed in her work or in a feeling of empathy towards her world. These notions have become very popular in the literature that focuses upon the different modes in which a reader or a spectator engages with artworks. Moreover, they have become very handy for solving other more general problems, such as the problem of knowing others' mind or understanding other cultures or groups, which, in a sense, precede the issue of aesthetic intimacy or even the problem of art's interpretation. In fact, identification and empathy have been increasingly considered as the key for overcoming a number of problems related to the alleged interpretative gap that hinders understanding among different groups and cultures.

However, there are some reasons to be sceptical about the need for these notions or, at least, about their actual role. Following Constantine Sandis (2009) this overabundance of empathy and identification, rather than solving the problems they allegedly help to overcome, assumes and dramatizes the very sceptical position that originates the interpretative gap in the first place. In his view, empathy or identification can be understood more as a consequence of successfully understanding others than as a condition for it. In fact, the magic trick that empathy is supposed to perform in opening and disclosing the others' mind only seems compelling if we initially assume that others' minds are closed boxes whose contents are not available by someone who is outside the box. But if we accept that those alleged hidden contents are not so hidden and that they partly constitute themselves through the ways in which they are expressed, there is no need

to resort to a psychological trick in order to make understanding other mind possible. Understanding others is simply a matter of making sense of their behaviour with a deep concern for what it may be important and significant for them<sup>25</sup>.

Following Sandis' reasoning, it is not obvious that understanding others, even in an intimate way, necessarily involves sharing a feeling or adopting the same perspective, as identification seems to require. Sometimes, those with whom we feel intimacy are not – and need not be – in the same predicament or situation as we are, nor is it required for intimacy that those who engage in that relation share a particular set of beliefs or attitudes. In fact, it may be that neither empathy nor identification is necessary for aesthetic intimacy to take place<sup>26</sup>. This may sound odd given the prominence and currency that these notions have in contemporary aesthetics and psychological approaches to art and fiction, but I think it is possible to show that a proper understanding of aesthetic intimacy repels these notions by paying attention to what intimacy, in more ordinary contexts, amounts to<sup>27</sup>.

If neither identification nor empathy is the key, how shall we understand the sort of proximity involved? Haapala is certainly right in underlining the significance of one's personal identity in determining which particular artworks we feel intimate with. As I have insisted above, aesthetic intimacy

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25 Sandis does not reject that psychological identification and empathy may be useful tools to reach cooperative behaviour or to other practices where feeling can actually play a motivating role. His concern is rather with those who consider empathy and psychological identification as necessary for understanding others. In his view, the need for empathy or identification is only pressing if we assume a sceptical attitude towards the possibility of understanding others "merely" by paying attention to what they do. But if we assume that people do express themselves in their behaviour, there is no need for a distinct method involving mental identification for overcoming doubt or ignorance. Uncertainty about how to understand someone's behaviour does not vanish through engaging with psychological identification but through a closer and more concerned attention to her behaviour.

26 Actually, adopting an identification stance may ruin the experience of aesthetic intimacy because it may display the author's own perspective under the appreciator's own light in a manner that stops paying enough attention to the author's particular perspective.

27 One could argue that even if identification or empathy may not be necessary for understanding – or even intimate understanding – it may be required for the experience of intimacy. One thing is to understand someone else, even intimately, and another to share some intimate experience. Maybe intimacy requires identification or empathy in a manner in which mere understanding does not. Nevertheless, I hope to show that we can clarify aesthetic intimacy without resorting to them.

goes beyond accurate artistic understanding or experiencing the work from an insider's perspective. As with other experiences of intimacy, understanding is necessary but it cannot fully explain the special character of this experience. So, there seems to be something about us, considered as individuals, that partly explains aesthetic intimacy and that Haapala characterizes in terms of personal identity, history or circumstances.

I would like to pause here and examine how exactly this aspect is to be understood. When we pay attention to experiences of intimacy with other people, it seems that a precondition for this experience is that the subjects involved shared an important or significant lifespan; that they know each other in the way one knows someone who belongs to the same family or friendship. However, when we think about aesthetic intimacy – as the peculiar closeness an appreciator experiences with respect to a work or an author – the conditions are different. First, aesthetic intimacy often occurs when engaging with works we encounter for the first time and without knowing much about the author – or her work – in advance. So, a history of acquaintance with the work that elicits that experience does not seem to be a precondition for aesthetic intimacy. In fact, when we experience this sort of intimacy with works that we encounter for the first time we are, as it were, taken by surprise. Secondly, the experiences of intimacy with others are – at least in the paradigmatic cases – reciprocal<sup>28</sup>, but reciprocity cannot be a feature of aesthetic intimacy for obvious reasons. So, if we consider the role that a shared lifespan, familiarity, and reciprocity actually play in paradigmatic cases of intimacy, we soon realize that when we talk about the importance of one's personal history in the occurrence of aesthetic intimacy we cannot simply draw an analogy from the non-aesthetic case. The role that our personal history plays in episodes of aesthetic intimacy must be different<sup>29</sup>.

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28 Maybe if we think of possible experiences of intimacy with objects (one's childhood bedroom or playground) this condition is not necessary. But I think that it would be hard to find an intimate relationship between two people if one of them was not able to engage in the experience. There may be exceptions, as in some experiences of baby-care.

29 I think that a similar problem arises when we consider works that seem to elicit a nostalgic feeling in the appreciator. Since nostalgia seems to be intimately related to one's personal history, it seems paradoxical that nostalgia is properly experienced in responding to a work. A recent exploration of this theme with respect to the emotion of nostalgia can be found in



So far I have been trying to remain as close as possible to our ordinary understanding of intimacy in order to illuminate the notion of aesthetic intimacy. Deep understanding – without necessarily feeling empathy or identification – proximity or familiarity, and a sense that something related to one’s own identity is at stake seem to be part of this experience. As I have tried to show, this last aspect seems hard to explain given that the sense of familiarity and proximity experienced towards an author does not seem to be grounded upon the actual acquaintance with the author. And yet when we experience aesthetic intimacy with a work there seems to be something intimately related to us as individual or particular subjects<sup>30</sup>. Maybe one way in which we can conceive this personal aspect is by considering the manner in which we relate to the expressive world of an artist or to the artist as expressed in her work. The works that we aesthetically experience in an intimate way are those in which we experience that a particular way of expression or a particular perspective could be our own – without actually having to be so – or that a deep understanding of that expressive endeavour is part of one’s experience of the work. It may be difficult to make explicit the personal aspects that make us feel that certain expressive world is familiar or close. But whatever these aspects are, the experience of aesthetic intimacy seems to be partly grounded upon the sort of proximity we experience with respect to that particular expressive world.

## 11.2 AESTHETIC INTIMACY AS AN AESTHETICALLY VALUABLE EXPERIENCE

**F**inally, following this tentative characterization of aesthetic intimacy, I would like to draw some conclusion concerning the value that this special form of experiencing artworks may have as an aesthetic and as a more general experience. I think one way in which the aesthetic value

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Martínez Marín (forthcoming in *Debates in Aesthetics*).

<sup>30</sup> See note 16 above.

of this experience can be characterized is by focusing on the possibility of feeling a certain proximity or closeness that is not merely explained by having shared a lifespan – as in ordinary intimacy – or by sharing someone’s perspective, set of beliefs, or attitudes. The key aspect of aesthetic intimacy is precisely that we feel certain proximity with someone’s expressive world or manner of producing artworks; that is, whose aesthetic decisions we experience as close. The intimacy is with the aesthetic dimension of the work and not with the author’s expressed beliefs or attitudes; that is, the intimacy is felt with the way in which the artist aesthetically works out the world presented in her work, with the artist’s aesthetic self.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, aesthetic intimacy affords a special kind of understanding where the bonding tie lies precisely in the artist’s aesthetic choices and in their expressive dimension and not in a theoretical or moral partnership.

This may also serve to explain the significance of aesthetic intimacy more generally. Beyond its aesthetic importance, aesthetic intimacy offers, I think, a kind of experience where one discovers modes of expression that, albeit produced by others and therefore not one’s own, speak to us with a particular closeness. In this sense, I think aesthetic intimacy shows the possibility of achieving a deep understanding of others’ subjectivity that is not based on a prior common history, familiarity or friendship. Aesthetic intimacy, rare as it is, makes us aware of the possibility of a deep understanding and proximity that does not rely on a prior belonging to a particular group nor upon possessing a particular worldview.

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<sup>31</sup> By ‘aesthetic self’ I refer to those aesthetic features that are perceived as constituting an artist’s style, that is, to those aesthetic choices that become characteristic of an artist and that end up constituting a way to acknowledge her artistic and aesthetic profile.

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KNUT OVE ELIASSEN

## QUALITY ISSUES

### ABSTRACT

Taking its point of the departure in examples drawn from marketing, quality assurance, and aesthetics, the article analyzes different historical configurations of the quality concept in order to demonstrate how the term's semantics is intrinsic to the conceptual economies of which it is an element. Moreover, the article draws attention the "spillage" between the different modern quality discourses in the sense that the specific usage of the term in one context have come to influence, even "contaminate" the content of the concept in a different context. The effects of this is manifest in the contemporary neo-liberal phraseology of quality assurance where the word quality notoriously fluctuates between the normative and the descriptive. Identifying three different quality concepts in the contemporary discourse on quality, the paper argues that the analysis in the final account show how the temporality structures inherent to the three concepts reveal their possible political consequences.

Is there anything more quotidian than aesthetic quality? One defining feature of the affluent society is the permanent pressure exerted on the aesthetic faculties of its citizens. As consumers, we assess quality on an everyday basis. Thanks to life-long comprehensive training most of us have acquired the skills needed to navigate the abundance of commodities confronting us when we enter stores, turn on the television set, open our laptops, choose restaurants, plan the weekend getaway, etc. In the era of neo-liberalism and unbridled commodity fetishism – what Marx called the spectacle of *die Warenästhetik* –, the gold standard and common

denominator of these endlessly proliferating acts of judgment is that magic formula of the customer surveys, *quality*.

While the emphasis on quality has been a distinguishing feature of the rationality of 20<sup>th</sup> century marketing, during the last decades the term has migrated into the world of public service as an effect of the implementation of management philosophies originating in business studies. *Total quality control*, the now more than half a century old principle of American business guru, Armand Vallin Feigenbaum, is now a part of the very infra-structure of public administrations across the Western World. ‘Quality assurance’ is the order of the day due to the expanding implementations of the quality standards of ISO – *International Standards Organization* – and the increasing pressure exerted on public servants to provide a quality product, be it in social care, education, or for that matter the army. “Smaller, but smarter”, “better service for less money”, “more bang for the bucks”, are familiar mantras that clearly signal the semantic universe as well as the purposes of modern management philosophy’s notions of quality.

In the world of art, a third concept of quality still lingers, a reminiscence of modernist aesthetics’ claim that quality is recognizable by art’s capacity (the performance, the text, the object) to transgress the cognitive horizon of its audiences. Genuine artistic quality manifests itself against the backdrop of standards of taste. Modern art is thus fundamentally agonistic; its power to distinguish and establish hierarchies (new/old, good/bad, genuine/kitsch etc.) is an intrinsic and defining feature. However, to understand quality as the measure of works of art’s singular nature and its – by the very same token – capacity to transcend established aesthetic standards of artistic traditions implicated that true works of art assert themselves as such by negating that which precedes them. To the degree that the aesthetic verdicts of works contain appeals to higher reasons than art, applying measuring sticks such as taste, ideology or moral value, the aesthetic argument is suspended as the work is evaluated as a medium serving other purposes than art. Works of arts that appeal to criteria of evaluation external to aesthetic reason do not meet the modernist requirements of aesthetic quality.

Three different notions of quality, three different conceptual economies. The proliferating and ubiquitous user satisfaction queries that accompany

an increasing number of the consumer's business transactions come across less a sign of concern for the quality of the product, than an indication of fear felt by service providers and retailers for the fickle nature of the easily seduced customer. Protocols of quality assurance are, on the other hand, in principle the practical application of certain standards in order to ensure that a product meets a set of required and expected specifications. Finally, the somewhat paradoxical modernist notion of quality is, so to speak, that of a standard that is not at standard. Contrary to how the quality concept functions in the world of commodity aesthetics and new public management, the transgressive nature of genuine works of art prevents the establishment of a positive class concept. Moreover, as long as the concept of transgression requires both the negation of the forms of tradition as well as the expectations of the audience, it is clearly at odds with the metrics principle of contemporary quality assurance.

In sum, the aesthetic spectacle of commodities, the metrics of quality assurance and the qualities of the experience of art, refer to irreconcilable and asymmetrical notions of quality. Not because one is normative and the others are descriptive – the normative and the descriptive are elements of all the three conceptual economies –, but because they articulate the relations between the normative and the descriptive in different ways. Thus, there is, strictly speaking, not one concept of quality, but several. In itself, this is hardly controversial; however, it is an insight of some relevance to the existing discourses on quality, where there is a tendency that these different concepts are confused. Due to their homonymy, they tend to blend into each other. Given the current topicality of the concept of quality in several disparate fields, a renewed discussion of the concept might yield insights that can shed some light both on the complex reasons for its popularity as well as the concept's potential as an analytic tool. A historical analysis of the concept might provide some critical distance to the phraseology that is currently prevailing.

“Quality is to a product, what character is to a man”. The slogan belongs to one of the pioneers of modern marketing, Johan Henry Heinz. Originally appearing in the 1890s on Heinz’ ketchup-bottles, the motto is symptomatic for the new challenges of marketing that arose in the early days of mass consumption. Mass produced commodities are uniform as they adhere to standards. While the absence of distinguishing features might be desirable from the point of view of the standardization protocols of production, they are less so in marketing; on display in the store, alongside other competing products, distinction is a precarious value. A visit to the nearest food store will confirm to what degree Heinz has succeeded in promoting the difference that makes a difference. Thanks to its fusion with *Kraft foods*, *Kraft Heinz Company* became the fifth largest food company in the world. Heinz’ slogan still appears on a large number of their products along with the number 57 in elevated types on the container. It is symptomatic of Heinz’ aesthetic approach to marketing that the claim that the company offers 57 different products never had any root in reality; the idea was that the number looked good on the container and better than other numbers. Still, his most revolutionary marketing idea was that the container had to be transparent in order for the customers themselves to *see* the quality of the product on display. There is an appeal to the gaze of the customer in the packaging of Heinz’ products; they are meant to seduce.

“Quality is to a product, what character is to a man”. Heinz’ motto has two elements. The first draws the customer’s attention to the producer’s awareness of the virtues of quality assurance. While it certainly contains an echo of a marketing rhetoric as old as the institution of the market place itself, the wording reveals the distinct modern industrial horizon of mass production. The second part establishes what is properly speaking an analogy: A is to B, what C is to D. What is at stake is not the truth claim of the analogy, but the particular phraseology of the statement. Heinz’ slogan and his marketing strategies are of interest not only as early testimonies of the simulacra of



modern marketing's commodity aesthetics, but because they bring together two distinctly different modern concepts of quality: the technological notion of "product quality" (the A to B relation) and the aesthetic notion of "individual quality" (the C to D relation). The first concept originates in the benefits of protocols of standardization and quality assurance in early industrial mass production; here, quality is that which is conform with a set of standards, in other words, a defined minimum value. The second echo implies uniqueness and inherent value independent of external standards; "a man's character" is rather a singular prototype than a quality product. Character is thus for Heinz a question of origin and provenance denoting singularity, that which sets the individual apart from the rest.

"Sell quality and the price doesn't matter", is another of Johan Henry Heinz' *bon mots* that has been passed down as received wisdom in the world of marketing. Clearly not meant to be taken literally, the hyperbolic statement draws attention to how individual quality and product quality are distinctly different concepts both with regard to the way they are constructed and to the nature of what they articulate. The son of a German immigrant and the inheritor of the values and words from the Europe's class society, John Henry Heinz cleverly draws on the semantics of the old world to market mass produced victuals in the new world. His ketchup was explicitly *not* marketed as a product for everyone, but for those that had the desire to be different and had the money to prove it. Sold at 12 cent a bottle, rather than the 10 cents that was the current running price for ketchup bottles, Heinz is an obvious case of what American sociologist Thorsten Veblen a few years later called "conspicuous consumption", the aesthetic practice of providing oneself with a distinct social persona through ostentatious consumption.



**T**he notion of individual quality inherent in Heinz' slogans does not appear to allude to the notion of singularity found in the art world; the uniqueness of Heinz' ketchup is brandished in contrast

to the bland uniformity of other industrial products, not as a transgression of the aesthetic conventions of tradition. Heinz' audience of consumers was more familiar with the idea of the singularity of character than that of the artwork. However, another explanation presents itself, Heinz' slogans reflect the realities of historical semantics, namely that the idea of moral qualities has a much longer and stronger conceptual tradition than those of artistic qualities.

The semantic core of the second part of the motto, "character is a question of quality", is traceable to the moral philosophy of the Enlightenment and the political conflicts between the first and the third estate. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "Quality" refers to character traits that distinguish and elevate certain individuals, *persons of quality*, from the populace as such. In the world of *l'ancien régime* and pre-revolutionary Europe, one social distinction stood out against all the others, namely the one between "persons of quality", and "persons of no consequence" – clichés of social identity that were just as current in England as in France.

According to the Enlightenment's major work of reference, Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, "une personne de qualité" is someone that by the power of his title or position exercises authority and upholds the rights belonging to him by right. This, the entry explicitly contrasts to those without quality, whose existence is of "no consequence". This, for a modern sensibility, somewhat undemocratic and elitist distinction between first-rate and second-rate individuals, expresses the estate society's fundamental distinction between nobility and ordinary people, between those whose family name, the synecdoche of the ancestry, warranted their quality, and those whose name both began and ended with themselves. The word *character* is hence the metonym for the natural order between individuals; there are those *with* character that stand out, and those *without* that disappear without leaving a trace into the faceless multitude from where they briefly emerged.

There are several entries under the entry word "qualité" in Diderot and d'Alembert's encyclopedia. Noteworthy enough, *none* of them addresses issues of aesthetics or the arts (despite the fact that Diderot was not merely a prolific author of fiction but also a pioneer in the genre of art criticism).

Instead, the reader learns that *qualities* (plural) are constitutive of a person's character and are the crucial elements of his moral habitus, whereas a person's talents decide whether he or she is useful or entertaining. Quality – contrary to talent – is not measurable by any standards of usefulness; it is an internal property that manifest itself in a moral disposition that is autotelic, an end in itself, but also the confirmation of the values of a social hierarchy.

A few years earlier, philosopher David Hume wrote a brief meditation on “The Standards of Taste” raising the issue of the existence of a principle that could serve to confirm or condemn aesthetic verdicts. In the singular, the word *quality* appears four times in the short text. Beauty is “no quality in things themselves”, Hume states, it exists merely in the mind. Wit is a “desirable quality”, he continues, and taste is “hereditary quality”. Finally, the quality of beauty or defect is integral to individual perception and experience, as illustrated by the effects of sickness on taste perception. The taste judgments of sick persons are thus not only deficient, but also conditional or automatic. In order to claim validity, an aesthetic assessment must be free. In the plural, as *qualities*, the term occurs seven times in the short text, referring to the objective properties of the things perceived, like ‘soft’, ‘warm’, ‘round’, etc. Physical rather than aesthetic categories, they do not carry aesthetic verdicts. While the brief text merits a more thorough examination, what we shall retain is how the reasoning rests on the premises of an individual in possession of naturally given discerning taste. Aesthetic verdicts are true only as long as they are not conditioned. Aesthetic competence is the moral prerogative distinguishing those in possession of it by birth.

#### IV

**F**ew have done more than the merchant class to disseminate the concept of quality. Ingvar Kamprad and IKEA's “everyday quality” is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century a central part of the global retail reality. The formula expresses a marketing idea as simple as it is brilliant: The company guarantees that a given product, for instance a drawer, can be opened 50 000 times without

breaking. The test apparatuses installed at the IKEA stores emphasize the point by allowing the passing customers witness the company's dedication to thorough testing procedures. Heinz' inventive didacticism sprang from his understanding of the power inherent in making visible the prime quality of his tomato-ketchup by using a transparent container. In the world of IKEA, the repetitive spectacle of the drawer-pulling robot visualizes how quantity is quality, pedagogically demonstrating for the discerning customers the abstract principles of quality assurance and standardization.

Semantically complex, the IKEA concept of "everyday quality" draws its rhetorical power from a heteroclit range of connotations. Contrary to Heinz, Kamprad's strategy was not to appeal to the individuality of the consumer, but instead to court the aesthetic sensitivities of the upward moving educated young Nordic middle class for whom egalitarianism and anti-snobbism were crucial components to their collective self-image. Marketing slogans such as the 2010 catalogue's "We are all from Småland", turns Swedish protestant provincialism into a global sub-culture egalitarian identity marker for young people across the globe paradoxically while tapping into much of the same desires for social distinction as Heinz' ketchup.

As the case was with Heinz, IKEA's clever advertising motto mobilizes another context, namely that of functional quality. While the aesthetics of functional quality inevitably carries with it echoes of Puritan anti-aestheticism, it also carries with it the assuring sound of quality protocols. Since the end of the Second World War ISO, *The International Standard Organization*, has dedicated itself to provide international standards in order to ensure functional quality (i.e., technical requirements) and product reliability for the benefit of producers and consumers alike. It is against this backdrop of rationalisation of the world of commodities that IKEA's concept of functional quality takes on its full meaning. At the same time as the company's marketing division has been exploiting the cultural distinction of the consumer movements of the sixties' anti-snob quality focus, at the same time emphasizing the company's dedication to protocols of production, customer satisfaction, and ecological standards. Their annual catalogues showcase a puritan ethos of quality conscious consumption aestheticized as life style simulacra.

What the Heinz' and Kamrad's examples illustrate is how aesthetic judgements have become integral to our everyday activities against the backdrop of a mixture of modern industry's quality protocols and a moral subtext of social distinction. We select movies according to preferences, moods, and the nature of our company, drawing on the knowledge we might have of genres and directors and with the discerning customer's knowledge that consumption also is identity construction. We buy decorative posters or prints because they appeal to our aesthetic sense, and convey a feeling of being part of "something contemporary". We visit exhibitions to be pleased, educated or to change the daily routine. These activities originate in judgements derived from knowledge, experience, and a sense of aesthetic distinction. They originate in specific taste regimes marked by education, interests, and trends. What the movie rental, the poster, and the museum ticket have in common is that they are commercial objects that are part of a social semantic. They serve purposes as entertainment, beautification and, not the least, distinction.

Conventionally, the non-quantifiable nature of artistic productions is conceived of as integral to their singularity, their uniqueness. That good art contain an element of something new, never before seen or heard, a "je ne sais quoi", is fundamental to the idea of aesthetic epistemology's notion of quality. This requirement holds even for artistic works understood as a critique of aesthetic essentialism. Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, or Daniel Buren's striped awning canvas are famous examples of this critique. Here, the aesthetic gestures' singularity – their context, irony, or site specificity – provide a specificity that transcends the uniform and eventless nature of the industrial products that form the material basis of the works. A corollary of this claim is that aesthetic quality is not merely about the object's singular and unique nature, but also about a specific temporality, namely the fundamental openness that defines works of art as such. The aesthetic experience is an event, and aesthetic reflection is always after the fact. Hence, an artwork's

quality is not to be anticipated, and cannot follow as the consequence of standardised production processes. Art schools teach skills and provide technical training, but not talent. Neither did their historical predecessors, the ateliers of the old masters, or the art academies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

That aesthetic quality is contingent upon the knowledge and qualifications of the audience does not necessarily mean that aesthetic judgements have no validity beyond their immediate contexts. While the appreciation of some works of art disappears with the aesthetic paradigm that brought them forth, others have outlived numerous aesthetic regimes and retained their appeal (though the nature of the appeal might have changed). Walter Benjamin once famously pointed out how artworks depend upon the technological conditions of their production and distribution. Thus, mechanical reproduction undermined the idea of an artwork's uniqueness, what the German philosopher calls its "Einmaligkeit". The term is often rendered as "uniqueness", however the translation misses an important aspect of the German word, its temporality. What characterises a work of art is not only its singular existence in space, but also its singular existence in time – it cannot be copied without loss of aesthetic quality. Reproduction – that is the production of identical series of objects – therefore changes the essence of the object. Quality protocols are fundamentally intended to make possible serial uniformity in production. Artworks' relations to their feedback into the production process must hence be fundamentally different from those predominant in commodity and service production spheres.

Product quality is pragmatic and property-oriented referring to more or less arbitrary protocols of measurement and evaluation; individual quality is ontological and existential, designating innate properties, they are akin to what, in Heinz' words, "character is to a man". Contingent upon external criteria "product quality" is a notion that necessarily implies a second order level, the given quality specification for a production run. The term's content (its critical reference) is a function of a scale that precedes it. A standard is a given threshold value on the scale applied and by which it can be judged to be of "prime quality" (and thus distinctly different from that which is of secondary or tertiary quality).

Any concept of quality, that is of evaluation, or *Wertschätzung* in the vocabulary of German aesthetics, is necessarily marked by interest. The standards, scales and values that come with it are always situation specific, they express *someone's* standards, scales and values. Any concept of quality, whether normative or descriptive, cannot but function within a larger complex of social relations, and is thus always liable to be appropriated, invested and subject to negotiations, and thus eminently political.

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## WORK AND PLAY – THE BUILT ENVIRONMENTS IN TERRY GILLIAM’S BRAZIL

### ABSTRACT

The article examines the meaning of space and architecture, the point of departure being the British cult film *Brazil*, directed by Terry Gilliam in 1985. The film appears as a satirical postmodern dystopia of a society that is exposed to the forces of surrealist and violent bureaucracy and the life of people is deeply estranged. In this world, the practices and conditions of work have turned nonsensical, and dreaming is the sole means of escape from the oppressive life in the society of control. From the viewpoints offered by Jacques Derrida’s and Martin Heidegger’s theories of architecture and living, the article clarifies the meaning and position of constructed milieus in *Brazil*: how they reflect our vision of work and its meaning and how imagined spaces emerge in the context of the film. As the author argues, a sense of fundamental dysfunctionality is what characterises both the environments of the film and the notion of contemporary life that creates them.

In Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil* everyday life is inextricably entangled with fantasy, and daily work, living and cityscape are presented in the light of imagination and the extraordinary. Although humorous and often funny and ironic, the film is not only a satire of the everyday life, but it also offers the spectator a deep dystopia of life in a society in which the individual is exposed to the mercy of bureaucracy and the force of faceless administration that uses its power in unanticipated and often violent ways. In its dystopian vision of the future, *Brazil* has similarities with George Orwell’s novel *1984* (1949).<sup>2</sup> In this article, I examine how, in *Brazil*, the

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Gilliam, the American-born British director of *Brazil*, has become known as one of the members of the Monty Python group.

<sup>2</sup> There are obvious differences between *Brazil* and *1984*, however; for example, the fact that



encounter between the realistic, the fantastic and the sinister becomes reflected in the environments in which the film takes place. This is done by considering the philosophical framework offered by the deconstructive notion of architecture.

In a number of earlier studies, Brazil has been accounted for as a dystopia of a society where bureaucracy has taken over the human life.<sup>3</sup> The motivation of my interpretation is, however, rather the social analysis and the role of places that appear recurrently in the film. Especially interesting is the relation of the cinematic environments to the then contemporary and much debated theories of architecture, especially as formulated by the philosopher Jacques Derrida. I shall look at how, in Brazil, the modern functionality of places and architecture has yielded in front of the dysfunctional, merely structural importance of sites and buildings, which is in the focus of many postmodern and deconstructive theories of art and architecture. I shall shed light on elements in the film and its environments that appear as mutually incompatible and thus create a sense of displacement in modern life – in play and work.

Brazil is about the impossible encounter between dreams and reality, between individual urges and desires and the restrictions of the community, which in Brazil is represented by a totalitarian society. In this community, work has a crucial position and people rely intensely on machines. The way in which working life appears is surprisingly modern still today, more than 30 years after the completion of the film, even though its information technology is presented as an amalgamation of early twentieth century archival systems, pneumatic tube mail, and even data processing. What is shown from the perspective of a dystopia in the film has not lost its cutting edge, but remains as dystopic in the contemporary world as it was in the mid-1980s. What is even more, it seems that the prophecies of Brazil have become more accurate than before in our use of digital surveillance

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Brazil is missing a big brother character. Control in Brazil is more arbitrary and dispersed among competing departments of administration.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of such studies are Jack Mathews' *The Battle of Brazil: Terry Gilliam v. Universal Pictures in the Fight to the Final Cut* (1987), Bruce Krajewski's "Post-Modernism, Allegory, and Hermeneutics in Brazil" (1988) and Richard A. Rogers' "1984 to Brazil: From the Pessimism of Reality to the Hope of Dreams" (1990).

and algorithmic faceless control. The film is a site of encounter for the meaningful and the senseless, the normal and the abnormal, the everyday, art and fantasy. The film's name derives from a bossa nova song *Aquarela do Brazil* composed by Ary Barroso in 1939. A modern version of this song is used as a leitmotiv and it is heard repeatedly; yet it has only a vague connection with what takes place in the scenes where it appears. Instead, the Brazil theme song is likely to create a contrast with the gloomy reality of the film, representing the realm of dreams.

## WORK AND THE PLAY OF IMAGINATION IN BRAZIL

**I**n the world depicted by the film, administration has been divided into different ministries and departments: for instance, the Department of Works, the Department of Records and the Department of Adjustment. Attempts at control and the ensuing careful division of work guide the employees' activities. However, in Brazil their effects are often of a negative kind, and the life of many inhabitants turns in the course of the film into an uncontrollable series of incidents. This is especially the case of the central character of Brazil, Mr. Sam Lowry. Lowry, a relatively humble office worker at the Department of Records, dreams of promotion. It turns out to be increasingly difficult to obtain. As the difficulties at the workplace accumulate, the spectator may see the absurdity of the Ministry: what is probably intended to look like a logical division of work into Departments, leads to a situation that is completely the opposite. The work loses its significance, as it is not connected to anything else that is done in the giant institution. In Brazil, work only seems to mean performing one's share in a machine that does not seem to function in any comprehensible manner.

Architecture and the aesthetics of place have a prominent role in the way Gilliam's dystopia is brought to life: Brazil offers the spectator types of buildings that can be easily recognised but that have, nevertheless, turned into something strange and repulsive. In the nameless city where the film

takes place, control and processes of centralisation have taken over all the functions of life. People are under continual supervision, and they are made to work long days, with obviously no idea as to how their work is part of any meaningful whole – at least they cannot know about its context. The different departments, however, are crowded, and the offices and other work spaces strikingly small. The central position is occupied by the office building of the Department of Records. The most remarkable – and the most eerie – part of this building is its pompous lobby. Its ornamentation brings to mind Fascist sculptures, and the scale of the entire building appears strongly exaggerated.

It is in the built environments of Brazil that I suggest there is a parallel with what is meant by the deconstructionist view on architecture. Brazil is contemporaneous with the heyday of postmodern and deconstructionist theorizing of architecture, namely the early and mid-1980s. As Jacques Derrida (1997, 319) has proposed, for deconstructionist thinking, architecture offers not only a technique, but also a possibility of thought, which cannot be reduced to the status of a representation of thought. In architecture, there may thus be undiscovered ways of thinking belonging to the architectural moment, to desire and to creation. In brief, architectonics is defined as an art of systems, and therefore as an art that is suitable for the rational organization of complete branches of knowledge and of structures. This notion does not only concern buildings but also the idea of working; as I see it, they are organised in a reminiscent fashion in Brazil. Or rather, it might be stated that they are *disorganized* in comparable way.

In the following, I shall have a look at the buildings in the film as models of estranged living in the modern and contemporary world.

For Immanuel Kant, ‘architectonic’ is defined as the “art of systems”. ‘Architectonic’ refers to both the art of constructing a system of science based on an “idea of the whole” of the science, and to that idea itself, its “general delineation or outline” (Kant 1992, 590). The system is characterized by an organized unity, which is the end to which the parts of the science relate, and in which they relate to each other. At stake is thus the art of establishing structures. Kant’s architectonic is part of his doctrine of the faculties: pure and practical reason, theoretical understanding, aesthetic judgement and

their various modalities or powers.<sup>4</sup> Because of his interest in structures of thought, Jacques Derrida's work is concerned with "architectural" models and metaphors. Specifically, this means to him systems that are comparable to architectonic models. These systems create places and spaces, which have been or may be meaningful to us.

Brazil is a film in which work and bureaucracy govern the life of people. This suggests that there is perhaps little life outside the stifling force of offices. The protagonist, Sam Lowry, works as a minor officer who, by chance, becomes part of a series of increasingly complicated incidents. He attempts to escape the suffocating powers affecting his life in the dystopic city. Lowry finds his work consuming and pointless; the organisations of the society seem to work for the sake of bureaucracy only. As a character, Sam Lowry is not a traditional hero. However, he has the capability of dreaming and imagination, which in a romantic fashion takes him out of the sombre darkness of the city. In the course of the film, Lowry has dreams in which there is always bright sunshine and clear sky, something that cannot be seen elsewhere amidst the buildings of the cityscape. Only in his dream world is Lowry able to move outside the totalitarian order of his environments. He escapes the absurdities of life into dreams, but by doing so, he loses the sense of what is dream and what is reality. His pursuit of dreams does not lead to a better world or to beauty. Instead, such ideas prove to be mere illusions. In Lowry's fate, Terry Gilliam's harsh vision of the contemporary world is revealed at the end of the film: the society punishes Sam Lowry for something he is not guilty of, and he falls into apathy where all sensibility is suspended.

Brazil begins one evening on the streets of the city at Christmas time, "somewhere in the 20<sup>th</sup> century", as it is announced in a caption. The first scenes refer to the mediatisation of reality: while TV sets in a shop window show advertisements, an explosion takes place in the neighbourhood. The TV sets continue showing their programmes in the middle of terrorist

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<sup>4</sup> Kant explores the subject of architectonic in the third chapter of the *Critique of Pure Reason's* "Transcendental Doctrine of Method" entitled "The Architectonic of Pure Reason". There he sees it as "the doctrine of the scientific in our knowledge" or the art of making "a system out of a mere aggregate of knowledge" (A 832/B 860).

bombings. In the Ministry of Information, an interview is made about terrorist attacks. Simultaneously, a fly is buzzing around in an office room. The office worker swats it, and the fly falls into his typewriter or computer. As a result of this, the name of the terrorist that is being typed – Archibald Tuttle – becomes Archibald Buttle because the falling fly causes a mistake in the typewriter. As if following the principle of structuralist semantics, there thus occurs a crucial difference of one phoneme that changes the whole meaning of the name. While the members of the innocent Buttle family are celebrating Christmas, they are invaded by government troops and Mr. Buttle is killed for being suspected guilty of terrorism. Troops make the family sign a paper that reads: “We do not make mistakes”. However, slightly later at the Department of Records, an officer called Mr. Kurtzmann types “Archibald Buttle”, and an ERROR announcement appears on the computer screen.<sup>5</sup> Such points of departure encapsulate what takes place in Brazil. There occurs an unintended mistake in the system, which cannot be admitted, the reason being that “We do not make mistakes”. The error escalates into more and more irrational incidents, and the film’s irony, directed at the alleged omnipotence of administration, work, machines and armed forces, is more than obvious.

Sam Lowry escapes the absurdities of his reality by dreaming: in his recurrent dream, he is presented as a flying superhero resembling Icarus who is able to defeat both real and imaginary enemies. Sam meets a lady called Jill Layton, whom he saves from mythical beasts. In the end, dreams and reality become confused in a way that they cannot be told apart any longer, which leads to Lowry’s extermination. The system, however, survives.

The events of the film occur in places that have turned into nightmarish images of themselves. What seems familiar at first sight appears to be strange, as there is something grotesque in the way that spaces and architecture are configured. Brazil turns the “normal” and the “habitual”

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<sup>5</sup> By naming the officer with a German-sounding name, Kurtzmann, Terry Gilliam makes possible an association to the gravely estranged character of Captain Kurtz in Joseph Conrad’s novella *The Heart of Darkness* (1899/1902) and the subsequent film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by Francis Ford Coppola. There exists a number of other “germanised” names in Brazil as well, such as Warrenn and Helpmann, an obvious nod to Nazi bureaucracy.

into their opposites, while what appears as uncanny to our eyes becomes revealed as the seemingly usual state of things within the scope of the film.

Although all the functions of the society of the city in Brazil seem strictly organised, there prevails at the same time a constant fear among the workers and other inhabitants, as there are recurrent terrorist attacks in public spaces, workers are corrupt, and anyone may be sentenced for surreal crimes, whether they have really taken place or not. The film shows that anything may happen in its dystopic reality. One's privacy is no longer guaranteed, and "government" troops are allowed to invade the homes of people for whatever reason.

The plot itself appears fragmentary, despite the fact that it is chronological. The events are scattered in multiple sequences and characters at first do not seem to be related to each other in any coherent way, although a degree of consistency soon becomes distinguishable on the thematic level. One of the leading motifs of the film is terrorism, which was a topical issue in the Britain of the 1980s after the frequent terrorist attacks of the IRA in the late 1970s. In Brazil, the threat of terrorism does not come so much from the outside than from the inside of the society and its members. Although it is left fairly vague, Brazil's terrorism seems to originate from anti-government resistance. The urban society also represents a world of competition, in which people like Lowry's mother take recourse in absurd ways to keep a favourable image of themselves and to avoid the unpleasant reality; she escapes it by means of cosmetic surgery.

The film shows that there is a chance of injustice in every organised system, while systems do not represent merely order, but, even more than order, their functioning also includes the possibility of coincidence, whether lucky or unlucky. Therefore, anyone can become a victim or a victor in the system.

## FROM DWELLINGS TO DECONSTRUCTED STRUCTURES: ARCHITECTURE IN BRAZIL

When watched from the perspective of places, the locations in Brazil play a large role in the meanings they are given and how they appear repeatedly as sites of action. The main locations of the film can be divided into four principal categories, namely office, city, Sam Lowry's apartment house and his dreams. As I claim, they not only provide different frames for the action, but also show a different attitude towards how architecture is used and how its function is defined.

To make a contrast between the modern functionality of life and architecture and the postmodern dysfunctionality of which Brazil provides a vision, a comparison between Martin Heidegger's and, respectively, Jacques Derrida's notions of building may be drawn. In his philosophy, Heidegger (2001) establishes a firm link between the notions of building, dwelling and thinking. As he says, his "thinking about building does not presume to discover architectural ideas, let alone to give rules for building" (ibid., 143). Consequently, his theory does not view building as an art or as a technique of construction, but rather "it traces building back into that domain to which everything that *is* belongs." For Heidegger, building brings with itself the senses of "shelter" and "dwelling", a place for humans to live in and to act in a meaningful way: "We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building. The latter, building, has the former, dwelling, as its goal" (ibid.). This is to say that in Heidegger's thought building is designed for a purpose. Still, it is useful to remember that not every building is a dwelling for Heidegger: "Bridges and hangars, stadiums and power stations are buildings but not dwellings; railway stations and highways, dams and market halls are built, but they are not dwelling places. Even so, these buildings are in the domain of our dwelling. ... These buildings house man. He inhabits them and yet does not dwell in them, when to dwell means merely that we take shelter in them" (ibid.).

For Heidegger, dwelling and building are related as end and means (ibid., 144). In dwelling, he says, "something decisive is concealed", because

dwelling has so far not been experienced as man's being. Dwelling means even something more: it is for Heidegger the basic character of human being. Thus, dwelling connotes remaining and staying in place (ibid., 146–147). Dwelling is living with things of the world: “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. That range reveals itself to us as soon as we reflect that human being consists in dwelling and, indeed, dwelling in the sense of the stay of mortals on the earth” (ibid., 147).

Dwelling refers to place and location, while mathematical space has neither of these properties. Therefore, dwelling is always in relation to human existence. As Heidegger concludes, “When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them space; for when I say ‘a man’, and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner – that is, who dwells – then by the name ‘man’ I already name the stay within the fourfold among things” (ibid., 154). The fourfold, a central aspect of dwelling in Heidegger, points to the four elements of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. As a double space-making, the location is a shelter for the fourfold or, by the same token, a house. According to Derrida's interpretation, such locations shelter or house men's lives in Heidegger's theory. Thus, they establish a connection between architecture and habitability (Derrida 1997, 320). Things of this sort are housings, though not necessarily dwelling-houses in the narrower sense. This notion has consequences for Heidegger's conception of building: building thus characterised is a distinctive letting-dwell (Heidegger 2001, 156).

Heidegger's view emphasizes the static sense of dwelling as residing and building as providing housing for this purpose. From such perspective, his theory is in contrast with Derrida's deconstructive theories of architecture. The meaning of architecture in Brazil approaches the deconstructive notion, in which the modernist idea of building for a specific function is radically put into doubt. According to the deconstructive notion, architecture becomes detached from the requirement of finality or a *telos* in



something outside of architecture itself (Derrida and Norris 1989, 74). It may be purposeful, but without being obliged to have a real practical purpose. Instead, architecture potentially offers sites of profound dysfunctionality as well as functionality. Rather than inquiring into the function of buildings, the deconstructive theory explores how the architectonics of organisations is created and in which senses architecture is able to produce systems and sites, which either may or may not possess any obvious significance.

For Derrida, the deconstructive notion of architecture is only concerned with metaphors. As he clarifies, “Deconstruction is a way of questioning the architectural model itself – the architectural model which is a general question itself, even within philosophy, the metaphor of foundations, of superstructures, what Kant calls ‘architectonic’ etc., as well as the concept of the *archè*... So Deconstruction means also the putting into question of architecture in philosophy and perhaps architecture itself” (ibid., 72). This tendency of examining the nature of a place and undoing its presupposed meanings is, as I wish to claim, at stake in the organisation of milieus in Brazil.

The most striking of the built environments in Brazil is the office building in which the protagonist, Sam Lowry, works. The office, which has been designed for efficient work, turns in the film to its opposite. Instead of efficiency and achievements, the building is a place for unworking and idleness, aptly described by the French expression of *désœuvrement*, which may be translated as “workless work” (cf. Nancy 1986). In the grand hall of the office building, sculptures and architecture oddly resemble totalitarian architecture. In Lowry’s department, the Department of Records, robots work with human beings and papers are circulated in a maze of pneumatic mail tubes, inspected and stamped to be validated as documents.

In addition to Sam Lowry’s own workplace, the film displays another dramatic building, Information Retrieval. Lowry is relocated to work in this building, where he receives a new, claustrophobically cramped office room for himself. Oddly enough, nothing stays in order in the room, as Lowry has to compete for the meagre space with his co-worker, who keeps moving the partition wall to gain a bit more room for himself. The tools of the trade represent an awkward mixture of old and new technology. For example,

the typewriters are old-fashioned, but newer technology is combined with them. In the corridors of the office building, groups of workers are constantly swarming about as if they were guided by invisible pack leaders. If the purposefulness of work equipment causes doubts in the viewer, so do the lifts: they do not operate as one would suppose, but rather move on their own. Lowry would like to go up, but the lift moves down instead. Here, one may find a mixing of dreams and reality, in which the protagonist changes from a worker, subjugated by repressive working conditions, into the life of an action hero.

The streets of the anonymous city are an environment of transition in Brazil. In the streets, the milieu is best described as surrealist, and the buildings, inspired by historical influences, correspond to what is typically understood as a “postmodern” cityscape. Some of the vehicles, such as Lowry’s, are peculiar three-wheeled cars. The city resembles the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* (1982): there are car crashes and fires. Despite the shiny façades, there is junk in the corridors of the living quarters. In their apartments, the residents sit apathetically in front of their TVs.

In the streets, despite the strange appearance, Christmas parades take place. A department store is equally recognizable as a place, but instead of offering a place for shopping and relaxed strolling about, there is an explosion. The gift that Lowry has received from an officer, Jack Lint, turns out to be a bomb. Accused of terrorism, Sam Lowry becomes a fugitive and eventually ends up captive. He is placed in something like an electric chair that brings to mind a scene from Stanley Kubrick’s film *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).<sup>6</sup> In a huge concrete construction, Lowry swears his innocence of terrorism and other actions.

Although Sam Lowry’s apartment plays a minor role in the film, its importance lies in the way it represents the surreal mentality of the city. The largeness of proportions visible in the office buildings also apply to Sam Lowry’s apartment building. The dysfunctionality of the film’s buildings extends to the apartment too. Lowry’s heating system malfunctions and the place is extremely hot and humid. Calling for help results in the visitation of a pair of government janitors, who only manage to leave the place in a mess of

<sup>6</sup> The featured building is actually a nuclear power plant in Croydon in the London area.

exposed air ducts and cables. Before their visit, a kind of rogue maintenance man had arrived – yet he turns out to be the terrorist Archibald Tuttle, getting Lowry further suspected of involvement in terrorist schemes.

In reality, the apartment in which he lives was filmed in the Abraxas House on the outskirts of Paris. The Abraxas complex is an architectonic experiment in the commune of Noisy-le-Grand in the eastern suburbs of Paris. The Spanish architect, Ricardo Bofill, designed the Abraxas House, or Palace of Abraxas, with the adjacent buildings, which were completed in 1983, only a couple of years before the filming of *Brazil*. The nineteen-storey Abraxas House draws its inspiration from the theatres of Antiquity, and an arch built in front of the apartment buildings augments their eclectic theatrical style. Modern precast concrete elements and characteristics of the industrial style are used to create a classicist Baroque outlook complete with Doric, Tuscan and Art Deco inspired columns. In the Palace, the central building of the Abraxas, the machine aesthetics and the temple-like construction are combined in “technological classicism” (Jencks 1984, 159–161). To say the least, the scale of the buildings and their details is extravagant, and the scale of forms exceeds the measures of function and of proportionate ornamentation. Consequently, the ideals of contemporary urbanism are eroded in the buildings, among which are compromise, democracy and pluralism (Jencks 1988, 259). The purposes imposed upon postmodern architecture and the deconstructive notion of architecture offer a key to understanding *Brazil*: what happens when functionality loses its significance and reveals its estranged, excessive face?

The fourth environment of *Brazil* is the realm of dreams. A recurrent dream replaces the senseless reality in which accidents happen and strangers intrude into the private living quarters. In dreams, Sam Lowry is often flying above the clouds, dressed up as Icarus, using his sword to fight various creatures, including a giant robot. At first, Lowry’s dreams are innocent daydreaming. Later, they turn more sinister and merge into reality, in a way that finally these spheres become inseparable. It appears that Jill, the lady of Lowry’s dreams, is “classified” in the eyes of bureaucracy, when Lowry asks about her after seeing her in a dream. This might refer to the idea that dreaming is forbidden in the dystopic city. The final dream of the

film turns into a nightmare. It takes place in a concrete building, where, after being taken captive, Sam Lowry is tied in a chair. He is shut out of reality and cannot see or hear anything, and the people around Lowry say: "He's gone away from us." The spectator realizes that Lowry's escape from his oppressors is just an illusion. Yet, it is not clear at which point onwards everything has taken place in his imagination only.

Such places are not real but rather surreal and exist in the domain where architecture operates free of practical restrictions. In Derrida's opinion, deconstructive architects have been deconstructing the essentials of tradition. They have criticized "everything that subordinated architecture to something else" – the value of usefulness or beauty or living, or architecture as "habitation", not in order to build something else that would be useless, ugly or uninhabitable, but "to free architecture from all those external finalities, extraneous goals" (Derrida and Norris 1989, 72). This is not to reconstitute some pure or original architecture, but, on the contrary, "just to put architecture in communication with other media, other arts, to contaminate architecture" (*ibid.*). Deconstruction as a framework for analysing architecture means taking into special account the concept of metaphor itself – namely, architecture as metaphor for structures – as far as it involves a complicated network of philosophical propositions.

While being well aware that architecture has long been interpreted as dwelling – "the place where gods or people are present or gathering or living and so on" – Derrida nevertheless claims that architecture cannot simply be subordinated to those values of habitation, dwelling, sheltering the presence of gods and human beings (*ibid.*, 74). With their experiments, architects associated with postmodernism, such as Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi, have shown that architecture without a connection to dwelling and shelter is possible. As a result, Derrida states, deconstruction is not simply an activity or commitment on the part of the architect, but it is also "on the part of people who read, who look at these buildings, who enter the space, who move in the space, who experience the space in a different way" (*ibid.*). The architectural experience, and not "buildings" as such, would be the opportunity for experiencing the possibility of these inventions of a different architecture, one that would not be "Heideggerian".

## THE KHÔRA AND BRAZIL'S PLACELESS PLACES

In Brazil, the milieus present themselves as images of conventional locations. They are immediately recognizable to the spectator, and yet their dysfunctionality is more than evident: they are a kind of simulacra of places, which fail to fulfill their conventional employment. Therefore, there remains a chasm between the seeming purpose of each place and the sense of failure and even catastrophe that results from attempts at living and working in each milieu according to its “ordinary” meaning. As I wish to claim, the locations of Brazil are never available as such, but a difference between two meanings – the real-life and the everyday on the one hand, and the cinematic and imagined on the other – takes place continuously.

For Jacques Derrida, the *différance* is at the same time a temporal and a structural notion. It includes simultaneously a presence which is always postponed and the place of origin, of khôra, in which the differences in each presence are outlined. The “origin” – the form of things – cannot be full presence. Rather, it exists as a *trace*, that is, as pure difference which itself does not have any definite place (Derrida 1982, 11–14). The presence of things is therefore characterised by its never being real: as Georges Didi-Huberman says (1992, 157), presence is always put into work, spaced, temporalised and made into traces. The sites in Brazil are like empty forms of places, with no evident relation to their everyday uses. If “form” has designated in earlier theories more or less the object itself, no matter if it really had an immediately recognizable form or not, such an object was still able to *give* form to other objects by the negative process of inclusion and imprint. In semiotic terms, form has been in relation to something that it is *not*: it has given a key for recognizing and interpreting other objects – an aspect of familiarity and a definition. According to Didi-Huberman, this semiotic notion of form is based on relations between things. Yet already in the Greek vocabulary associated with “form”, its scope soon became more complex. In Derrida’s theories, this development has come to its extreme, form being no longer an opposite of “content” or “matter” (ibid., 156–157).

The places featured in Brazil remind us of well-known types of locations. As such, they all have a function which brings forward the plot of the film. Yet, as they are presented, these environments are more or less meaningless and non-functional with respect to how they are conceived in the everyday life. As places, they are highly stylized and the spectator's imagination takes part in completing their role and signification in the course of the film. This is what changes their nature from realistic to artistic.

On such a basis, the locations of Brazil are like empty signs; they are places without place, but still with a space and time of their own. In his essay "Art and Space", Martin Heidegger emphasizes the ontological interlacement of space and time. He calls this *Einräumung*, "making-room", while Derrida has the notions of *différance* and *khôra* (Heidegger 1973, 3–8; Derrida 1982, 3–27; Derrida 1993a). As I propose, both the Heideggerian "making-room" and the Derridean *khôra* imply a differing movement, which makes them convergent from this perspective.

Derrida, as well as Heidegger, reject the notion of space as a homogeneous, geometrically determinable expanse: *différance* and *Einräumung* must be termed temporalisation at once as they are considered spatiality. Heidegger gives an account of making-room and the yielding of places in art, space and their intertwining. In "Art and Space", sculpture, as the embodiment of places, is his primary example of art (Heidegger 1973, 7). Derrida, in turn, refers to *différance* as a non-place, a place of different relations, or constant differing and deferring movement. In both Derrida and Heidegger, these notions involving the interplay between time and space are connected with art.

Derrida's concept of *khôra* does not mean a place (*lieu*) in a general sense, but it refers to an abysmal chiasm of time and space. Plato's *Timaeus* serves as a point of origin for Derrida's thinking of *khôra*. It is neither sensible nor intelligible, but belongs to a "third kind", *triton genos*. Yet *khôra*, which is neither being nor nonbeing, is itself a placeless place, an abysmal gap between all oppositions (Derrida 1993a, 46–47).<sup>7</sup> Such place remains without identity.

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<sup>7</sup> The *khôra* appears as "invisible" and is without a "sensuous" form. Thus, the *khôra* is an interval and a space between things, their material substratum. Plato, *Timaeus*, 48e4, 52a; cf. Derrida 1993a, 15ff.

In this state of affairs, presence, such as the presence of our idea of an office building or a city, is characterised by its never being real: presence is always put into work, spaced, temporalised and made into traces (Didi-Huberman 1992, 157). For this reason, *khôra* is also beyond *logos*: only belonging to a place would grant it the truth of *logos* (Derrida 1993a, 57). Derrida is thus giving a figure to an aesthetics in which the form of a thing, as soon as it exists, is already reproduced, with no other origin than the endless chain of images. The origin or the model is an abyss; each production is reproduction and original repetition. The work's fate is to exist *à part*: separately from everything else (Roelens 2000, 99).<sup>8</sup>

In the essay "Art and Space", Heidegger seeks a thinking of space that differs from the traditional conceptions of physical and technical space. In addition to only one kind of "objective cosmic space", he inquires whether there could be other kinds of space as well, and not only "subjectively conditioned prefigurations and modifications" of the scientifically determined space. He contends that art is often held to be such a space, but instead of this, he is still seeking something else, not derivable from the physical, calculable expanse.<sup>9</sup>

For Heidegger, one has not yet determined in what way space reigns throughout the work of art. What space as space would be, and in what way space is, are his questions. Heidegger's key to investigating these is the notion of *Räumen*: clearing-away or clearing-space, with the intensions "to clear out" and "to free from wilderness", to bring forth the "free" or "the openness for man's dwelling". *Räumen* implies thus the release of places and bringing forth of a locality, as time spatialises space, or provides space (Heidegger 1973, 5). In spatialisation, time and space belong together to make "space space by filling it up", a notion that Heidegger already developed in *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (1999, 134, 183f). Making-room prepares for things

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8 To the figure of the separateness and non-reciprocal existence of the work of art, it is possible to see a point of comparison in Derrida's notion of spectrality, which refers to the presence of absence – namely, the fact that a thing may be present to our thought and memory, although it is absent from us in any concrete sense. The idea of spectrality is part of Derrida's theory of film and photography. See Derrida 1994; Derrida and Stiegler 2002.

9 This idea links "Art and Space" to the over 30 years earlier *Origin of the Work of Art*.

the possibility to belong to their relevant “whither” and, out of this, to each other – in this twofold making-room happens the yielding of place. Thus, for Heidegger, “Place always opens a region in which it gathers the things in their belonging together” (Heidegger 1973, 6).

Derrida’s *khôra* means pure space of differing, a place in which any relations between things and meanings are born. Therefore, the *khôra* opens up placeless place. To put into question the notion of pure, measurable space, both Derrida and Heidegger have introduced the thought of infinite divisibility and production of places. While Heidegger’s *Einräumung* refers to releasing places, I argue, however, that Derrida’s *khôra* is not a spatial notion as such, nor does it belong to the inside or the outside of any signification. Rather, the *khôra* appears to be their very condition, an invisible limit between things that makes space: it is the withdrawal [*retrait*] or the eclipse of appearing, the differential inappearance (Derrida 1993b, 53). The limit between the realistic presentation of places and their surreal cinematic renderings is what I understand to be at stake in Brazil.

In both deconstructive theory of architecture and the film *Brazil* there appears a notion of places as structures that are not concerned with values and purposes only, but which, even in their dysfunctionality, exist to fulfil a certain objective in the framework of either art or living. As Derrida states, “You can’t (or you shouldn’t) simply dismiss those values of dwelling, functionality, beauty and so on. You have to construct, so to speak, a new space and a new form, to shape a new way of building in which those motifs or values are reinscribed, having meanwhile lost their external hegemony” (Derrida 1989, 72). As I suggest, spatialisation and difference are the ways in which places are born in *Brazil*. They are lacking a stable essence; rather, the action, however out of place, gives them an identity in the film, although this identity is only local and ephemeral and dependent on each context. The unrealistic, even surreal, attributes given to each environment are thus different from our everyday ideas of a workplace or a department store, and dependent on the very context that they are surrounded by in each scene. Yet, despite their fictive nature and unrealistic features, they are recognizable enough to arouse an ominous feeling of familiarity in the viewer: if our world is not yet quite like this, will it be so one day?



## CONCLUSION: THE DYSFUNCTIONS OF LIFE

The film *Brazil* deals with fantasy, which is at the same time a terrifying reality. In addition to being a dystopia, a frightening vision of today's reality, *Brazil* is a satire. With humour, irony and exaggeration as its means, it criticises and ridicules the structures of the society of the twentieth and, presciently, the twenty-first century alike. Its reality is distorted – and, at the same time, the film shows that it is impossible to escape reality. Sam Lowry dreams of another life in his monotonous and yet threatening world, a superman life that is immune to the dangers of cynicism and violence. This dreaming does not, however, provide an escape from the society, as he ends up in a non-functional, catatonic state.

In *Brazil*, everyday work and its environments are both disengaged from their ordinary meaning. In a manner that can be described as postmodern, the film calls into question our presuppositions concerning relations between the signification of built environments and their rational, everyday purpose. In concrete reality, the depicted buildings are set pieces, façades; yet, in cinematic realism this basic fact is concealed in order to produce a sense of reality in the viewer. *Brazil* inverts this fictional arrangement: “realism” in the film is manifestly portrayed as being based on the representative or expressive dimension of buildings. Buildings and environments are thus primarily representations, not functional settings even to the fictitious characters of the film. Buildings appear as images or simulacra of architecture, with only arbitrary connections to what we in the daily life come to think of as city streets, home or workplace. In *Brazil*, architecture means something more like a subjective experience than realistic images of buildings: as in caricatures, the attributes of each place are overwhelming. In the lobbies, there is too much space; offices are too small, apartments too cramped and in bad condition; and factories appear as too dark to work in. As for other spaces, what is distinctive is the sharp difference that Terry Gilliam creates between the world of fantasy and dreams on the one hand, and the reality of work on the other.

Brazil seems to break with the current idea of functionalism, which brings it close to the founding ideas of the deconstructive notion of architecture. Although this notion is neither “modern” nor “postmodern” according to Derrida, it is nevertheless an opposite of functionality, an orientation often associated with modernism. In the film, environments are not created to fulfil the citizens’ needs; if they do fulfil some need, it is for the politics of the ruling members of society. In presenting the variety of places and environments, imagination plays a crucial role in Brazil – while watching it, it is the spectator’s work to allow the free play of fantasy.

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## DOES VALERY GERGIEV HAVE AN EVERYDAY?

### ABSTRACT

Building on Thomas Leddy's interpretation of current everyday aesthetics, I take a critical look at the position he terms "restrictivism," concentrating especially on the work of two of its important representatives, Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen. I begin the paper by providing a glimpse of the everyday of Valery Gergiev, the dynamo conductor famous for his frantic lifestyle, and argue that the kind of everydayness of the everyday which Haapala and Naukkarinen place at the heart of everyday aesthetics is not as necessary and all-encompassing a component of our everyday lives as they assume. Another important part of my argument is an analysis that seeks to uncover some important distinctions between our possible everyday routines. I by no means aim to question the restrictivist understanding of the everyday completely. However, I do believe that the picture of the everyday emerging from my account of Gergiev's everyday, together with the outline of everyday routines I present, show restrictivism's scope to be more limited than Haapala and Naukkarinen believe. This conclusion, in turn, clears the way for a more expansionist understanding of everyday aesthetics, such as the one Leddy builds on Dewey's aesthetics.

Some years ago the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) published a series of YouTube videos in which some of its members were followed for a day. One of these videos depicts a day in the life of the orchestra's then chief conductor, Valery Gergiev, arguably one of the most powerful figures in classical music today, who is infamous for his hectic work schedule.<sup>1</sup> The video begins in the arrivals terminal of Heathrow Airport, London. It shows Gergiev entering the terminal from the baggage claim area, after a flight from Düsseldorf, where he had a concert with the LSO the previous evening, with an assistant dragging his very minimal luggage. Gergiev explains that upon

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHgoEWkL73Q>

waking up in Düsseldorf he watched Australian Open on TV for a while before having breakfast at the hotel, after which he headed to the airport to catch a plane to London. Looking as if he would not have had a decent haircut or a proper shave in ages, and wearing a down jacket one or two sizes too large for him, Gergiev slips into a luxury BMW that has come to pick him up from Heathrow to travel to the Barbican Centre, where the LSO is already preparing for a rehearsal with Gergiev before the evening's concert. Unsurprisingly, upon waiting for the driver to get everything ready, Gergiev twiddles with his cellular phone and when the car leaves the airport carpark he is already engaged in a conversation on the phone.

The video moves to the Barbican Centre, where the LSO is shown to be rehearsing Tchaikovsky's First Symphony with Gergiev. As the piece was part of their recent concert tour repertoire, Gergiev divulges that there is no need for any in-depth rehearsal of the piece; it suffices just to get everyone's musical muscles warmed up for the concert. After the concert, Gergiev meets some 20 people who have come to greet him backstage. This is something he says he does regularly after concerts. After a quick bite to eat, Gergiev heads toward Heathrow again to take a plane to Moscow, where he states he will be conducting his Mariinsky forces on the following day. The video ends with Gergiev dashing off from the Barbican, again in the backseat of the black BMW seen earlier.

The video is called "Life in a Day: Valery Gergiev." It might, however, just as well have been called "The Everyday of Valery Gergiev." The day the video depicts is in no way unusual to Gergiev – he actually describes the beginning of the day as "boring, nothing exceptional." This is a person who is known to have conducted two concerts in two different continents on a single day and who at one point commuted between New York and St. Petersburg as some of us do between Helsinki and its neighboring cities.

In this paper, I use Gergiev's life as a kind of thought experiment to test some of the conceptions of the everyday present in everyday aesthetics. My focus will be on those views that have been named "restrictivist" and which define the everyday in terms of factors to which we have a recurring, routine-like relationship.<sup>2</sup> Instead of the extraordinary moments that sometimes raise

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<sup>2</sup> The term "restrictivism" derives from (Leddy 2015). As restrictivists Leddy names such

the everyday above the level of the ordinary and the mundane, restrictivists argue that the aesthetics of everyday life is to be found in the routines of the everyday and in the feelings of safety and of being “in control” their carrying out can engender (Haapala 2005, 52). Gergiev is admittedly a rather extreme example – although some of the best thought experiments, of course, are generally such – and it is clear that we cannot all be Gergievs; society as we know it would most likely collapse in that case. However, I do believe that a look at Gergiev’s everyday does raise some interesting concerns for the restrictivist position. Restrictivists believe that the structure and attitude that they see as essential to the everyday characterize even the lives of figures such as Gergiev. The everydayness of the everyday is something that we cannot escape from, they insist. One restrictivist, Ossi Naukkarinen, for example, claims that “it is difficult to even imagine a life that would be completely non-everyday-like” (Naukkarinen 2013, section 2). I think Gergiev’s everyday serves as a very good candidate for such a life.

Below, I will critically examine the restrictivist account of the everydayness of the everyday, with Gergiev’s life as a backdrop. My examination aims to show a significant weakness in the restrictivist position: everydayness is a far less fundamental factor of our waking life than restrictivists believe. I do not deny the value of the notion of everydayness completely, but I do believe there is no necessary reason why most of our waking life has to be characterized by the kind of everydayness structure and attitude restrictivists posit to the heart of the everyday. It is clear that our relationship, for example, to our everyday environment is different from that of a visitor’s. The restrictivists, however, overemphasize this difference. It is equally clear that without routines and habits human life would become a real drudgery; however, again, the restrictivists attach far too much significance on this fact. This is what I hope my examination of the restrictivist take on the everydayness of the everyday will show. Following this, I take up the other term in the notion of everyday aesthetics and show some problems that I believe restrictivists face on this front.

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everyday aestheticians as Kevin Melchionne, Yuriko Saito, Arto Haapala, and Ossi Naukkarinen. Of these four, I will concentrate on the views of Haapala and Naukkarinen.

## ROUTINES AND THE EVERYDAYNESS OF THE EVERYDAY

**R**estrictivists essentially take the everyday to be a relational concept. It is indeed possible to list things, events, and activities around which our everyday is built. Usually this list would consist of factors related to our home, work, other errands, and hobbies. From the restrictivist point of view, this sort of list still leaves it untouched as to what makes these things everyday-like; that is, what constitutes their everydayness. What, ultimately, explains the nature of the everyday and how it differs from non-everyday parts of human life is a particular kind of attitude and relation that we take toward the things and events constantly surrounding us and the activities we recurrently perform. Regarding the everydayness of the everyday, Naukkarinen writes:

The everyday attitude is colored with routines, familiarity, continuity, normalcy, habits, the slow process of acclimatization, even superficiality and a sort of half-consciousness and not with creative experiments, exceptions, constant questioning and change, analyses, and deep reflections.

(Naukkarinen 2013, sec. 2.)

In contrast to crises and other less dramatic breaks of our lives, the everyday is characterized by “routines, easiness, and trust” (Naukkarinen 2013, sec. 2; see also Naukkarinen 2017, sec. 3). Upon encountering objects and activities that our existing routines cannot embrace, we are no longer in the sphere of the everyday, though such objects and activities can, of course, become part of one’s everyday, once one simply manages to engage with them in a routine-like fashion.

Another restrictivist, Arto Haapala, also emphasizes the relational character of the everyday. The key notion of his account is familiarity. Relying on Martin Heidegger’s well-known analysis of tools, Haapala illuminates the everyday attitude by comparing it to nailing. While nailing, a skillful carpenter does not pay attention to the hammer itself, for he

is familiar with this tool and how it functions. The carpenter only pays attention to the tool when it stops working as it should. Similarly, many of our everyday activities from commuting, writing on the computer to shopping at our neighborhood grocery store are carried out with a similar type of inattentive smoothness. We pay attention to the fabric of our everyday lives only when a tear appears in it. Again, as in Naukkarinen's case, the everydayness is identified with such qualities as comfort, ease, safety, and coziness. (See, especially, Haapala 2005.)

Though the restrictivists have analyzed the everydayness of the everyday with various concepts, I here take a closer look at the notion of routine.<sup>3</sup> This is because I believe that routines are much more variant and complex things than restrictivists have noticed. At the very least, the following kind of taxonomy between routines seems possible:

1. There are routines that we cannot really choose; these are necessitated by the biological character of our being. We have to carry them out to simply stay alive. Going to the toilet in the morning and eating are good examples of these sorts of routines.

2. Some routines stem from the social character of our being. Taking part in social life requires at least moving between different places, communicating, dressing, as well as meeting friends and family. Going to the shower and brushing one's teeth in the morning are also routines that are prone to make one's social life more prosperous.

3. Then there are routines that guarantee some minimal level of well-being. There is, for example, no natural reason why we should clean and tidy our homes, but most of us tend to do that on a regular basis, because it makes life more pleasant.

4. Work-related routines are another group of routines. These of course vary considerably from work to work; my routines, unfortunately, are very different from Gergiev's. Some works can also consist of very different sorts of routines.

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<sup>3</sup> I am somewhat wary of my use of the term "routine" below, but with it I basically mean an activity that is performed on a regular basis. For example, all activities that are recurrently related to one's work, such as writing and reading in my case, are routines in this sense. This, I think corresponds, to the restrictivists' use of the term.



5. Hobbies are, in various ways, also tied to routines. Not only can hobbies be considered routines in themselves, but they may demand a certain set of routines to be performed. What is significant with this group of routines is that, even though children, for example, might be forced by their parents to take up a certain hobby, we are usually in a position to choose these routines and how we engage with them. This factor might also explain the value we place on our hobbies.

Routines in all these senses arguably have an important role in the everyday. Yet it is not clear what sense the restrictivists are referring to when they define everydayness in terms of routines. Naukkarinen's position in particular is heavily built on a contrast between routines and non-routines (Naukkarinen 2013, sec. 2). However, it might be more fruitful to make distinctions between different sorts of routines and see how those function in our everyday. For example, in many cases it is possible to make a difference between the what and the how or the form and the content of the routine. The same routine can be performed in different ways at different times, like preparing something to eat. The content of the routine can also change; you do not have to cook the same meal every day. Routines in the first group allow very little variance in this respect – there are only so many ways one can go to the toilet and perform one's daily chores and duties – whereas, in particular, some work-related routines can be done differently and these routines can also be developed in time.

One important factor to note is that some routines are merely a means to a further end (e.g. morning routines), while some can be ends in themselves (e.g. hobbies). Even those routines whose ultimate point is the achievement of some ulterior end can have different levels of intrinsic value (e.g. cooking, doing sports). All this is to say that calling something a routine does not necessarily tell us that much about the ultimate character of the activity in question, beyond the fact that it is something done recurrently.

More importantly, it is important to distinguish routines from simply carrying out something in a routine fashion, as nailing is performed by Haapala's carpenter. Again, there is a great deal of variance between the routines listed above from this perspective. Some of them can indeed be carried out in the kind of half-conscious state of mind that Naukkarinen

thinks defines the everydayness of the everyday. However, in particular, groups 4 (work) and 5 (hobbies) may involve routines whereby the carrying out of which requires a very different kind of attitude, even such things as imagination, reflection, and inspiration. Writing an article and revising one's CV to meet the guidelines of yet another application are two very different routines of a researcher, as is literary reading from Nordic walking in the case of hobbies. Doing the same things regularly does not imply that they are always done routinely; writing an article and literary reading are precisely such routines. Something similar could be said of Haapala's example of nailing; it might illuminate how we carry out some of our routines, but it cannot apply across the board. From the fact that something is a routine; that is to say, that it is done daily or at least regularly, it does not follow that the activity is carried out without any detailed attention to the activity.

Another factor to note is that the routines listed above are hardly of equal value and play very different roles in our lives. Some of them we value greatly for the significance and content they bring into our life. This, for example, applies to many of our hobbies, as well as to the skills we have acquired. But the value we place on the ability to go to the toilet, in turn, gradually dissipates after early childhood. Again, routines turn out to be more complex things than restrictivists assume. Routines can have a very different value with respect to our everyday lives, so a mere reference to routines does not yet tell us that much about what the everyday is like.

Naukkarinen thinks that the everydayness of the everyday is something "unavoidable" (Naukkarinen 2013, sec. 6). Haapala goes even further, saying that "it is as unavoidable as death" (Haapala 2017, 172). At this point, a clarification would, however, be in order. Everydayness might be unavoidable in senses of routine 1), 2), 3), but it certainly is not unavoidable in senses 4) and 5), i.e., routines related to our work and hobbies. In fact, in those cases, the incapacity to look beyond one's routines – or to think outside the box – is often considered a negative trait and can lead to depression or getting fired, or both in a worst case scenario. At another point, Naukkarinen writes that the everyday "is nothing very exceptional, strange, weird, or extraordinary" (Naukkarinen 2017, sec. 3). Perhaps. But

why could the everyday not be imaginative and inspirational, for example? Why is half-consciousness something necessarily tied to the everyday? Where does the necessity that most of our waking life is characterized by what Naukkarinen and Haapala term everydayness come from; that is to say, that this sort of attitude is “present all the time”? (Haapala 2017, 172).

So, what about the case of Gergiev? Though Gergiev is based in St. Petersburg, he very likely spends more time at airports, hotels, and foreign concert halls and opera houses than in his home city. Moreover, while in St. Petersburg, Gergiev’s base really is the Mariinsky Theatre, where he, besides making music, takes care of all sorts of administrative work, usually late into the night; it seems that his home is basically just a place for some (albeit very brief) sleep. It’s very difficult to pinpoint where the everydayness of Gergiev’s everyday might lie. But Gergiev’s line of work makes this even more challenging. Besides rehearsals, he conducts some 250 concerts per year. One can say that conducting really is a routine of Gergiev’s life. However, it is certainly not something that can be done routinely in a half-conscious state. In fact, in the YouTube video Gergiev admits that he is very aware of the high expectations the public has for his concerts, which set certain demands on him and the orchestra he is conducting. In particular, Gergiev explains, he has to make sure with the orchestra that the concert does not turn out to be “a routine business.” Concerts might indeed be everyday events for Gergiev, but they certainly are not everyday events in the everydayness sense of the term.

Haapala thinks that the everyday, as he understands it, is a ubiquitous phenomenon of human life. He writes: “Even the most extraordinary of humans... all have their normalcy, their routines, their ordinary existence, however extraordinary it may look in our eyes ...” (Haapala 2017, 174). The taxonomy between different routines, however, gives new light to this claim. We may indeed all have our routines, but routines themselves can be less and more exciting and not all of them can be carried out in the same way as nailing. That our life is filled with routines, in other words, does not make it impossible for our life to be extraordinary. The concept of routine by itself just does not imply everydayness in the restrictivist sense.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I press this point further in light of the notions of habit and function in (Puolakka 2018).

In a more recent article, Naukkarinen admits that the everyday and the non-everyday are not binary opposites, but that everydayness comes in degrees (Naukkarinen 2017, sec. 3). These sorts of concession are, of course, dangerous, because they invite the slippery slope argument; if everydayness is in no way a necessary, all-encompassing feature of our waking lives, then why can the everyday not be very different from how Naukkarinen – or Haapala – initially portray it.

What the above taxonomy between different routines, along with the analysis of Gergiev’s life presented, shows is that the restrictivist idea of everydayness has a significantly more restricted scope than its proponents have assumed. It may very well form a sort of background or a safety net for our everyday pursuits, but, in light of the above, it is very debatable that it would be some kind of necessary defining character of our waking lives. At the very least, it seems a less interesting element of our lives than restrictivists have assumed.

## IDENTITY IN THE EVERYDAY

One typical feature of at least some restrictivists is that they see the everyday as a very fundamental aspect of human life. Haapala, for example, thinks the everyday “constitutes our existence” (Haapala 2017, 172). What our everyday is like determines who we are, and this of course can change with time. Our identity is not something that exists outside or prior to the everyday, but “we are the everyday” (Haapala 2017, 174).

But it is arguable that Haapala’s analysis has things backwards; it is not the everyday that constitutes our identity, but our identity is what, in general, constitutes our everyday. Our identity is expressed in and through our everyday dealings, routines, and actions. That at least would be the Aristotelian point, though instead of identity, he might use the term character; our character is revealed in what we do and how we do things. The factors that have molded us into the kinds of beings we are determine our everyday, not the other way around. This is, however, not to deny that

our everyday actions would not have an effect on our character in the long run. That is Aristotle's point again; to become a virtuous person one must perform virtuous deeds.

Haapala's account of the relationship between the everyday and identity also overlooks the fact that people can have potentialities and latent skills which they cannot fully use and realize in their present everyday contexts. Think of people who have difficulties of finding a job that matches their education. Especially in times of mass immigration, this is a frequent human experience. There are also other ways in which people can find that their everyday does not support their existence or that they cannot engage with their everyday with all their capacities. In such cases, it would be far too simple to just say that people's identity is constituted by their everyday.

It can, of course, happen that in time people will in a way become stultified by their everyday, which can also lead to a change in their character. Nonetheless, this reinforces the Deweyan point that our experience and character are formed through an interaction with the environment, which Dewey understands in the broadest possible sense, including not only the natural and urban spaces that humans inhabit and encounter, but all "those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being" (Dewey 1955, 13). This is not to say that humans would have some kind of permanent identity, but it does emphasize the fact to a much greater extent than Haapala's view does – and in my view correctly – that a person does not enter into a new environment as a *tabula rasa*, but as constituted by what he or she has absorbed from previous experiences. And if the resulting interaction with the new environment turns out to be especially significant, that will, in turn, influence his or her future interactions, and so on.

It is also not clear why the things we do daily would be more constitutive of our identity than the things we do less frequently. For example, I think my habit of making some half a dozen concert trips abroad yearly defines my identity much more than my daily routine of having a walk after work, for example. I also consider myself some sort of Wagnerian, but I do not listen to his music daily – I am not crazy after all. (I actually think it's good

to take sufficient breaks from listening to his music.)

All in all, the question of how the everyday is related to questions concerning human identity seems much more complex than Haapala realizes. As catchy as the phrase is, it cannot be summarized to the claim that our identity is constituted by our everyday. Many more factors have to be taken into account in considering the issue.

## THE AESTHETICS OF EVERYDAYNESS

**N**aaukarinen claims that the so-called restrictivists in everyday aesthetics are also expansionists in an important respect. Aesthetic tradition, in his view, has taken the striking and the extraordinary as central characteristics of the aesthetic. The restrictivists meet this powerful tradition by trying to expand the scope of the aesthetic to include “ordinary, low-key, prosaic, mundane, or even trivial experiences, events, and objects” (Naukarinen 2017, sec. 2). This insistence is behind the restrictivist critique of Dewey, the main inspiration of the expansionist approach to everyday aesthetics. Restrictivists do admit that our everyday can include the kinds of energetic experiences which Dewey dubbed aesthetic. However, as they are the exceptions, not the rule, an aesthetics of everyday life has to be framed in terms of more commonplace experiences. Though these experiences do not stand out from the ordinary flow of experience as powerfully as Deweyan aesthetic experiences, for example, do, restrictivists claim that many of the commonplace experiences we have in our everyday are, nevertheless, aesthetic in character. The feeling of coziness has been mentioned as one experience of this kind (Naukarinen 2017, sec. 6).

Haapala extends Heidegger’s tool analysis to the aesthetic sphere of the everyday. In his view, the aesthetics of the everyday is characterized by a kind of trustworthiness. Just as the carpenter can rely on his tools and routines while nailing without paying that much conscious attention to the activity itself, the familiar objects and routines of our everyday life raise a similar experience of comfort in us. Qualitatively, the experience

is very different from the extraordinary experiences that attentive and concentrated engagements with artworks can raise. Nevertheless, it is, in Haapala's view, an experience that we find pleasurable, even aesthetic. This is how Haapala explains his idea of the aesthetics of familiarity:

We take pleasure in being in the surroundings we are used to, and fulfilling normal routines. The aesthetics of everydayness is exactly in the "hiding" of the extraordinary and disturbing, and feeling homey and in control. One could paradoxically say that the aesthetics of the familiar is an aesthetics of "the lacking," the quiet fascination of the absence of visual, auditory, and any other kinds of demands from the surroundings.

(Haapala 2005, 52.)

This account also brings the relational character of the everyday into view. There is no determinate limit on what can become an everyday object or environment in Haapala's sense. In time, even an extraordinary view or artwork can turn into an everyday object and inspire the sort of sense of security and being in control that Haapala thinks characterizes the aesthetics of familiarity.

Functionality also appears in another part of Haapala's view, which relates to the idea of the kind of concealed character of the aesthetics of everyday life. He believes that a locals' relationship to their immediate home environments is very different from a stranger's. As we become familiar with our everyday environment(s), we gradually take on a highly functional attitude toward its buildings and other sites. In this type of attitude, the surface qualities of the environment, in turn, move to the background of experience. The places of our everyday, Haapala writes, are "first and foremost, seen through the lenses of functionality, as tools or simple backgrounds in the flow of the everyday" (Haapala 2017, 180–181). Homes, offices, cafés, libraries, lunch places, neighborhood shops, and other everyday places are "tools for living." However, once they are seen as such, Haapala argues, "the room and the house and the whole neighborhood disappear in their usefulness" and become "mere bricks in the fabric of the everyday" (Haapala 2017, 174; see also

Haapala 2005, 48–49). Again, we pay more direct attention to the individual constructs of familiar environments and their surface qualities only when a crack appears to this fabric.

Haapala's analysis captures some important points about the experience of everyday environments. Yet his conclusions seem a little too radical. Haapala is, of course, talking about disappearing in a metaphorical sense, but even so it is arguable that he overemphasizes the effects settling down into an environment can have on our everyday experience. Haapala's account seems to be built on a very rigid contrast, where the other end of the pole is represented by a person who cannot stop staring at the view opening up from the top of a New York skyscraper, and the other by someone so settled in his ways that he has become totally blind to his home environment. The process of familiarization is portrayed almost as a kind of vacuum that sucks the effects of the surface and visible qualities of environments – much like death according to Plato in the *Phaedo* dialogue: “must not all things at last be swallowed up in death” (*Phaedo* 72d).

It is true that functionality has an effect on how we experience built environments. However, this does not mean that the function of a building situated in our everyday would in a way swallow up its surface qualities. Rather, our experience of those qualities depends on the category under which the building is seen, namely, we see the building *in terms* of its function. The reason why office buildings, for example, often seem cold might not only be in the style of architecture, but also that the knowledge that they are mostly uninhabited during nights and weekends enters into our perception, giving our experience a sort of emptiness that we, in turn, do not experience while walking in a residential area.

Perhaps this might be just a question of differences in experiences, but many everyday aesthetic practices also suggest that the effect of the surface qualities of everyday objects and buildings does not fade once they have become part of our everyday. Haapala writes that instead of “recreational values,” a local puts emphasis on the “everyday functional values” of his environment (Haapala 2005, 44). However, this claim is hard to square with the fact that people can spend a considerable amount of time and money for finding a place to live that meets their aesthetic taste, as well as with the



fact that it is often the aesthetic appearance that largely determines which one of our neighborhood cafés becomes our *Stammplatz*.

Jane Forsey has interestingly argued that it is very hard to incorporate the design practices related to everyday objects into Haapala's scheme. By uniting aesthetics with function, the point of good design is to enhance our experience of the everyday above the ordinary and the mundane without making it exceptional in the way that art can. She also questions Haapala's claim that we would notice the tools of our everyday only when they break down. Forsey writes: "we also notice things when they work extremely well, when they perform their functions with an ease and grace that calls for our appreciation. And this is the kind of aesthetic judgment that is particular to design." (Forsey 2013, 241.) What Forsey believes her analysis of the role of design in our everyday shows against Haapala is that the juxtaposition between his central notions, the strange and the familiar, should be softened. That is precisely my point as well.

Some objects and environments also seem more resistant to the causes of familiarization than others. That many classic pieces of modern furniture still seem fresh to us testifies to this – or think of how radical Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* still seems, almost 200 years after it was composed. It is also far from clear that Gergiev would in no way pay attention to the glorious decorations and color of the great hall of the old Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg when present there. The experience of conducting there must also be very different than in some other halls familiar to him, such as the Martti Talvela Hall of the Mikkeli Concert Hall Mikaeli in Finland. The concert hall might actually be thought of as a tool as well; it is a tool for making and experiencing music, and a well-functioning concert hall with great acoustics and aesthetically rewarding spaces surely enhances the experience for musicians and public alike. I also very much doubt that the experiences undergone by the musicians working in such a place daily and by the regular evening concertgoers would in time become ordinary in the mundane and low-key sense of the term. At the very least, experientially the end result of settling down to an exciting environment and to an unexciting one are not the same.

## CONCLUSION

While in this essay I have been fairly critical toward the restrictivist position, as represented by Haapala and Naukkarinen, I am not denying the value of their position completely. Their analyses do manage to capture some important factors of our everyday lives and life is likely to be markedly more chaotic in their absence. Nonetheless, this is nothing more than a base. Showing that our routines can be more varied and richer in terms of their content and how they are carried out goes a long way to demonstrating this. I also think this base is far less interesting from an aesthetic perspective than what can be built on top of it – and it is still debatable whether the bottom level of our everyday experience should be considered aesthetic at all (see, for example, Forsey 2013, 230–236; for a response see Naukkarinen 2017). Considering these levels equally interesting would be like saying of an opera performance that the stage machinery is of equal value than the events taking place on stage and in the pit.

All this means that there is more room for an expansionist understanding of everyday aesthetics. This position, whose most systematic proponent is Thomas Leddy, understands the aesthetic character of the everyday in terms of heightened experiences, such as those Dewey tries to capture with his rich analysis of aesthetic experience. In a recent article, Leddy has, in turn, approached these experiences with the concept of awe (Leddy 2015). It is indeed true that to keep the everyday running, we need to do some rather unexciting things, some of which are, moreover, not necessarily that pleasurable – admittedly, Gergiev might again actually be an exception here. Though some of us like cleaning, these things usually fall into the category of routines 1), 2), 3). But there is no inherent necessity why, in particular, everyday routines 4) and 5) could not cause the kinds of heightened experiences, which are at the heart of the expansionist approach, daily.

We humans indeed do have a certain sort of craving for stability and comfort. Even Gergiev talks about how his life is organized in the video. There is actually an entire team of people behind Gergiev, from managers to rehearsal conductors, who make his frantic lifestyle possible. In a certain

respect, this background forms the safety net of Gergiev's everyday. It is precisely the psychological necessity we humans seem to have for stability and for feeling safe that the restrictivist account of everyday aesthetics captures well – and it is of course an interesting fact why we cherish this feeling in our everyday lives, but much less frequently in art. However, if the restrictivists believe their analyses of the everyday uncover some more fundamental necessities of human life, even Kantian transcendental ones, as some of their formulations suggest,<sup>5</sup> then the view has some severe flaws.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Naukkarinen, for example, writes that "everyday is the unavoidable basis on which everything else is built" (Naukkarinen 2013, sec. 2).

<sup>6</sup> A big thank you to The Finnish Cultural Foundation for funding this research.

## THE AESTHETIC VALUE OF THE UNNOTICED

### ABSTRACT

This paper comments on a paradox that seems to be the crux of everyday aesthetics: the aesthetic character of the non-aesthetic. The ‘everyday’, characterised as the routine, familiar, taken for granted, or just unnoticed, seems to be opposite to that marked as worth looking at, and aesthetically contemplating. The aim of the article is to hold that the unreflective consciousness of objects, environments and events in everyday life permits their aesthetic appreciation. The paper considers the role that art and memories play in bringing into consciousness that which was previously ‘unnoticed’.

### INTRODUCTION

The aesthetics of the everyday focuses on and tries to characterise the kind of aesthetic experience we obtain from the ordinary, daily, everyday life. In particular, everyday aesthetics seems to demand an approach different from the approach adequate for the aesthetics of art and nature. Arto Haapala’s work in the field has especially endorsed the idea that aesthetic experience of the everyday should respect what is characteristic of the experience of the everyday, namely, its commonplace, routine, unexceptional, ordinary character. Indeed, hiding the inconspicuous character of daily life could lead everyday aesthetics to miss the point of the very object of its investigation. While for other approaches to everyday aesthetics the central point is – according to the title of Thomas Leddy’s 2012 book – the appreciation of “the extraordinary in the ordinary”, Haapala insists in the necessity of explaining the aesthetic experience of the everyday *qua* everyday, that is, as commonplace and familiar. For

Leddy calling an experience aesthetic implies separating it from precisely the ordinary, even if minimally, involving the objects of appreciation with “aura” (Leddy 2012, 127 ff.) For Haapala everyday objects and environments may be aesthetically appreciated in their scarcely noticed presence.

Pointing to the unobtrusive character of the experience of everyday life, a problem to philosophical aesthetics immediately arises concerning the very concept of aesthetic experience. From Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* onwards, aesthetic experience is thought to involve a reflective judgment, a pleasant awareness of the collaboration of our cognitive faculties. The form of representation of beautiful and sublime objects provide our mind with the occasion of feeling the free play of the mental faculties. In contrast with the scientific and practical apprehension of the world, the mere form of the object in itself, with independence of its utility and cognitive or moral relevance, gives aesthetic satisfaction. Aesthetic properties are considered to be sensual salient properties of the object, which are identified in that disinterested pleasant experience.

Dewey’s pragmatist conception of aesthetic experience has been invoked to solve problems linked to autonomist Kantian aesthetics (Shusterman 2000). However, Dewey’s conception of aesthetic experience also represents it in contrast with everyday experience. To have an aesthetic experience is to have “*an* experience”, which, contrary to our daily interaction with the world, is complete, united, “self-sufficient”, and full of significance: “...we have *an* experience when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment” (Dewey 1934, 37) So, both in Kantian and Deweyan traditions aesthetic experience is marked by its differentiation from the daily experience of the world.

In this article, I will examine the aesthetic character of everyday life in its characteristic ordinary and commonplace experience. First, I will point out the ubiquity of aesthetic experience in everyday life and its very often irreflexive character. Second, I will point to the role that art and memories play bringing to consciousness what passed unnoticed when we lived it. Finally, I want to stress that it is not art or remembrance that aestheticizes everyday life, but that the everyday was aesthetic even when unnoticed.

## AESTHETIC PLEASURES AND HUMAN LIFE

**A**esthetic pleasures of all kinds play an important role in our lives. We enjoy the contemplation of moon and clouds, the singing of birds, the sound of waves, attractive people, agile cats, fragrant flowers, colourful gardens and elegant terraces, vintage furniture, fashion, jewels, all kind of ornaments and decoration, and many more things that are, happily, not so unusual. The enjoyment of these things makes life better, more valuable. In general, the aesthetic quality of objects, people, activities and environments contributes significantly to human wellbeing and happiness. Although aesthetics has barely paid attention to these commonplace objects and activities, it is certainly possible for aesthetics to defend their aesthetic value as objects or phenomena which attract our attention by their appearance.

We admire human beauty, for example. Some people's appearance strikes us in the middle of a room full of people, walking down the street among the mass, or projected on the screen of a movie theatre, as beautiful, and marked with different kinds of beauty. There are expressive, sexy, mysterious, graceful, merely superficial, and other kinds of human beauty. In these cases, human beauty like the beauty of animals or urban environments can be appreciated just as art or nature are. That is, it can be an object of an experience that considers sensuous properties – by themselves or together with other relational properties – and the way they affect us. A person's face may attract our attention for the way in which the different parts – hair, eyes, mouth, neck, shape of the head, skin colour – are arranged in the whole. But also, hairstyle, glasses, and clothing may attract us as original or elegant. Sometimes a woman strikes us for her similarity to a Botticelli figure, as Odette seemed the reincarnation of Zipporah to Swann in *Swann's Way*.<sup>1</sup> In the first case the face is contemplated as a natural object (to the extent that a human body can be contemplated as something completely natural); in the second, as an artefact, an artistic artefact, produced with aesthetic and other intentions; in the third case, it

<sup>1</sup> Swann projects on Odette his vision of Zipporah, a figure in a fresco by Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel: « Standing next to him, allowing her hair, which she had undone, to flow down her cheeks,

is a real person perceived under the influence of a fictional character.

The aesthetics of human body may well be central for the aesthetics of the everyday, given the ubiquitous, fundamental and influential role that appreciation of human beauty and aesthetic qualities play in human relations and culture (Irvin 1998; Naukkarinen 2016). Moreover, human actions result from body movements and the appreciation of those movements and actions is consequently intertwined with that of the body. However, in the examples given above the human body is appreciated as an object with an aesthetic value according to the same criteria with which we would appreciate a beautiful object, artistic or natural. Indeed, the human body is a field of different types of aesthetic appreciation, relative to the attitude adopted by the beholder, the features taken into consideration, etc. A visage can be appreciated from a merely formal or sensory perspective. It may be more or less photogenic, well-proportioned, harmonious, etc. Or it can be appreciated as expressive, or suggestive of moral virtues or traits of character. In this case, the visage is melancholy, friendly, agreeable, profound, etc. The human body, and more specifically the human face, is probably an example of the impossibility of neatly separating sensory aesthetics and deep aesthetics, aesthetics of nature and of art.

In everyday life we also have continuous contact with art: we visit museums, are surrounded by architecture and public art, listen to music, go to the movies, etc. And maybe not Botticelli, but certainly TV series influence the way people perceive other people and conceive human relations. On a daily basis, we make a lot of aesthetic decisions too: related to art or not: about which book to read or going to which museum, about clothing, haircuts, manners, hobbies, friends, etc. Some of them are of relevance to our entire life: where to live, with whom, etc. Aesthetic decisions are those in which aesthetic reasons are the most relevant, but decisions of other kinds incorporate aesthetic reasons too. Aesthetic reasons have more or less weight, depending on people, but are certainly of more relevance

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bending one leg somewhat in the position of a dancer so that without getting tired she could lean over the engraving, which she looked at, inclining her head, with those large eyes of hers, so tired and sullen when she was not animated, she struck Swann by her resemblance to the figure of Zipporah, Jethro's daughter, in a fresco in the Sistine Chapel". Marcel Proust (2001, 230–31)

than we want to admit. Actually, it is unlikely that the attractiveness of someone does not play a part in our reasons for choosing not only a sexual partner but also a friend, or even a colleague. So, everyday life is imbued with aesthetic perception, understanding, appreciation, judgment, and, eventually, behaviour.

## THE AESTHETICS OF EVERYDAY AS EVERYDAY

**N**ow, important as it is to emphasise the active role of the self in aesthetic perception, understanding, appreciation, and judgment, it is also necessary to acknowledge that many of what can be considered aesthetic preferences, decisions and behaviour may pass ignored, repressed, or simply unnoticed by the self. Aesthetic motivations may not be acknowledged socially or by the individual, but an immense part of our behaviour depends on factors that are unknown to ourselves.<sup>2</sup> The everyday includes not only what is commonly perceived, believed or felt, but also all that is hidden, taken for granted, and unnoticed. In this sense, Highmore (2002) cites Bataille's phrase: "the everyday ... receives our daily inattention", to conclude that "things become 'everyday' by becoming invisible" (Highmore 2002, 21).

Yuriko Saito approaches everyday aesthetics also by considering the invisibility of everyday phenomena and the lack of consciousness of our daily engagement with aesthetic matters. According to her, there are "aesthetic dimensions of our everyday life that do not result in 'an aesthetic experience'" (Saito 2007, 104), meaning that even though in daily situations we very often react, act, and make decisions of an aesthetic character, we do it without necessarily having an aesthetic experience, at least if considered "disinterested and contemplative" (Saito 2007, 48 ff.). Saito stresses the unreflective character of aesthetic judgment and the action-directed, instead of contemplative, dimension of most of our daily life.

Like Saito, Haapala's account seeks to locate everyday aesthetics in the

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<sup>2</sup> On aesthetic bias and the social discrimination of unattractive people see Irvin (2017)



analysis of the specific character of the everyday, namely, its everydayness. Strikingly Haapala defines the everyday as that which is non-aesthetically marked, at least from the point of view of traditional aesthetics. However, unlike Saito, Haapala still tries to capture the specific phenomenology of everyday interactions with the world. He conceives his approach as an “existentialist account of the phenomenon of the everyday and its aesthetic character” (Haapala 2005, 40). The starting point is, therefore, the phenomenology of everyday life, which is felt as routine, dull, automatic, unremarkable. However, there is a limit point in the phenomenology of the everyday, and it is the point at which the everyday turns invisible, unnoticed. The immediate consequence is that there cannot be an aesthetic experience of that which is not noticed. Paradoxically the aesthetics of the everyday life becomes the aesthetics of the non-aesthetic.

The paradox of the aesthetics of everyday life is about the appreciation of that which does not attract our attention, is not worth being looked at, or is taken for granted. How is an aesthetics of the unnoticed possible? If aesthetic appreciation comes from the disinterested contemplation of an object, how can something that is scarcely looked at, but intermingled with our daily goals and desires, be aesthetically appreciated? The aesthetics of the everyday is not about the experience of salient properties in the object of disinterested contemplation, but about our *being in the world*, Haapala suggests, using Heidegger’s notion in *Being and Time*. Consequently, the aesthetics of the everyday is about our engagement with objects, environments, other persons, and actions, which is fundamental to human existence. And that provides us with a sense of being at home in the world and with a sense of personal identity and belonging to a community, which characterises the aesthetic experience of the everyday.

Haapala (2005) provides an example of the experience of place, which is characteristic of our daily experience of the world. A place is not just a location, the setting of our life; it is not only a geographical point with its own natural or historic “character”. A place has also personal meaning, it is related to our own biography, and it is “sensed” in a certain way. Basically, a place is strange or familiar to us, and its aesthetic character is determined by that. Our place, the place which we inhabit, and in which we develop our daily life

is made significant by our uses of it, by the meaning we give to its elements, by the way in which we deal with it. In turn, the place also constrains and structures our movements, visions, and actions. Familiarity, place, and everyday are interconnected: “Familiarity and everyday are the very heart of place” (Haapala 2005, 40). The key aesthetic notion is familiarity, which is how we sense the place. The elements that form part of our place are barely noticed, but rather taken for granted. They constitute the background in which daily activities take place, and also where extraordinary events might happen, and unexpected objects draw our attention.

Thus, strangeness may make its way through everyday life. Indeed, a new building, a work of public art, a new bridge, strikes us as an intrusion in our place, to which we react with a sense of strangeness, first, and then by making aesthetic judgments about its shape, meaning or fitting in the place. Leddy takes it on that making something aesthetic always implies making it strange in a certain sense: to frame, to point it out, to highlight it among the rest of the objects as objects with “aura”. Dishabituation and estrangement were concepts bound to the theory of Avantgarde; but renewing and refreshing our perception, discovering hidden or overlooked aspects of the world, are very generally taken to be among the main values of art. Admittedly, “(i)n a sense of the word *aesthetic*, strangeness creates a suitable setting for aesthetic considerations” (Haapala 2005, 44). Now, according to Haapala, in opposition to the strangeness that characterises the aesthetic of art, familiarity marks everyday life. After a process of habituation in which the new object or environment is included in our routine, it becomes everyday.

Haapala’s point is that besides the aesthetics of strangeness there is an aesthetics of familiarity. And that if there is to be an aesthetics of the everyday, it has to be an aesthetics of familiarity. In order to do justice to the aesthetic character of the everyday we need to take familiarity into account. At the same time, he suggests that the aesthetics of strangeness is pretty different from the aesthetics of familiarity. Something familiar is something towards which we have personal ties: we are attached to familiar things and persons, we are rooted in our place. For that reason, the aesthetic experience of familiar things, places, people, is personal, and cannot be

disinterested, detached, as the aesthetic experience required by a work of art, or a natural environment. The experience of the familiar retains the aesthetic character because it is related to pleasure and value, wellbeing and good life. It is sensory aesthetic in the sense that it is perceptually experienced, but meaningful in the sense that what gives sense to space and facilitates familiarity are actions, behaviours, and habits that link us to the environment and make it our place.

From this point of view, the paradox of the aesthetic experience of the unnoticed everyday may be elucidated, considering that what usually goes overlooked may flow into our consciousness as aesthetically valuable. The unnoticed enters our awareness, not as something extraordinary or strange, but rather dyed with familiarity. According to Haapala, from time to time we may take a breath on our daily ups and downs, and we can come to perceive aesthetically our surroundings, familiar scenes and things. Certainly, it will oblige us to take “some distance”, but the pleasure we will obtain “is not distinct from the pleasure that we obtain from the fulfilling of the daily routines, but *dependent on them*” (Haapala 2005, 51, *my italics*). Things are not “transfigured”, or experienced “with aura”, but the aesthetic experience of the everyday demands keeping the closeness and intimacy that the object possesses for us. Although we may perceive just its sensory appearance, it does not deprive the thing of its special meaningfulness for us.

So, Haapala’s solution to the paradox of the unnoticed passes for admitting that in order to be appreciated the object has to enter the sphere of consciousness. And this is enough for Saito to point out that Haapala is still “wedded to defining aesthetic as something pleasurable” (Saito 2007, 50). Ideal for Saito is to acknowledge and leave room for “those dimensions of our everyday aesthetic life that normally do not lead to a memorable, standout, pleasurable aesthetic experience *in their normal experiential context*” (Saito 2007, 51). That is, for Saito a feeling of familiarity still preserves the pleasurable character that characterises aesthetic experience out of daily contexts. According to her, to do justice to the everyday *in its normal experiential context*, as overlooked and unnoticed, demands that daily aesthetic decisions and behaviour do not involve a special feeling or pleasant consciousness of the object. However, aesthetic decisions

and behaviours in the realm of the unnoticed require also some kind of experience of objects, scenes, and actions.

Non-reflective consciousness seems to me the most promising way to understand the unnoticed character of the daily experience of objects and actions. First, in order to explain the – usually – successful manner in which we handle daily with objects and find our way in the world. And secondly, in order to explain how the aesthetic experience of the everyday “depends on” the experience of everydayness, as Haapala suggests (Haapala 2012, 51). Pleasure is not something added to everyday life by the aesthetic detached contemplation, but something that is recovered by aesthetic experience from our daily life.

In what follows, I want to explore what I take to be Haapala’s account of the aesthetic experience of everyday *qua* everyday. My aim is to go deeper into the idea of noticing the unnoticed or perceiving the overlooked, as the passage from non-reflective awareness to reflective awareness. So that when we take a step back and look at the commonplace, we may in some sense keep the experience we had when we were dealing with it in our daily routines. I assume that the psychological description of the experience of the everyday is that of a non-reflective awareness of the object, the action, the environment, or the person we experience. We are aware of the sun streaming through the balcony, the fragrance of freshly made coffee, or the wind on our face while riding the bike... even if we don’t necessarily stop and pay attention to them. Actually, we sometimes avoid paying attention to them, for whichever reasons, for instance, not to be distracted from other occupations. Writing on my computer I withdraw my attention from the stream of sunlight entering the room through the balcony, in order to concentrate on my paper.

Very often in daily routines, our mode of experiencing objects and actions is distracted. We may do several things at a time: while preparing sandwiches for the children’s lunch, we drink our coffee, listen to the radio, open the windows to ventilate the rooms, and think about a meeting in half an hour. Some of the things we do automatically, while some others require more concentration. We are not reflecting on the perception of objects or the action itself, but it does not mean that we are not aware of

the objects involved in the activity or the atmosphere around. Something or just coincidence may make us see more intently the object in question. For instance, we suddenly realise that our favourite song is being played on the radio, or we realize that the window needs cleaning. A positive and a negative aesthetic experience results in each case. However, we were hearing the radio and seeing the window before realising it. We might also retrospectively bring to mind the experience that we were having distractedly, without realizing that we were having it. For instance, when driving to the meeting the image of the dirty glass may enter our thoughts. And this can only happen because we saw that it was dirty before. I could not make the aesthetic decision to clean the windows, without having a displeasing experience becoming more salient in my mind.

When we stop and look at the sun illuminating the room, we may make an aesthetic scene of it, bringing it out of life limited by space and time and contemplating it *sub specie aeternitatis*. In this sense, we are redeeming the ordinary from its ordinariness. There is certainly something really lacking when I stop typing on my computer and contemplate the sun entering through the balcony. What is lacking is my own presence, my movements and actions inside the scene. I stop being part of the environment to become a beholder. And, consequently, my experience changes. However, there is a sense in which the experience may retain its ordinariness. The sunshine enters my office room every day more or less at the same time, illuminates the place from the same point, warming the room and giving it a golden light in the evenings. I enjoy it almost daily, even if only from time to time, especially in winter, do I reflect on it, that is, I become aware of my perceptions. When I do, the experience does not lose its everyday character. Moreover, as Haapala points out, it depends on the familiarity brought about by time (Haapala 2005, 51).

My point is that sunshine entering through the balcony was aesthetically pleasurable also when it was unnoticed, that is, non-reflectively perceived. It is not that the non-aesthetic features of the object are aesthetically experienced only once they are attentively contemplated, but rather that the object was from the beginning aesthetically perceived, if non-reflectively. There are some symptoms revealing that my activity was suffused with

pleasure also during the time it was routine: I didn't realise the time passing, my body expressed calm and comfort, or I smiled. Equally, children playing don't reflect about having fun, but they have: they jump, run and laugh. To the contrary, familiarity does not convert a certain ugly building in our way home into something beautiful. Familiarity allows us to see it daily without paying attention to it. We don't perceive its ugliness constantly, but from time to time we are sadly disappointed by its presence.

## MEMORIES OF THE UNNOTICED

**E**vidence of the aesthetic experience of everyday objects, scenes and actions lies also in the fact that we can retrieve it when we come to perceive again the same objects after a time, or when we recall them, they are evoked by others, or represented in works of art. When years later we visit again a place, or smell the fragrance of a person, or have the old sensation of having fun or being surprised by something, that is possible because we once had those perceptions and sentiments. And we may now recall the satisfaction we got formerly from them. Our present experience is not as new, but it is permeated by the sense of something already lived.

Some episodes, moments, atmospheres or journeys, that in everyday life can pass unnoticed, moments in which we are happily, melancholically, or excitedly engaged, without reflecting, in an action, perception, or conversation, can also be brought to reflexion in memories. In the *Search of Lost Time* Proust wrote about involuntary memory and the recollection of moments and persons that bring us the happiness of past times. There is no reason to think that these recalled moments are happy only now in the present, due to nostalgia or idealization. Or that it is writing or literature that make them happy. If episodes from past times are remembered now as happy, it may be because they were happy then, even if then we were not reflexively aware. Swann liked transiting from art to life and then to art, as when he perceived Odette as Botticelli's Zipporah. The taste of a madeleine made Marcel recollect his childhood summers at Combray: the smells in the

kitchen, nap time reading in bed, with the blinds closed protecting the room from the sun in the hottest hours of the day; all these were everyday pleasures of Marcel's childhood. Certainly, it is reminiscence that brought those moments to reflexion and recovered them from insignificance. However, the content of the memories are moments really lived by the child Marcel, now recollected by the adult Marcel as pleasantly familiar.

I am not prepared to enter here in the epistemology of memories, but I want to consider a question that recurrently arises when dealing with memories and autobiographies. I am referring to experiential memories, that is, memories from the inside, or the recollection of the past from the first-person perspective, a recollection not only of what happened but of what it was like for the self to live it. The problem is the very likely manipulation of memories and the impossibility of the true representation of past times. The main reason is of course that the person has changed, and even if there is a serious aim at being truthful, the same things do not look the same or have the same significance. Time also blurs the facts: we mistake people for other people, years, and even the proper content of what happened. More to the point, there is no inner mark of the truth of a memory. However, no matter how frequent mistakes and conscious or unconscious manipulation are, there is something like remembering truly.

In part, the problem arises from thinking about memories as representations of facts that are somewhere held in reserve in the mind. Remembering something is considered as drawing a picture or a print out from the reservoir of our mind. But this is not what Marcel, the narrator of the *Search* did. He did not draw a memory from the back of his mind to write about it. But involuntary memories bring to his consciousness past events that are part of his identity and explanatory of his ways of thinking and acting in the present. So, in the novel, the narrator tells truly a past event from the first-person point of view, that is, he expresses himself sincerely, respecting the expressive and aesthetic character of the present experiences of the past. He did not take the mental and discoloured picture of an event, in order to revive and embellish it with literary decoration. That is, literature does not repair the missing parts and manipulate the less interesting ones, to build a

nically written, beautifully structured whole. Instead, the value of *In Search of Lost Time* is considered to be the narration of the past from the present, and the exploration of memory, truth, human life, and the passing of time.

It is likely that in reading *In Search of Lost Time* we don't care about the truth or falsity of the narrated content. That's not my concern here, but to show what it would be like for a memory to regain the experience of the past, to evoke it. Recollection is often the private imagination of past events in which we more or less luckily are able to evoke the experience we had of them. Proust is often regarded as defending the impossibility of regaining the past. However, even though only involuntary memory can escape the traps of nostalgia, it is still possible that "truth appears and grants us happiness in moments of insight linked to the retrospective consideration of sensual experience, the 'making strange' of what previously had been a matter of assumption and ready certainty" (Stewart 2004, 114).<sup>3</sup>

## THE UNNOTICED IN ART

**F**ollowing Proust's novel, I now want to hold that for the reason already given, that we can only recognise or remember something that we had somehow experienced before, art may also be capable of retaining the characteristic experience of everyday life. That everyday life can be enjoyed, and that happiness depends much on our capacity to be sensitive to it has been often remarked. That art has been able to represent the everyday up to the most overlooked aspects of it has also been claimed. From different perspectives, and in a variety of art forms, from literature to music or painting, artists have striven to represent the elusive, the unnoticed, character of daily life. Artists and philosophers have assumed that in order to do that it is required to make the familiar strange. However, the Avant-garde idea that the aesthetic experience of art is essentially an experience of estrangement is unwarranted.

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<sup>3</sup> Stewart makes again the point of the 'estrangement'. However, I take it to be just one more occasion in which the notion is used by habit. It does not add anything to the idea that what was assumed before is now realized.



Certainly, the unnoticed, neglected, lived but not contemplated aspects of the everyday, are brought to contemplation and reflection by art. And, certainly, a work of art is a representation, and needs to be interpreted; it is just the opposite of daily life, which is immediately taken in. But all that does not imply estrangement. Art may make the familiar strange, and vice versa. However, it may also be the case that art represents the everyday, and, furthermore, that it is able to evoke what is peculiar of the experience of familiarity. Actually, that is the point of many works of art, which aim to conjure the everydayness of the everyday.

Photography is in some sense particularly adequate to fit the task of representing the everyday since it makes it possible to mechanically and transparently represent what happens in front of the camera. That way, Henri Cartier-Bresson's photographs succeeded in capturing the "right moment", in which it may be said that the extraordinary appears in the middle of the ordinary. In *Derriere la Gare Lazare* (1932) a man leaps across the water of a puddle in the surroundings of the train station. The photograph captures the figure on the air and the symmetric reflection on the puddle. The photographer was lucky and ready to shoot the exact moment in which an ordinary event transforms the complete scene. Together with the geometric pattern of the station fence and different elements of the setting, human figures and architectonic elements, light and obscurity, movement and stillness, balance and unsteadiness are organized in a composition with aesthetic sense and value transforming the grey non-place behind the train station in a poetic urban scene of lights and shades, stabilities and movement. Like in other photographs by Cartier-Bresson, geometry and human presence, the permanence of the setting and the transience of actions combine in a composition that is visually striking.

Cartier-Bresson has very often been mentioned in relation to the representation of everyday life. As an artist, Cartier-Bresson "makes us attend to the message of reality" (Gombrich 1991, 198) and has the capacity "to make reality speak" (Gombrich 1991, 199). And nevertheless, Haappala writes about Cartier-Bresson as representative of the art "where the *quotidian* has been used as the subject-matter", but also as an example for his scepticism

about the power of art of representing everydayness: "...my point is that in the context of art the everyday loses its everydayness: it becomes something extraordinary" (Haapala 2005, 51). The value of Cartier-Bresson's art is not about the ordinary, but about the extraordinary in the ordinary, the humorous, the surprising, the unlikely in the middle of the everyday<sup>4</sup>.

However, sometimes art not only has the everyday as subject-matter, but it is able to represent the everyday life *qua* everyday, that is, to evoke everyday everydayness. Photographic transparency does not warrant the representation of everydayness, but, in contrast, artistic opacity is sometimes capable of doing so. Let's consider painting: among her pictures of mothers with children, Mary Cassatt's *The Child's Bath* (1891) represents a moment in which a woman with a girl in her lap washes the girl's foot in a porcelain basin full of water. I find the painting a great example of the evocation of daily domesticity. However, the work is greatly pictorial, that is, artistically opaque. In the first place, the influence of Degas and Japanese prints compositions meets the eye. The proper composition underlines the artistry, with a superior angle that imposes the foreshortening of the pitcher in the foreground to the right. Secondly, there is artistry in representing the texture and touch of different materials, the fabric of the rugs, maybe wool, the silky dress, the porcelain, the water, the varnish of the furniture, and the wall-paper. The bourgeoisie interior is luxurious and beautiful, "the well-provided upper-middle-class bedroom or parlour, in which her curving body (the mother's body) can provide shelter and sustenance" (Nochlin 2008, 191). But, apart from the conspicuous presence of the medium – or maybe due to it – the painting is capable of evoking the physical contact of mother and child, and the intimacy of the moment. The painting achieves it thematising the touch. On the one hand by means of the representation of stuff and texture: wool, silk, water, flesh...; on the other hand, by the way

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<sup>4</sup> The relationship between Cartier-Bresson and the everyday has usually been remarked. Commenting on Danto's phrase that we respond to Cartier-Bresson photographs "in the fullness of our humanity", Rubio (2016) claimed that what is at stake is "our capacity of seeing, in the magic of Cartier-Bresson's photographs, the world that we see on a daily basis, realising that it is the same world. It is *the* world". In this sense, Rubio points in the opposite direction of the idea that Cartier-Bresson unveils the magic in the quotidian to the idea that it unveils the quotidian in the magic.

in which the figures touch each other, the hand on the foot, the huge hand of the mother around her daughter's waist, the daughter's hand leaning on the mother's knee.

According to Linda Nochlin: "Cassatt's mother and child images speak openly of the sensual fleshly delights of maternity" (Nochlin 1999, 190). Caresses, crossed gazes, sleepy attitudes and the children's nudity are the main motives of these paintings. Understanding and appreciating them hinge on the capacity to recognize the pleasant experience of bathing toddlers, and the happiness of intimate domesticity in the everyday relationship with children. Beyond the aesthetic qualities of the artistic representation, the value of the work lies in my opinion in its capacity to evoke domesticity in its characteristic everydayness.

The representation of something that has been considered characteristic of everydayness also contributes to the value: the absorption of the figures in the domestic activity. Both mother and child stare at the basin, collaborating automatically in the action. They seem unaware of themselves and of the other, but they are attuned in their movements and in fulfilling their actions. Indeed, they are in comfortable control of their actions because they are aware of their own body and movements, and sensitive to the touch of the other's body and movements. Mother and child are unreflectively aware of all that and of many other things – like perhaps the temperature of the water and of the room.

Michael Fried has dedicated most of his writings to the topic of absorption in painting. But in *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before* (2008) he deals particularly with absorption in photography and its relation to the everyday. In that context, he writes about Jeff Wall's photographs under the insight of Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's conceptions of the everyday. Fried aims to demonstrate "the philosophical – specifically, the ontological – depth of which painting is capable" (Fried 2008, 49). And comparing Wittgenstein with Wall about art and the everyday, he cites Wall: "The everyday, or the commonplace, is the most basic and richest artistic category. Although it seems familiar, it is always surprising and new. But at the same time there is an openness that permits people to recognize what is there in the picture, because they have already seen something like

it somewhere. So, the everyday is a space in which meanings accumulate, but it's the pictorial realization that carries the meanings into the realm of the pleasurable" (Wall cited by Fried 2008, 64).

Fried pointed out that those pictures in which Wall deals more successfully with the everyday are those in which there are absorbed figures. However, contrary to what may seem the case, they are not 'documentary' photographs of people in the subway, on the streets, or looking at paintings in a museum, but rather fictional and pictorial photographs, where the final picture is the result of much posing, acting, collage and montage of hundreds of shots. While *Morning cleaning, Mies van der Rohe Foundation, Barcelona* is 'nearly documentary' (because the cleaner is the real worker, doing his daily maintenance work in the real building), *View from an apartment*, which I want to analyse briefly, is almost completely fictional (in the sense that the scene is staged, and the characters are acting). *A view from an apartment* depicts the interior of an apartment with two big windows – like *vedute* – in the background, one of them looking towards the port of Vancouver. There is a dialectic between interior and exterior marked visually by the difference in light tone. Lights are already on in the apartment, and illuminate softly and warmly all over the room, while outside there is as yet some daylight. The lamps from the interior reflect on the glass. The port is full of cranes, ships, and industrial buildings, but there is nobody to be seen, while inside the apartment two young girls seem absorbed in their activities, silent. The figure that attracts the beholder's gaze walks in diagonal to the foreground of the image, downcast eyes, holding a napkin in her hands, maybe for ironing, since there are at sight an ironing board and an iron, and some clothes in a basket. She is wearing home-clothes. The other girl lounges on a sofa browsing a magazine. The apartment looks relatively messy, though not chaotic, and in a certain way contrasts with the calm that both figures express.

The attitude of both figures shows the lack of concern about the proper image and about being seen characteristic of domesticity and absorption. In Fried's terms, they lack the to-be-seen-ness, which is proper of public social life. In this sense, everyday awareness of oneself is subject to the same 'daily inattention' we dedicate to objects. Even if it is obvious that the sitters are acting for the camera, the presence of a beholder is avoided,

oblivious of the external world as the figures are: one apparently occupied in her thoughts doing automatically her housework, the other distractedly browsing the journal. As spectators we have no access to the women's inner lives. No gesture is expressive of their mind, apart from the state of self-absorption. There is no hint that permits possible identification or empathy. And however, we recognize in their countenance and gestures expressive of nothing, in their way of moving in the room or sprawling out on the sofa, in the way the objects spread out in the sitting-room, the look of domesticity and the sense of everydayness familiar to all.

Obviously looking at paintings or photographs we adopt an external perspective and miss the kind of engagement proper to everyday life. And when we in the first-person are living the moment, we don't realise it; at least up to a certain point, because as adults in a social world we are almost always conscious of being seen, and therefore conscious of our own image. Absorption is the state of mind which better represents the point in which we are scarcely conscious of ourselves but completely engaged in an action. These moments of absorption amount to an almost complete loss of self-awareness. So, when we are absorbed in the action, we are barely conscious of ourselves, but if we become aware of ourselves or of being observed we lose this basic and spontaneous contact with the world. In order to aesthetically appreciate the everyday, we must – maybe just for an instant – switch to the third person perspective, in regard to ourselves or to others. We do it very often in art and life, but the role of spectator does not prevent us recognising the everyday in others or in ourselves.

In conclusion, if we can aesthetically appreciate the everyday adopting a third person perspective on us, looking at others, in memories, or in art, it is because the experience of the world in those moments of daily inattention proper to everyday life had already an aesthetic quality. Appreciating the everyday in our memories, in other's activities, or in art, is bringing to reflexion what was there before – overlooked and hardly noticed – without changing it. That is why an aesthetics of the extraordinary is not adequate for everyday life, but maybe it is not an accurate aesthetics of art either.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This paper is part of the research projects "Aesthetic experience of the arts and the

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## EVERYDAY GREEN AESTHETICS

### ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to discuss the idea of everyday green aesthetics conceived of as an approach that combines everyday aesthetics with environmental aesthetics. I contend that discovering the aesthetic values of everyday nature is important because it may positively influence people's wellbeing. I believe that it may broaden the array of things they find aesthetically rewarding and foster a more respectful attitude toward nature. The basic issue of green everyday aesthetics is then to show how to aesthetically enjoy nature, so ubiquitous that people do not notice it or treat it as a nuisance. There are, however, places where everyday nature is intentionally brought to the foreground in order to make it an object of aesthetic experience. These spaces are gardens, therefore garden aesthetics, especially its version offered by Rosario Assunto, is discussed as an example of how everyday green aesthetics may be developed.

Everyday aesthetics has been a well-established field of philosophy for more than a decade.<sup>1</sup> So has ecological aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> These fields are not distant from each other, sharing a number of issues and being included in the agenda of environmental aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, they are studied together much less frequently than one would expect, and consequently the idea of everyday green aesthetics is still waiting to be fully developed. There are at least two reasons to do so. First, the nature that people most often encounter is rather plain and hence passes unnoticed as a neutral background for their everyday life (Marder 2013, 3–4). Their aesthetic concepts, rooted mainly in their experience of art, make it hard – if not impossible – for them to aesthetically appreciate the exact opposite

1 See e.g. Light 2005, Di Stefano 2017, Saito 2017.

2 On that topic see e.g. Nassauer 1997, D'Angelo 2010, Prigan and Strelow 2004, Hosey 2012.

3 See e.g. Carlson and Lintott 2008, Toadvine 2010.

of scenic nature. As a consequence, even if everyday nature requires daily maintenance, it tends to be treated as unworthy of extraordinary care or protection which is otherwise limited to rare species or spectacular sites. Showing that this 'dull' nature deserves attention and suggesting that it can be appreciated may positively influence people's wellbeing because it may broaden the array of things people find aesthetically rewarding. This consequence is backed up by another, which is at the same time the second reason for developing everyday green aesthetics. As Yuriko Saito rightly notes, aesthetic experience may play a crucial role in creating what she calls 'environmentally active citizenry' (Saito 2007, 203). Thus, discovering the aesthetic values of everyday nature may foster a more respectful attitude toward nature on a day-to-day basis. As people tend to care more for what they like, the aim of everyday green aesthetics is to persuade them that there is a lot in everyday nature to be enjoyed.

Everyday nature is heterogeneous, and it spans from uncultivated wild areas to hyper-cultivated vertical gardens, from pleasure grounds to urban farms.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if aesthetics is to successfully fulfil both of the aforementioned aims, it has to account for this variety. There is, however, an issue that seems to be of primary importance here, and which underlies all the possible perspectives on everyday green aesthetics. Any possible discussion of how different greenery may be aesthetically appreciated is perforce based on the assumption that such an appreciation is indeed an appreciation of nature, no matter the extent to which the appreciated nature has been influenced by human intervention (Budd 2002). Even if a weed sprouting from the cracks of a concrete footpath belongs to a species invented in a laboratory and grows because people inadvertently brought it there on their soles, it is reasonable to think of it in terms of nature, i.e. as something that is fundamentally different from human creations such as the concrete and the footpath. There is no point in reiterating arguments proving how debatable the notion of nature is. For the sake of the present argument, it is enough to identify nature with an animate or inanimate other-than-human sphere. The basic issue of green everyday aesthetics is then to show how to aesthetically enjoy this other-than-human nature, so

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<sup>4</sup> On everyday nature as an artistic topic, see Spaid, 2002, 2012, 2017.



ubiquitous that people hardly even notice it. Or if they do, they deem it a nuisance.

Even if everyday nature sometimes makes a noticeable impression — for instance, in the form of hyper-trimmed lawns in front of houses, shrubs pruned in fancy shapes or green walls made of hydroponically cultivated mosses — such a reaction expresses an aesthetic appreciation of the human artifice required to produce these green forms and not of their vegetal matter. Nature as an other-than-human sphere remains an invisible background for people's activities. There are, however, places where everyday nature is intentionally brought to the foreground. These 'other spaces' (Foucault 1986) are gardens.

In fact, gardens are places where people living in a more and more urbanized world most often have an occasion to experience nature without leaving their daily environment. Michel Conan is right when he states in his introduction to the volume *Contemporary Garden Aesthetics* that:

[g]ardens have been more numerous and ubiquitous in contemporary western cities over the last fifty years than at any previous time in their history [...]. One may say that gardening is one of the very few arts that has been practiced on a large scale by amateurs [...] Gardens are places that we enjoy as part of our dwelling in the world. They belong to our everyday life, and they impinge upon it. This is true of home gardens and of public gardens where we withdraw for a moment of leisure during the day, or of any of those gardens that we enjoy as a part of our walks to work, to a shopping mall, or even to a museum; but it is also true of the historic gardens that are visited during their holidays, even though it is not immediately apparent that these visits belong in the same way to their everyday life. [...] Gardens are undoubtedly about everyday life, at the same time that they offer moments of aesthetic enjoyment.

(Conan 2007, 3–4.)

There is no doubt that gardens are art in the sense that they are very often designed and taken care of in such a way as to render the nature in

them spectacular and hence aesthetically appealing, e.g. through careful selection of flowers, cultivating prize-winning pumpkins or composing sophisticated views. Nevertheless, there is always a place in gardens for vegetation which is not that attractive and, in all likelihood, would have passed unnoticed, had it been experienced elsewhere. The importance of gardens for everyday green aesthetics lies precisely in that even unattractive nature gets the attention of those who cultivate gardens as well as of those who merely visit them. Thus, gardens may be said to be spaces where the epiphany of nature takes place (Cooper 2006, 129–154).

Not only do gardens allow people – as Conan writes – ‘to dwell in nature’ (Conan 2007, 4), but they do so in a way that is unique to gardens. The uniqueness stems from the sort of experience only gardens offer. This experience is particularly interesting for everyday green aesthetics as its analysis shows what an aesthetic appreciation of nature in all its everydayness may consist of. Because of the experience offered by gardens, they are also places where everyday green aesthetics can be put to practice, which may result in a heightened level of ‘ecological literacy’ (Orr 2011, 251–261). In fact Wendell Berry (2012, 79) claims that there is no better way to get involved in caring for the environment than gardening. In other words, gardens are philosophical places, as Rosario Assunto (1988), an Italian garden philosopher (discussed below), used to say, meaning that they are places that favour both philosophical inquiries into the relationship between humankind and nature and thus leading an eco-friendly life.

Needless to say, the experience of a garden is manifold, but it is unanimously agreed that it has a strong aesthetic dimension which makes it an aesthetic experience above all. It is no wonder then that gardens have been recently analysed by a number of aestheticians.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that we have recently witnessed a birth – or a revival, if we think of its 18<sup>th</sup>-century origins – of garden aesthetics. Its agenda covers three main questions (Cooper 2009): how should gardens be aesthetically appreciated: as artworks or as natural environments? What do gardens mean, and what meanings may they convey as partly artificial and partly natural places? What is the relationship between art, i.e. human

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<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Assunto 1988, Miller 1993, Ross 1998, Cooper 2006, Chomarat-Ruiz 2015, Salwa 2016.

activities, and nature in gardens?

The first two questions have received considerably more attention than the last one. They in fact refer to the unclear status of gardens as artworks, whereas the third question touches upon the ethical dimension of gardening. Garden aesthetics may be seen as an attempt to go beyond the traditional limits of aesthetics conceived of as philosophy of art. However, in the case of gardens the burden of tradition is surprisingly heavy because even if the environmental dimension of gardens has been perforce acknowledged, the dominant approach analyses them in terms of art-centred aesthetics, treating them as 'cultural objects' (Hunt 1991) defined by the designs, meanings and intentions behind them. Very rarely are they conceived of as human created natural environments or – to use Malcolm Budd's (2002, 7) term – 'human affected nature'. The fact that gardens are 'all too human' environments makes them of rather little interest for environmental aestheticians who seem to take it for granted that gardens should be appreciated in terms of their design and not in terms of a 'natural order'.<sup>6</sup>

One of the consequences of the somewhat reductive approach that treats gardens as if their design were all there is to be appreciated is that scholarly attention is mainly paid to gardens created by artists or designers, while everyday gardens tend to be overlooked. If yards or garden allotments are discussed, they are analysed as expression of different social or political practices. They are also discussed as ecosystems or communities consisting of humans and other-than-human beings. From these perspectives, aesthetic experience seems very often to be irrelevant – as if these gardens could not offer it.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, enough to go through a number of personal literary accounts of cultivating vegetables, preparing compost, weeding, etc., such as humorous Karel Čapek's *The Gardener's Year* (2013), more serious Michael Pollan's *Second Nature* (1991) or Jim Nollman's *Why we Garden* (1995), to find out that gardening implies an aesthetic experience of nature. It goes without saying that this sort of experience has little or nothing to do with

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6 There are exceptions, of course, e.g. Carlson 2000, 114–127; Parsons 2010, 165–175, Berleant 2012.

7 Again, there are exceptions, e.g. Laroze 1996, Hitchings 2003, Ross 2007.

an aesthetic experience of any art, and instead it resembles the experience analysed by environmental aestheticians who in one way or another claim that an adequate aesthetic experience of nature amounts to experiencing nature *qua* nature, i.e. as something which is not art.

It seems then that there are good reasons to go further in the direction suggested by environmental aesthetics, beyond an art-centred perspective. That is not to say that one should dismiss the fact that gardens may be appreciated in terms of their design, meanings or functions. Rather, it is tantamount to seriously considering that what is to be appreciated in gardens is nature. From this point of view, whether gardens may be approached as full-fledged works of art or not is of little importance, but what is crucial is the fact that they offer an aesthetic experience to their creators and the public as artworks do.

The idea that gardens are works of art, not so much because of their design or skilful maintenance but because they engender aesthetic experience has been developed by Assunto (1988, 1996). Even though there are no links between his theory and environmental aesthetics as such, and his philosophical idiom is totally different from the one used by Anglo-American philosophers, their conclusions nicely supplement one another, especially where gardens are at stake (Salwa 2015). Assunto's theory is noteworthy as it is probably one of the most systematic philosophical accounts of garden aesthetics. It is not devoid of highly debatable points, but discussing them would be beyond the scope of the present article. A very short summary of his thought has to suffice.

Assunto named his theory a 'philosophy of the garden' (*filosofia del giardino*), as his principal aim was to describe the 'Idea of the Garden' and thus to answer the question 'what is a garden?' At the same time his intentions were broader – he contended that the idea of a garden was a useful point of reference in environmental thinking. Following in the footsteps of his philosophical masters, Plato and the German romantic philosophers, he believed that it is possible to define the essence of garden and that such a definition should account for the fact that this essence, despite being trans-historical and trans-cultural, has only a historical existence i.e. it exists only through its various historical embodiments that

changed over the centuries following different aesthetic ideals. He claimed that people designed gardens in reaction to their innate need to create a natural environment which would correspond to their ideal of nature. Medieval gardens, French Baroque ones or English landscape parks were thus reflections of a singular idea of the garden, in the sense that they were supposed to be embodiments of the ideal nature. It is true that they differ, but it is so only because they follow different 'garden poetics' which are expressions of different ways of imagining what ideal nature is like. In other words, for Assunto, gardens are places which are made of real nature in order to present *in vivo* ideal nature. Thus, apart from other functions, gardens serve as places where real and ideal nature may and should be contemplated. This means that in gardens – even those which, *prima facie*, seem to epitomize human dominance over nature – art in fact is at nature's service.

Describing the Idea of the Garden and its historical vicissitudes, Assunto offered an ontology of gardens, defining conditions that a place has to fulfil in order to be a garden. His definition is rather peculiar as it is at the same time open and closed, and it refers to objective as well as subjective factors. On the one hand, he claims that gardens have an essence which make them 'absolutely other spaces', on the other he does not list the properties that a place has to have in order to be a garden. The essence of the garden is then not defined by the look or its economic, social or political functions. It is, rather, defined by the attitude with which it was designed, set up and with which it is cultivated and used. So, the *differentia specifica* of gardens lies in all sorts of garden practices. Having in mind its double character, Assunto named it *esteticità* (the aesthetic) and associated it with aesthetic experience.

He identified aesthetic experience with contemplation. As has been mentioned above, gardens are places where nature is contemplated whenever gardens are designed, cultivated or visited. In other words, he claimed that gardening was an art, by which he meant that gardens should be appreciated in the same manner in which artworks are and that gardening required not only technical skills but also a particular attitude. In both cases a contemplative approach is needed, and it results in the

beauty of the garden or its *estetività*. Thus, a gardener cultivates nature in a garden in such a way as to make it beautiful, and a visitor or user of a garden is supposed to discover the garden's beauty and have an experience of it. Contemplation does not, however, amount to an approach typical for a distanced observer. On the contrary, Assunto contended that people should always be physically and sensually engaged in gardens, and yet such practices should be contemplative. He simply identified contemplation with a disinterested attitude, i.e. an attitude which allows one to see things as they are and to respect them for what they are. Therefore, insofar as nature in a garden is contemplated, it is treated as a goal in itself, which means that cultivating a garden differs from cultivating a field on a farm in that it does not treat nature solely in instrumental terms.

Nature in a garden may, obviously, have instrumental value, yet it must never be reduced to it. Gardens are places where nature turns out to have an inherent value which, however, does not replace its instrumental value but accompanies it. This is what makes gardens so different from e.g. urban green spaces which are 'ecological machines'. Thus, the aesthetic experience of nature implied by the disinterested approach results in particular gardening practices which respect nature's needs and cycles and it allows one to notice and appreciate them. What is more, it promotes the notion of people's unity with nature and that they should not abandon or destroy it. In this sense, gardens are also places where people may contemplate themselves and their relationship with nature.

Summing up, for Assunto, gardens are places where a sort of harmony between humankind and other-than-human nature is achieved, and it is based on a non-instrumental human approach to nature which amounts to an aesthetic appreciation of it while also fostering respect toward nature in its otherness. Gardens are considered earthly paradises and as such they offer an ecological ideal of what the Earth should be like.

When Assunto described gardens as artworks and gardening as art, he referred as much to the modern system of the arts as to the broad meaning of *tekhne*. If we now focus on the latter, we may see that for him gardens are places created by human hands according to cultural ideals – they are 'cultural objects' – but one cannot focus solely on human efforts and overlook the fact

that they are made of nature and that they are designed in order to make nature itself, among other things, an object of aesthetic experience. Hence, gardens are places where nature is intentionally pushed to the foreground, experienced as a sphere that is not human and appreciated precisely for this. Borrowing a few expressions from Malcolm Budd, it can be said that gardens are places where humans cultivate, shape and organize nature in a particular way implied by ‘an aesthetic experience of nature as nature’ (Budd 2002, 1–23), and that they are managed in this particular manner in order to make other people have an experience of this sort. As a result, in a human-made garden people may aesthetically experience the ‘naturalness of nature’ (Ibid.) (or what they take to be nature’s naturalness). That does not mean that garden nature is not subject to human intentions; it does mean, however, that humans do not approach it in a purely instrumental way. Garden nature is intentionally designed to be the object of aesthetic experience. Otherwise why would anyone want to set up a garden as a garden and not as a small farm? And why would anyone want to enter it? Is it not the case that people like gardens because they like to be amidst nature, even if nature is limited to their yard or garden allotment?

Assunto was also a garden historian; therefore, he wrote extensively on historic gardens which he used as illustrations and proof of his theory. It is then no wonder that he believed that they were an important part of cultural and natural heritage worthy of protection. Yet, he claimed that in some respects everyday gardens were equally – if not even more – important because it was in them that the Idea of the Garden – in its local as well as global meaning – was currently kept alive in daily practices.

*Esteticità*, to which he devoted so much space in his writings, has little to do with extraordinary aesthetic qualities of gardens stemming from either their spectacular design or the rarity of their plants. It is rather rooted in their ordinariness, that is in the fact that no matter how spectacular they may be, they are ‘made of’ nature which may be easily found elsewhere. The *esteticità* of gardens exists not only when one admires them as compositions, but also when one contemplates single flowers or leaves (which are never the same) or branches heavy with matured fruits, when one contemplates the autumnal decay of vegetal life and its rebirth in the spring, when one opens oneself to

various looks and moods of gardens changing with the passage of seasons; in other words – *esteticità* emerges whenever one contemplates the order, rhythms and cycles of nature. All this provokes a deep wonder before the bountiful and beautiful world to which humans belong, which they partly create and modify, but which is never entirely theirs.

The Assuntian Idea of the Garden is in fact the idea of a human approach to nature based on the aesthetic experience of nature as nature. Gardens are places where the human experience of nature is enriched by the addition of an aesthetic dimension. Assunto is well aware that cultivating a garden is a matter of purely practical skills and that, in many ways, cultivating a garden does not differ from running a farm. What, however, changes *tekhnē* into art is the attitude with which it is practiced. The same holds true for the use of gardens. It is then the particular human attitude that makes the epiphany of nature possible, and gardens foster both of them. Assunto compared the relationship between gardens and ‘mere’ green spaces to the relationship between poetry and prose. Just as poetry reveals the ‘materiality’ of language which remains hidden in prose, gardens unveil the *esteticità* of the world. This is their ‘aesthetic function’ (Mukařovsky 1979), which may have consequences reaching far beyond their boundaries. In all probability, once ordinary, everyday nature is aesthetically experienced and appreciated in a garden, it will also be noticed and appreciated elsewhere. Is not a weed sprouting from the cracks of a concrete footpath fascinating and beautiful on closer inspection – much more so than the footpath – because of how it looks and strives for life?

Assunto’s theory is noteworthy for, among other things, the fact that he developed a garden aesthetics that has a strong environmental inclination and may serve as an example of everyday green aesthetics. He effectively showed that everyday nature can and should be aesthetically experienced. When he stated that nature should be aesthetically experienced as nature, that is as something which is not human-made (even though it may be – and in fact is – arranged by humans), he was largely in line with environmental aesthetics. Furthermore, he insisted that such an experience was beneficial for the people as well as for their environment. He underlined that an aesthetic experience of nature leads to a positive appreciation of it.



However, an aesthetic experience of everyday nature does not amount to experiencing it as extraordinary, as devoid of its usual functions or effects. It rather consists in paying attention to it, which requires a sort of 'bracketing out' one's utilitarian interests. Assunto's position is then not far from Arto Haapala's account of everyday aesthetics:

Although we are embedded in the structures of the everyday and see things most of the time through functionality, every now and then we take some distance from the concerns of the daily activities. When doing so, we do not see familiar objects surrounding us as strange, rather we start to enjoy their visual and auditory features.  
(Haapala 2005, 50.)

When we do so – Haapala continues – we act as the Heideggerian peasant who:

can from time to time sit down and set aside the needs and demands of the everyday, and enjoy the familiar scene—the fields, the sky, birdsong.  
(Ibidem, 51.)

For Assunto, however, 'setting aside the needs and demands of the everyday' does not have to imply 'sitting down' since such a contemplative approach may perfectly well accompany daily practices. What is more, one aesthetically experiences not only 'visual and auditory features', but also relations, processes, etc., i.e. all the workings of nature. They are extraordinary not because they are unfamiliar or strange but because in all their ordinariness they may elicit wonder. Nothing is more reassuring than the belief that, next spring, nature will start its vital cycle once again as it has always done. And nothing is more banal than this. Yet, these natural rhythms are wonderful despite, or rather thanks to, their repeatability.<sup>8</sup> Nowhere are they easier to experience than in gardens – every gardener knows it and so does every garden goer.

Arnold Berleant (1992, 98) compared urban planning to gardening,

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8 Cf. Di Stefano 2017, 63–72.

which he took to be a paradigm of cultivating ‘the functional and the aesthetic as inseparable’. Similarly, the experience of a garden may be treated as a paradigm of experiencing everyday nature in such a way that the functional and the aesthetic go together, reinforcing each other. While not disqualifying the use of nature, the everyday aesthetic experience of nature can inhibit the possible excesses of a practical approach to it and consequently guarantee the preservation of both the environment and the human wellbeing that it bolsters.

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## FEELING (WITH) MACHINES

### ABSTRACT

Computers and their networks are drastically changing our everyday lives. In this article, I focus on how this change affects the field of everyday aesthetics. I address my theme in four steps and ask: how could present and future developments affect, first, the creation of everyday aesthetic phenomena; second, aesthetic phenomena themselves; and third, the perception and evaluation of aesthetic phenomena? Lastly, if remarkable changes happen in all or some of these, how could that affect aesthetics as an academic discipline?

### LOGIN

Computers are everywhere. The maze of laptops, phones, tablets, servers, databases, sensors, and robots, as well as the programs, algorithms and codes that run them, is becoming ubiquitous. It is changing our environments, working practices and lives in general so quickly and significantly that it is very difficult to foresee where it will lead us. We shop, chat, listen to music, drive our cars, write, exercise, run processes in factories, diagnose diseases, create weather forecasts, search for partners, analyze sports statistics, cook, and do practically everything with the help of computers, and they are getting much better than humans at more and more tasks. Some people install microchips in their bodies to monitor and control themselves with the help of computational tools, turning themselves into some kind of hybrid creature. There is no sign that this trend will change anytime soon.

How is all this changing the aesthetics of our everyday lives, and what will happen next? To be honest, no-one knows. This text is pure

speculation: an essay leaning towards the French verb *essayer*, from which the English noun is derived. I am trying to imagine some possible aspects of our future, things that do not yet exist but might become true. The future is necessarily based on the past and present, and it is not entirely open; as we know something about the past and present, we may also know something about the future that will grow out of them. Still, I do not pretend to know what will happen, and I only make suggestions and ask questions that may find their answers later. For now, we just have to settle for sketching various possible futures.

I muse on how computers and computational approaches are changing our everyday aesthetics. But when doing this, I emphasize the everyday aspect of my approach. I am not a computer scientist, not even an advanced and exceptionally active user, but a very ordinary, mid-range digital citizen living with various sorts of computers and software, such as Word, WhatsApp, Twitter, Outlook, Skype, ParkMan, Spotify, SoundCloud, LinkedIn, Google Maps, several online shopping channels, news portals, cameras, teaching tools, and others. In this, I am like most people in wealthy countries. On many occasions, our lives are guided by computers without us even knowing and noticing it. Recently, in discussions about the opportunities and threats presented by an advanced artificial intelligence, there have been two opposing extremes and everything in between: super robots will solve all our problems and make us their slaves ... or will just continue both helping and harming humans, like all previous generations of machines have done, changing many things but not everything. In every scenario, however, there will be impacts on our everyday aesthetics. What could they be? Where could the present situation lead us to?

I address my theme in steps and ask: how could present and future developments affect, first, the creation or production of everyday aesthetic phenomena; second, aesthetic phenomena themselves; and third, the perception and evaluation of aesthetic phenomena? Lastly, if remarkable changes happen in all or some of these, how could that affect aesthetics as an academic discipline?

## EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

**B**efore sketching how computers, and the algorithms that make them tick, may change our everyday aesthetics, it is necessary to describe briefly what everyday aesthetics is.<sup>1</sup>

By everyday aesthetics, I mean the aesthetic deeds, objects, processes and experiences that we do, make, have and face in our everyday lives. I see the everyday as a relational concept. There is no list of things that would always be of an everyday type to everyone. Almost anything can be that to someone, at some point in their lives: certain kinds of clothes, food, sports, art, tableware, work, cars.... In addition, what is not everyday right now can become normal and habitual, and vice versa, meaning that the content of the everyday changes. True, everyday things often relate to our homes, work and hobbies, but what kinds of objects and events these actually include varies a lot. The essential characteristic of the everyday is that it is normal, habitual or commonplace; it is what we face repeatedly and are used to.

Everyday things, whatever they are, can be experienced as positive, negative or rather neutral. The everyday can feel safe and thus positive, because we know it so well and can trust it; and it can be boring and gray for exactly the same reason. Or it can be just something we rely on and live through without really actively thinking about and noticing it.

Aesthetics, in everyday settings, has to do with how we experience and interpret such everyday things with our senses, perceptually and often emotionally, with our bodies, and we typically describe all this with specific terminology referring to this approach. We can notice the *messiness* of our home, the *cool looks* of someone we meet in a café, the *smooth easiness* of our daily exercise routine, the *cuteness* of a cat, the *freshness* of a fall day, the *exotic character* of a new tea variety, or the *neatness* of our phone. Of course, we often also use various kinds of tools when making aesthetic observations and evaluations, but I would still think that the direct bodily, sensual, and emotionally charged approach is typically at the heart of them.

In everyday life, those features of things that are normal, ordinary,

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<sup>1</sup> I have analyzed the concepts and relations of the everyday and aesthetics in more detail in other articles. See, for example, Naukkarinen (2013) and (2017).

and unsurprising can be precisely the goal that is very satisfying. For a businessman, a suit looks and feels good exactly because it does not scream and stand out, but slides smoothly into the normal daily routines of the surrounding culture. If we strive for something extraordinary, we break the everyday. This does not mean that we do not value and strive for exceptionally great, extraordinary things—of course we do—but they are exactly that, extraordinary: something that we cannot have every day.

Now, computer-based phenomena have become an essential part of normal daily life and its aesthetics, and they are becoming more and more dominant, changing the whole picture, creating a new normal.

## CREATING DIGITAL EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

**W**e all create everyday aesthetics, meaning aesthetics that we repeatedly face in our everyday lives. We cannot but do that because whatever we do or make (or decide not to do or make), it has its own aesthetic features that we can evaluate and discuss, if we want to. As a university professor, my everyday aesthetics are related to the things that I normally do in classes, meetings and the office: how I dress, talk, write, and so on. If I decided never to comb my hair, I would not create less everyday aesthetics in my life than someone else who spends hours on their hairdo. We would just produce different aesthetic results. Leading a life with no aesthetic deeds at all is not possible. True, one does not have to pay attention to them personally, but someone else always can.

In the future, too, many aspects of everyday aesthetics will be created in very traditional ways. We, as human beings, will still sometimes cook with fire, draw with a pen, wear jeans, grow roses in our gardens and play the acoustic guitar. In addition, animals, plants and inanimate objects and processes will continue to form our everyday aesthetics: things we can evaluate aesthetically in our everyday ways. Of course, it is highly questionable which non-human actors can *intentionally* create aesthetic products and events for us and for themselves, but it is possible that at least some animals, such as chimpanzees

and bowerbirds, can.<sup>2</sup> In any case, intentionally or not, animals and other non-human actors will keep on producing things that can form part of everyday human aesthetics, and non-living non-artifacts, such as stones and traces of erosion, can also be a part of this.

However, as human beings, we now have powerful computers to help us create everyday aesthetic phenomena and experiences. Anyone who writes texts with a PC, takes photographs or shoots videos with a phone, googles recipes when cooking, shares GIFs through WhatsApp, updates their Facebook profile, monitors their pulse and other bodily functions with an activity tracker in order to improve their diet to look better, tweets about a great movie, or searches for a scenic driving route with a map app is doing exactly that. We constantly create computer-generated or -assisted things in and for our everyday lives without always even thinking about it, in ways that were not possible some years ago. There is no doubt that there will be more and more possibilities for that, and as soon as 5G and 6G are here, everything will again be faster. Soon, there will be augmented and virtual-reality solutions that most of us cannot even imagine right now, but that will be widely used on a daily basis. This will probably be most evident in working-life environments, and these are at the core of most people's everyday lives. Everyday aesthetics of, for example, farmers, engineers and bus drivers can change drastically; farmers may work in cities, on buildings, and use computers to optimize hydration and fertilizer usage, taking computer-aided farming practices that are already used in countries such as the Netherlands to a new level; engineers working in factories will probably use virtual or augmented-reality head-seats to monitor and adjust production processes; and bus drivers will not drive but will become some sort of travel hosts in self-driving vehicles. Advanced chatbots will take over many service positions. We will also see completely new professions that we do not know of right now. Systematic forecasts about such changes have been made, the latest and broadest one in Finland being the publication by Risto Linturi and Pekka Kuusi (2018) for the Finnish Parliament, called *Suomen sata uutta mahdollisuutta 2018–2037*:

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<sup>2</sup> The discussion about animal aesthetics and art can be seen as a special strand of the broader post-humanistic discourse, and it has been developed by, for example, David Rothenberg (2012).



*Yhteiskunnan toimintamallit uudistava radikaali teknologia (One hundred new possibilities for Finland 2018–2037: Radical technology that will renew the operating models of society).*

There are several layers in this. Most of us can take digital photographs and modify them to some extent, write texts, create web pages and PowerPoint presentations, order customized sneakers from a web shop, and perhaps sometimes design a new interior for our own home by using hardware and software that someone else provides. However, if we want to go further and create something different from just variations of off-the-shelf products, we have to learn to understand the possibilities and restrictions of such tools better, and at some stage, build and program them by ourselves. We need to understand how algorithms are created and what can be done with them, when combined with the physical machines that do what algorithms make them do. Without mastering this level, we cannot really understand how our everyday aesthetic environment is built, and we are rather helpless receivers of what is given to us by those who understand better. If we want to be creators of the digital everyday, we need skills that make this possible. Does this mean that everyone has to learn to code, or will there be completely new ways of interacting with computational machines? Will it be possible, for example, to program computers just by talking to them? Time will tell.

Even now, it is not just human beings, with the help of computers and their networks, who create our everyday digital environments and phenomena, but it is also computers themselves. They, to a large extent, create the digital bubble we live in, select the things we see, and the music we listen to. They are programmed to offer us newsfeeds, tweets, and shopping suggestions, and the more we use them, the more accurate they become; and using can sometimes mean just visiting a certain location with your phone in your pocket. In addition, such systems are becoming partly self-learning through autonomic computing, which implies that they are also, to some extent, true black boxes; they take care of and develop operations and algorithms in such a way that no human can, in practice, follow exactly how they gradually change. They have initially been programmed by humans, but the algorithms change independently of constant human interaction. As the changes are partly unknown, it is also very difficult to fix problems when

they arise, because it is practically impossible to trace their exact cause.

Little by little, machines may also come up with completely new everyday aesthetic solutions, be they paintings, songs, clothes, or something else we cannot yet imagine. For some, even sexual acts, which can be seen as a special case of everyday aesthetic activities, are already partly robotized, and not just through internet links and pages, but in the form of actual, physical robots with whom one can do whatever one pleases. As their “evolution” goes further, such robots can be active and suggest and invent novel things, and not only do what the user commands (Crist 2017). Of course, for the time being, human beings still plan, build and program such computers and robots, but as soon as that is done, the computers and robots can function rather independently and come up with things we did not expect. Who would have thought that Microsoft’s Twitter bot would learn to tweet like a racist idiot in just one day (Read 2016)? Sooner or later, computers will start to plan, build and program each other much more effectively than now. In the worst dystopian scenarios, whether we believe them or not, some kind of “gray goo” consisting of an endless mass of self-replicating nano-robots will take over everything else. In more positive utopias, super-intelligent robots or biobots will live side by side with humans and both “species” will have their own, partly overlapping aesthetic cultures. For now, this kind of world only exists in science fiction novels such as *Autonomous* by Annelee Newitz (2017).

In fact, we already have more and more of something that is called AI (artificial intelligence)- generated art. Computers have been taught to paint pictures; carve, cut and print 3D sculptures; and compose and perform music. They are on stage in dance performances. Companies such as StoryFit and Synapsify provide software that helps analyze and create stories that sell. Programs and hardware are getting so good that, in many cases, it is quite impossible for the observer to tell whether a piece is made by a human hand and mind or by a computer. The most advanced cases are far removed from the earlier clumsy attempts to imitate human art. For example, the computers that Robbie Barrat has programmed to create pictures come up with amazingly surprising results through so-called GAN (generative adversarial network) processes in which competing procedures spar with each other rather autonomously, without much human control. Yes, again,

it is still humans who design these systems, but that will eventually change. Machines are becoming more and more independent and active, and will create what we and they see, hear, touch, feel and smell in our everyday settings, whether aesthetic, artistic, or otherwise. Most likely, not all such creations will resemble the aesthetic phenomena that we are now used to.

## DIGITAL OBJECTS AND ENVIRONMENTS

**D**igital everyday phenomena are not aesthetic objects in the same way as many physical objects are in our traditional thinking. On the level of our everyday perception, we have spatial and temporal objects like tables, cars, paintings, songs and flowers, which are rather stable and distinct from ourselves, and have clear limits and characteristics that we can see, hear, touch, and perceive in other ways. True, the stability and clarity of the limits are dependent on our everyday-scale approach, and they do not exist for some other approaches, such as the one of physics, for which physical objects are ever-changing, statistically analyzable processes with no sharp borders between them. However, we do not see tables like that in our daily lives, and everyday aesthetics typically operates on the level of a more traditional object-based approach.

This, however, does not suit the digital world. There, it is evident that there are lots of things that are not objects in the traditional sense of the word. Of course, computers, phones, tablets and other tools are also physical objects and can be seen as such, but in many cases they are just means to get access to something else. We don't pay attention to them but to the things they open up: pictures, stories, songs, and recipes, which, in turn, are often linked to the non-digital world. In fact, the borderline between different layers of existence easily becomes very blurred.

In digital everyday aesthetics, the separation between the original and a copy, autographic and allographic, as well as spatial and temporal, works tend to lose their relevance. There is no such thing as the original, real object or work. Obviously, someone or something has created the original

file or algorithm at some point, with a laptop, camera or the like, but as soon as it is uploaded and others receive it with their gadgets, it starts to vary and spread potentially everywhere. Even if the algorithm behind various instances of, well, a “thing” on different screens or other interfaces remains the same (and it can alter, too), there is no way of knowing where and how and on what kinds of screens this “thing” will spread, how it will look, and to what other “things” (texts, images, sounds, hardware) it will be connected and when. If it is erased from one server or memory stick, it can exist somewhere else and start spreading again, with practically no time lapse. And how will this all be experienced in numerous changing contexts? The variations are practically endless. In principle, the same has always been true for recordings, books, compositions and other allographic art forms, but now the phenomenon is much stronger, wider, bigger, and more common. Everything that is digital can be copied, varied and spread endlessly, and this is exactly what is happening. This is on top of the traditional notion that even the one and the same object can be experienced in many ways. Now we have more variations than ever.

In addition, the difference between what is truth and what is a lie, and what is real and what is fictional, becomes challenging. It is becoming easier and easier to create fake versions of people and their activities on the internet. For example, when I was writing this article, by using software such as Face2Face and Lyrebird, it was possible to create a video in which a digital creature moved and talked exactly like, say, Arto Haapala, and the viewer could not tell that it is really “it”, not the real Arto. (When you read this text, such software may have a different name, and it will be much more advanced than the current Face2Face and Lyrebird.) For many people, if something looks real, it is real. In a sense, this means having an aesthetic relation to reality or having an aesthetic truth in a superficial sense: what looks and sounds like it, is it. We are already operating on the borderline of this when we make use of software such as Facetune, and tell selected stories about ourselves on LinkedIn, to appear slightly different than we do in our physical environments. In some cases, the fascination of such created identities is so strong that people also try to imitate them outside the internet; a contemporary version of Oscar Wilde’s notion

about life imitating art, and not the other way round. Cases such as Henry Harjusola—a well-known social media character who has openly said that he wants to look as good as his pictures on the internet—are extreme,<sup>3</sup> but there are countless others who act in the same way in a more modest way.

In addition, this digital mesh, network, environment, system, mycelium or whatever name one prefers to use, easily swallows traditional objects, or at least some aspects of them. It is quite normal for there to be a traditional aesthetic object somewhere, such as one's dog, new chair, fresh hairdo, or painting, but the only thing most members of their "audience" perceive of them is what is happening around and after their "birth" on the internet: pictures on Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat and/or Twitter, comments about them, and links to and from them. This is also what David Joselit emphasizes as one of the most important features of the present art world, in his book *After Art* (2013). Most things that are seen on our screens—sometimes repeatedly, sometimes just once, sometimes by millions of others, sometimes by just a few—we do not face anywhere else. It would be misleading to call these phenomena representations of the original or the authentic, even if in some sense they might be that. Using the word "representation" carries with it the idea that there is something that is represented, something that is more valuable and true than its representative or trace. However, in the case of our everyday digital aesthetic phenomena, that is often irrelevant. Any instance of a net meme or tweet is as true or real as any other, and they all intertwine and pair with dozens of other things in an eternally changing flow, and they often come and vanish without our control.<sup>4</sup>

As this happens, it is not easy to feel that some particular moment or instance is important and valuable, because it will be soon replaced by something else. Stability and feelings of attachment or devotion do not belong here, and it is possible that we learn to treat everything else in the world in a similar manner. Just think of the difference between the feeling that you had when you found and owned a rare vinyl record in the 1980s,

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<sup>3</sup> One can follow Harjusola's activities in various digital and analog versions through <https://www.instagram.com/henryharjusola/?hl=fi> (downloaded 10 May 2018).

<sup>4</sup> There are attempts to fight such endless flows of copies and variations. For example,

and the way in which we approach the icon of the same recording on Spotify. Yes, the music is the same, but the value of its carrier is entirely different; the former was a treasure as a physical object, the latter is one click among millions of others. We may learn to expect that the “real” world is like a click, too—again, quite as Oscar Wilde taught us that life will imitate art, now it will imitate our digital habits.

Together, some digital “things” form something similar to what Timothy Morton (2013) calls hyperobjects. Can we really figure out what Facebook, Microsoft and Amazon are, and how and where they exist? If they are hyperobjects, they are too vast and complex to be directly and completely perceived. They surround and penetrate us, are everywhere and nowhere, like climate change and chemicalization. If we want to make use of traditional aesthetic concepts to analyze them, the concept of the sublime is probably the one that might work the best. Sublime “things” are something that we feel that we cannot really perceive and understand in their totality, and they evoke some sort of awe that is both frightening and tempting at the same time. Depending on how one understands this kind of experience, it might be of a Kantian type, finally resulting in a revelation that has to do with our own capacities as rational and free human beings to make sense of such overwhelming phenomena, or of a postmodern variety that results in a feeling closer to (charming) despair and anxiety in front of something uncontrollable, incomprehensible and enormous. In addition, there is no clear-cut answer to whether it is more reasonable to think that some “things”, our experiences of them, or their combinations are actually what we call sublime. In any case, as our digital environments grow bigger and more complex all the time, impacting more and more areas of our lives, I would not be surprised if sublime experiences also became more common, or even rather commonplace. How many people can really understand how the system works? And can those who understand it really control and affect it? One can live with it, but it might cause the same sort of respect and humility as the vast oceans and the endless cosmos.

But that is only one possibility. There are much easier cases, too, and sublime experiences, in their extremity, cannot really be part of our

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blockchain technology is sometimes used in digital art markets to guarantee the authenticity of a work. See Bailey (2017).

everyday all the time. Most of the time, I believe, we just idly float through the continuous flow of data, realizing that the “objects” we face are just disappearing vortexes in a bottomless stream, and that they are linked to other ones in ways that are often difficult to understand in detail, even if we wanted to. All that is solid melts into data and its perceivable islets. Google something today, try to find it tomorrow, and it might be gone.

All this also affects the non-digital, physical or analogical world. What we see and hear on the internet can make us, for example, order books and clothes to our homes, which means transporting them from somewhere, by some sort of physical means. This requires vehicles, oil and other materials, partly turned into kinetic energy. The computers themselves are also physical devices requiring materials and electricity. So, things happening on the internet are always necessarily also happening on a very true, real, physical basis. This basis is the planet we are living on. The materials are taken from mines, seas and forests. These, too, are someone’s everyday aesthetic environments. It is hard to imagine that mining and other activities that change environments will always change them for the better, aesthetically or otherwise. However, the ecological and aesthetic footprint of our daily digital diet is enormous; things may look good on the screen but be disastrous elsewhere. This complex is not an object either but something else, a constantly changing environment that you experience with all your senses, on different scales, being part of it yourself. It might be that, someday, a lack of materials and energy will make the present-day digital culture disappear, but a lot will happen before then.

It is also worth considering what kinds of things can be part of the digital world. What will necessarily remain outside it and why? It is not the whole world, in the end. We still have our analogical world and not everything, probably, can be computerized or seen as a set of algorithms. The current developments probably force us to study better where this difference actually lies, and at the moment, it is difficult to find a good answer. The deeper we drill, the more blurred the difference between physical and computational, human and non-human, and matter and energy becomes. Will *anything* be left outside the digital, in some respect? This sort of total merger is not how we experience things in our everyday lives, but will the

situation change if we learn to see the world in this way?

On another level, there are political and economic reasons for different datasets to include different data or digital “things”. This has nothing to do with ontological and existential features of data, but such inclusions and exclusions will still have a strong role in our everyday aesthetics. For example, what do Spotify or the National Library have in their files, and who has access to these? Who is allowed to be part of the digital world and its everyday aesthetics and why? For example, quite simply, if you do not operate in English, do you have a place in global data flows? As the giants of digital economy—Facebook, Google, Amazon and Apple—gain more and more power, whom and what will they include and exclude and where? Even if other big players, such as the EU, try to affect the direction of travel by means such as GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), no-one really knows how all this will develop in the coming decades. One thing is clear: actors such as the MyData Alliance (<https://mydata.org/finland/>) are urgently needed.

## AUDIENCES AND RECEPTION

**I**f someone or something creates digital everyday aesthetic environments, objects and “things”, who or what perceives, uses or consumes them? Who or what is their audience? Well, we are, obviously. But what are “we” nowadays and in the future? And is it only us?

Natural scientists have shown that human beings are not just human through and through, but that we also consist of archaea, bacteria, fungi, viruses, and other organisms without which we would not survive. According to the most extreme estimations, over half of “our” cells are of this type (Gallagher 2018). Whatever the exact proportion, it is clear that we are walking combinations of various organisms, and there is no distinct borderline between them. I am we.

We are also growing together with computational machines, without which we feel that we cannot survive. In fact, there is no radical change in



this respect. We have been quite dependent on all kinds of technologies since the invention of the first tools thousands of years ago, and the Industrial Revolution made machines ubiquitous. Nowadays, we have new types of gadgets that do things that previous ones could not, but our dependency on machines as such is nothing new. The world as we know it has been technically mediated for millennia.<sup>5</sup>

New digital technologies, combined with, for example, chemical ones (that are largely computationally designed), have an impact on receiving and evaluating (and also producing) everyday aesthetic phenomena. In some scenarios, not all of us will remain human beings in the sense that we are used to. Instead, some will become some sort of transhuman creatures who have much better capacities to live longer and do things more effectively, with the help of computers and computer-generated drugs, and instructions on how to live in a certain way (Harari 2016). We are already going in this direction, and events such as the *Upgraded Life Festival* <http://www.upgradedlifefestival.com/> bring together existing companies operating in these fields. Future upgraded beings could see the world differently from us. If they live longer, they will be more experienced, and if they perceive things more accurately, they will probably know more. If they are more intelligent and have more memory space, they will be able to understand the world better, or at least differently. Aesthetics concepts such as beauty might mean something different to them, and new concepts might arise: concepts that we could not understand any better than bowerbirds can understand “sublime” or “romantic”. What such concepts could be, I don’t have the capacity to guess. This might sound utopian, but it is not entirely fictional. Just think how differently we understand the world and how we boost our capacities with computers, compared to people who lived two hundred years ago and used just hammers and steam machines. If they were transported to our time, they would not understand very much of what we do. There are no biological, evolutionary differences between us, and they would quickly learn our habits, but at first they would be completely lost and unable to make any sense of our everyday aesthetics. We are very different types of human-technology combinations than our predecessors were, and

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<sup>5</sup> In my experience, one of the clearest books giving a historical perspective of this discussion is Marttinen (2018).

there is no reason to assume that this trend will not continue.

It is also possible that, sooner or later, computers will generate aesthetic events and objects for each other. Even now, systems like Spotify can suggest music to us, although “us”, in this case, is in fact our computer profile. Spotify does not care whether an account is really used by Arto Haapala or another computer; it can suggest playlists in both cases. For now, it sounds reasonable to say that computers cannot be genuine audiences of aesthetic objects or events, even if they can create them. They cannot perceive paintings, music or food in the same way as human-technology combinations can, although they can select and choose. They cannot emotionally feel, like, prefer, have taste or be touched and impressed. They don't cry, laugh or get excited. They are not, moreover, conscious of themselves as emotional entities, and they have no identity in this sense. They are not living beings, and even the most developed robots, such as the famous Sophia and Asimo, are still very clumsy in most tasks that are quite easy for humans.

Perhaps machines are not like us right now, but it is possible that one day they will be. True, for now, their sensors and web crawlers only detect what they are programmed to detect, but as mentioned above, they are learning new things all the time, partly rather autonomously. When this goes even further, they could have an aesthetic culture of their own that could be wildly different from ours. They could have their own kinds of museums, concerts, and Ms and Mr Algorithm contests that they would evaluate and experience by themselves... or something completely different, for which they would need no human participants. And if at least some parts of all this were perceptible to us human beings, this would probably, again, change our everyday aesthetics surroundings, as well. Future computers will probably invent all kinds of things that people cannot. It is a different matter whether we could understand anything about what was going on. At some point, the entire human species might be gone, but such developed machines could continue their culture and maintain their own everyday aesthetics. What and how future machines could experience and feel is quite unclear, of course, and may remain so for us humans forever. However, this does not mean that such experiences could never happen. In novels such as Newitz's *Autonomous*, robots even have something that resembles

the human orgasm (they “run that program again”), and they tackle similar emotional and cultural issues to humans, as well as others that they think humans cannot understand.

If we think of academic aesthetics and its audience, it might already be possible for a computer to write an article and send it to an e-journal, where another computer or robot reviews, accepts and publishes it, so that a third robot can find and read it. I am not sure whether there are still technical obstacles to this, but if there are, they will disappear in the near future. If the outcome is an academic article that is published in a journal that is listed in an academic database such as Web of Science or Scopus, monitored by even more computers, it will be recorded as the research output of a university (affecting the funding of the university) without a single human being ever having anything to do with it. Eventually, this may result in academic article factories, like academic bitcoin mills. This makes one wonder why we are here. Could we witness what Daniel C. Dennett sees as one possibility: “So practical, scientific, and aesthetic judgments may soon be off-loaded or outsourced to artificial agents” (Dennett 2018, 392)? If so, then maybe “[t]he real danger, I think, is not that machines more intelligent than we are will usurp our role as captains of our destinies, but that we will over-estimate the comprehension of our latest thinking tools, prematurely crediting authority to them far beyond their competence” (Dennett 2018, 402).

Here, too, a highly relevant question is who is allowed to have access to what kind of data and be the audience of what. Technically, more and more people (and machines) are getting easy access to more and more data. Obstacles are often political, legal, and economic, and they are presently tightly connected to ownership and copyright issues, including who can decide who can use what, where, and how, and how much each user should pay and to whom.

With regard to our everyday aesthetics, here we are very close to privacy policies, too. Technically, it is quite easy to follow in great detail what we like, buy, and eat, how much we earn, where we go, whom we meet, and what we say. Based on this, a computer “audience” can draw a very precise picture of our aesthetic taste and, say, market new products to us or assume something about our political or sexual preferences. It is not hard to imagine a society

in which such profiling could also be used for discriminatory purposes, and something of this kind is probably happening more often than most of us know. Already, there are very disturbing reports, for example, from the Chinese province of Xinjiang, where the Uighur minority is effectively monitored using advanced technologies, and (aesthetic) deviations from the majority culture seem to be enough to lead to arrests and hard-handed “re-education” (Phillips 2018). We don’t typically like to let strangers into our physical homes to see what we do, but we don’t necessarily know who or what is following our digital activities in our digital “homes” and for what purposes. Still, our activities can say a lot about our aesthetic tastes; and taste, in turn, has traditionally, since Hume and Kant and even earlier, been seen as some sort of overall social ability that reveals something essential of our character. That is why it is so important to know who or what is monitoring and evaluating it, and to have control over one’s own profiles.

## IMPACTS ON ACADEMIC AESTHETICS

**W**ith regard to the serious study of the everyday aesthetics of the contemporary and future digital world, most traditionally educated philosopher-aestheticians do not have the sort of literacy that would be required. In computing and engineering, people sometimes talk about black boxes, referring to devices whose input and output are known but whose inner operations are not. We do not know what happens inside them. Living with so-called black boxes means that our relation to computers and their products is largely aesthetic in a superficial sense. We often settle for what we perceive directly with our senses. For most of us, the operations that take place within a computer and its network is something we do not have access to or understand. Rather few users really understand the components of a device, what they do, how they are manufactured, how machine languages work, how electricity flows through the whole, how different programming languages differ, what algorithms do what, how they are coded, and so on. We know that when we click this

button, this or that happens, but we cannot really explain why or how. In fact, most things around us, digital or otherwise, are actually black boxes in most respects. We understand something about them but far from everything. For everyday purposes, this kind of aesthetic approach is quite enough.

This must change if we want to remain relevant as academic aestheticians who are able to analyze what others do and how the world around us functions. For this, we will probably need to cooperate with professionals from other disciplines more often than we do now.<sup>6</sup> Then, a unit doing research on everyday aesthetics will be a multidisciplinary team, not an individual scholar in their study, as it used to be. This should also be considered in the education of future aestheticians. In fact, this approach is already being taken into account in some other fields close to aesthetics, such as art education. There, as described by Tomi Dufva (2018), even rather young children are taught, for example, how to code creatively so that they can express themselves through computer-based pictures. This requires educational teams to include people who understand education, human development psychology, computers, and art, at least.

Many things evolving around us and forming our everyday aesthetics can be seen as a series of black boxes that just operate and push out things, but whose operations we do not understand. However, aestheticians, I think, should not settle for this. We should have at least a basic understanding of how computers and their networks function; what they do and what they cannot do. This is just as important as understanding the core features of oil paintings, realistic novels and classical Greek philosophy is for those aestheticians who focus on them. I seriously think that it is very difficult, or even impossible, to understand present and future everyday aesthetics without understanding how computer systems work.

On the other hand, this does not change the basic philosophical starting point of, for example, Kendall L. Walton's classic category thinking. In this new situation, we should also have an idea of what kinds of things are characteristic of certain categories. What is possible, what impossible, typical, standard, non-standard, accidental, and so on, for each. What can

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<sup>6</sup> I have started to practice this, and the first results have been published in Naukkarinen (2018) and Naukkarinen and Pacauskas (2018).

we expect of the latest phone models or future VR equipment? Why?

As new tools and networks are very complicated, and they create complicated cultural-technical phenomena—even if certain interfaces seem simple and may lure us into thinking that we have mastered them—it is quite likely to be almost impossible for individual scholars to really understand what is going on. This suggests that aestheticians should probably be more active in building cooperation with scholars from other fields. Such combinations would be better equipped to understand everyday aesthetic phenomena. It is quite clear that these are not just technical issues and cannot be analyzed by, say, engineers alone, but they require philosophical approaches, too. However, philosophical aestheticians cannot manage alone either. In the best case, future scholars of aesthetics would be educated so that cooperation is natural for them. What this would mean for intake processes and degree structures of academic degree programs is a different matter and would require an essay of its own.

Will there be a place for traditional philosophical or humanistic aesthetics, done by human beings reading books, meeting in conferences and analyzing artworks and their general questions? I guess so. Whatever machines do, even if they learn to feel and develop a genuine identity and consciousness, as long as there are human beings, we will have our own approach to everything around us. We will still want to do, make and perceive things by ourselves, and to explain them to each other, using human language, using human eyes and bodies. There will still be countless things with which we interact and for which we don't use computers, even if we could. Humans will still understand and feel the world by other means: by swimming, running, cooking, dancing, discussing.

Very often, we do things in cooperation with computational machines. This essay has not been written by a computer. However, it has been written together with one, or with a whole network of them. No doubt, it would be completely different if we did not have computers. In that case, this text would not exist at all, or its theme would be quite fictional. But now, in the digital world, it would be even more fictional if I tried to imagine completely non-digital everyday aesthetics.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I want to thank Johanna Laakkonen and Kasperi Mäki-Reinikka for their excellent advice

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RICHARD SHUSTERMAN

## PLEASURE, PAIN, AND THE SOMAESTHETICS OF ILLNESS: A QUESTION FOR EVERYDAY AESTHETICS

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways that somaesthetics can treat the problems of pain and illness that emerge in our everyday experience of life. Noting the evolutionary value of pain for our survival and well being, the paper argues that the perceptual acuity achieved through better somaesthetic awareness can help us minimize the damage that pain typically signals while also helping us better appreciate the lessons pain can teach us and the pleasures that can be derived from everyday illnesses and experiences of pain. These points are illustrated by using the texts of influential thinkers such as Michel de Montaigne, Edmund Burke, and Virginia Woolf.

### | SOMAESTHETICS, THE SAUNA, AND THE SUBLIME

**T**he project of somaesthetics has sometimes been criticized for being one-sidedly focused on pleasure, power, and successful performance because of its melioristic concern for the body and its health. This is a misunderstanding but one that understandably arises from somaesthetics' explicit aim to make us feel better. The misunderstanding consists in not recognizing the double-barreled meaning of "feeling better" that I repeatedly emphasize in insisting that somaesthetics is about improving our experience and not just our external bodily appearance or performance. As I wrote in first introducing the experiential dimension

of somaesthetics, its melioristic “methods aim to make us ‘feel better’ in both senses of this ambiguous phrase (which reflects the ambiguity of the very notion of aesthetics): to make the quality of our experience more satisfyingly rich, but also to make our awareness of somatic experience more acute and perceptive.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, the somaesthetic project embraces the root Baumgartian meaning and aim of aesthetics as concerned with improving perception, along with today’s more familiar notion of aesthetics as concerned with pleasures of sensory perception and beauty.

Central to this second idea of “feeling better,” namely the ability to perceive our bodily feelings more accurately and clearly, is a better appreciation of our feelings of pain in its wide-ranging multiple modalities that include discomfort, stress, disability, disease, or everyday illness. In early discussions of somaesthetics I insisted on the crucial importance of perceiving such painful, discomforting, or otherwise negative feelings for somaesthetics’ aims of improved knowledge and improved experience. “Consciousness of breathing can therefore make us aware that we are angry, tense, or anxious when we might otherwise remain unaware of these feelings and thus more vulnerable to the eventual pain, misdirection, or injury they could cause. Similarly, an excessive but “chronic muscular contraction that...results in tension and pain may nonetheless go unnoticed because it has become habitual. As unnoticed, this chronic contraction cannot be relieved, nor can its resultant disability and discomfort” (S 303). Improved body awareness through somaesthetic training, however, can bring such feelings of excessive contraction “to clear attention” so that “there is a chance to modify it” before it results in “unhealthy consequences” and “pain” (ibid.) An improved perception of pain, I elsewhere argue, is essential to athletes in monitoring their training and performance, such as “the bodybuilder [who] needs to know through inner experience the difference between the aching ‘burn’ of effort that builds muscles from other aches which mean injury.”<sup>2</sup>

I admit, however, that my primary focus in somaesthetics has been

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Shusterman, “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal,” first published in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 57:3 (1999), 299–313, citation from p. 305, hereafter S. The paper is reprinted with some minor revisions in *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the End of Art* (Ithaca:

directed toward pleasure and beauty whereas my discussions of the somaesthetics of pain and other negative somatic experiences have been rather meager and are very far from doing justice to the topic. In this paper, therefore, I want to make pain, illness, and injury the focus of somaesthetic inquiry while considering how they relate to everyday aesthetics. It is an obvious if unfortunate fact that these unwelcome experiences form part of the fabric of everyday life, even if they typically signal an unpleasant break in its smooth flow. One reason I chose to write this paper from the perspective of everyday aesthetics is to honor Arto Haapala, the focus of this Festschrift, because he has devoted significant scholarship to this topic and because he was the person who first introduced to the everyday aesthetics of Finland.

My first visit to Finland came from Arto's invitation. It was back in 1996 when he was still a freshly new Professor at the University of Helsinki, and I was a Fulbright professor in Berlin, on leave from Temple University. We had never met before. Arto picked me up at the airport but then brought me not to my hotel but directly to his home, where after grabbing a six-pack of beer from the fridge, he immediately led me (with that polite but silently sober style of cultivated Finns) to his apartment building's sauna and quietly instructed me to undress. I was too astounded to raise any questions or to object. And there we suddenly were, naked strangers sharing the experience of a hot, intimate, closed space – an aesthetic experience of a distinctly somatic character. Thus was I introduced to an iconic staple of what could be considered everyday Finnish somaesthetics, even if it is not for most people a daily habit or pastime.

At that moment, however, I did not yet think of the sauna in terms of somaesthetics, because, back in 1995, I had not yet conceived the concept of somaesthetics. The first mention of that concept was in my German book *Vor der Interpretation*, published in the fall of 1996, preceding my first English reference to somaesthetics in *Practicing Philosophy* (1997).<sup>3</sup> Now, in

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Cornell University Press, 2000), 159.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Vor der Interpretation: Sprache und Erfahrung in Hermeneutik, Dekonstruktion und Pragmatismus* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1996); and *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

recollecting that experience, I see that the sauna not only could serve as a good example of everyday Finnish somaesthetics (as opposed to some special art experience or special, overwhelming experience of natural beauty). It can also provide a useful example of a key point I would like to make in this essay: the intricate, intimate linking of pain and pleasure, of stressful discomfort and delightful relief. The stressful discomfort of the sauna's excessive heat, often accompanied by somewhat painful sensations in breathing, sitting, and sweating, forms a necessary part of the relaxing relief the sauna brings. The stressful shock of the cold lake water or cold shower on one's overheated body is likewise a blend of somaesthetic discomfort and delight. The birch-branch beating of the naked body (a practice belonging to Finnish traditions of sauna) is a more problematic case that I would not risk interpreting here, as I lack the necessary expertise.

Whatever one's experience with saunas, the idea of the powerfully intimate connection between pain and pleasure in aesthetic experience should be familiar to students of aesthetics, because it forms the basis of Edmund Burke's theory of the sublime.<sup>4</sup> Burke's theory is an important precedent for asserting this connection while also affirming the plurality of pleasures.<sup>5</sup> Burke famously distinguishes between the "positive pleasure" of beauty (among other positive pleasures) and what he calls "the relative pleasure" produced by the sublime which he dubs "Delight." In contrast to positive pleasure which is entirely independent of pain, delight is a *relative pleasure* in the sense of being in some way closely related to pain or danger

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4 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Penguin, 1998), 159. Page references hereafter to this work will appear in parentheses in the text with the abbreviation PE

5 In closely relating certain pleasures to pain, Burke did not however try to define them in terms of each other to provide a single scale of affect. Instead he affirmed the plurality or independent existence of positive pains and pleasures rather than regarding pain and pleasure as "mere relations, which can only exist as they are contrasted to each other" (PE81). For Burke, in other words, pleasure cannot simply be defined in terms of absence of pain while pain conversely as absence of pleasure. Contemporary neurological research confirms this view that pain and pleasure are bivalent rather than bipolar. Pain and pleasure involve different electromyographic changes in facial muscles, differences in cortical activation patterns and neural pathways, just as approach and avoidance behavior (behavioral correlates of pleasure and pain) are associated with different neurotransmitters and so can occur virtually simultaneously (thus generating conflict). See Daniel Kahnemann et al. (ed.), *Well-being: the Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: Russell Sage, 1999).

(where danger is understood as the threat of pain). Burke defines delight as “the sensation which accompanies the removal of pain or danger” or as “the feeling which results from the ceasing or diminution of pain” or from “the removal or moderation of pain.” The delight of the sublime, he claims, is thus “a sort of tranquility shadowed with horror” which we would experience “upon escaping some imminent danger, or on being released from the severity of some cruel pain.” Although not a positive pleasure in the sense of independence from pain, delight is certainly experienced as a “pleasure” or “satisfaction” (PE 82–83). With Burke’s understanding of the sublime as a delight based on relief from pain or the fear of danger to one’s self-preservation, we can perhaps find a place for the sublime in the everyday aesthetics of a sauna, whose extremities of heat were meant for health but can provide not only pain but even, if taken too long, involve some risks for one’s self-preservation.



## THE VALUES OF PAIN AND RELATED PLEASURES

**R**ather than linger on my first experience with Arto and the Finnish sauna, let me turn to more troubling cases of the somaesthetics of pain and discomfort, cases of illness and injury that are essentially different from sauna experiences because they normally occur involuntarily in our everyday life, indeed against our conscious will or desire, whereas we normally choose, willingly, to take a sauna. The first point to make is that although pain is experienced as an unpleasant or negative phenomenon, it has an essential positive function in everyday lives, one that evolved from our evolutionary needs. Pain is a conscious signal that something is wrong in one’s body and therefore needs attention; it is a strong, disturbing alert that is difficult to ignore and therefore extremely effective in gaining our attention and spurring our efforts to seek rapid remedy. Before our primal ancestors knew the secrets of biology, they knew that they had to treat wounds and stop bleeding in order to alleviate pain. If they did

not feel pain when they received a serious cut, they might have ignored the incident and bled to death. Pain should be seen, therefore, not as a merely negative aesthetic phenomenon but rather in terms of a melioristic framework in which its negative feeling serves as a positive force to improve one's experience. Pain is, at the most basic level, an evolutionary device to preserve life and to improve it, despite its distressing, often agonizing sensations.

Besides providing such stimulus to preserve ourselves and improve our situation, pain and illness instruct us in patience, discipline, and self-control. We learn to face up to adversity and accept our infirmities precisely by living with them, even if we simultaneously try to remedy or overcome them. The pain, illnesses, and infirmities that we suffer in our everyday lives are, as Montaigne argued, preparations in discipline and coping for the inevitable decline of our powers in old age and the ultimate loss of all powers in death. "We are born to grow old, to grow weak, to be sick, in spite of all medicine. ...We must learn to endure what we cannot avoid."<sup>6</sup>

Pain, illness, and injury can provide, he argues, a foretaste of death's possible agonies and thereby help us to prepare for them. Montaigne believed that our intense fears of death's agonies are largely exaggerated, because like most of our fears they are largely the product of the uncontrolled excessive workings of our imagination rather than of direct experience. "Many things seem to us greater in imagination than in reality," he argues, noting that he was long tormented by "the thought of illnesses so horrible that when I came to experience them I found their pains mild and easy compared with my fears" (EM 268). Montaigne insists that "the most grievous [fears]...and troubles are those that fancy loads upon us" (EM 832), and our everyday experiences of illness, injury, and pain provide us tools for deflating our exaggerated fears of suffering, because they approximate in some way the presumed pains and sufferings of the coming of terminal illness or death, just as they also provide practice in dealing with growing incapacities of old age. These ordinary sufferings serve as a useful askesis to prepare us for more challenging torments, and they have the further

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6 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), 835, hereafter EM.

advantage that they come to us freely and unbidden without any effort on our part, whereas heroic ascetics “of past times” had to seek out “such troubles” to train themselves in patience and endurance “to keep their virtue in breath and practice” (EM 837).

Montaigne’s appreciation of the merits and pleasures of illness and injury rest primarily on two examples. The first is a riding injury he suffered, when he and his horse were violently plowed into by a galloping horseman from behind, throwing Montaigne from his mount and rendering him temporarily unconscious and bleeding from the impact and the subsequent fall. Montaigne notes, however, that although he thought he was dying from this injury, he did not feel excruciating pain but instead a languid pleasure: “It seemed to me that my life was hanging only by the tip of my lips; and I closed my eyes in order, it seemed to me, to help push it out, and took pleasure in growing languid and letting myself go.” It was a pleasure “not only free from distress but mingled with that sweet feeling that people have who let themselves slide into sleep” (EM 269–270). He felt ready to die in this “pleasant and peaceful” condition; “it was a languor and an extreme weakness, without any pain” but with “infinite sweetness in this repose” (EM 272). Of course, Montaigne admits that once the initial hours of shock had passed and normal consciousness returned, he felt strong pains from his injuries. But his point remains that death-threatening injury need not be accompanied by violent pain but can instead bring a numbing of consciousness that has a degree of pleasure, a feeling of relaxed peace that comes from “letting go” of normal consciousness and its concerns.

My second example from Montaigne suggests perhaps even more strongly the intimate connection of pain and pleasure in our suffering from illness or injury. Here the example is not a sudden and unusual accident like his horseback collision, but rather something from the fabric of Montaigne’s everyday life, his long and painful struggle with his illness of kidney stones. Without disregarding or minimizing the discomfort and attacks of severe pain he suffered from this malady, Montaigne highlights the particular pleasures that arise from relieving himself of the pain of a stone.

But is there anything so sweet as that sudden change, when from extreme pain, by the voiding of my stone, I come to recover as if by lightning the

beautiful light of health, so free and so full, as happens in our sudden and sharpest attacks of colic? Is there anything in this pain we suffer that can be said to counterbalance the pleasure of such sudden improvement? How much more beautiful health seems to me after the illness, when they are so near and contiguous that I can recognize them in each other's presence in their proudest array, when they vie with each other as if to oppose each other squarely! Just as the Stoics say that vices are brought into the world usefully to give value to virtue and assist it, we can say, with better reason and less bold conjecture, that nature has lent us pain for the honor and service of pleasure and painlessness. When Socrates, after being relieved of his irons, felt the relish of the itching that their weight had caused in his legs, he rejoiced to consider the close alliance between pain and pleasure, how they are associated by a necessary link, so that they follow and engender each other in turn (EM 838).

I am not such an expert in all the varieties of pain to insist that we go so far as to agree with Montaigne that the pleasures of relief are always stronger than the pains they relieve. But we do not need to go so far in order to appreciate the validity of Montaigne's essential point. That is, namely, that pains entail corresponding pleasures that would not exist without them – that there are pleasures that hover behind our sufferings and that we would do well to attend to them in order to bring them out more fully. Let me offer two examples from my own experience, which, precisely because they are less extreme than Montaigne's riding accident and kidney stone sufferings, are perhaps more appropriately considered as belonging to the everyday somaesthetics of pain.

The first concerns feelings that I typically have when ill with a mild flu. I typically suffer from a slight headache and vague muscle aches but my key symptoms are feelings of weakness, feverishness, and dizziness. So long as I am in bed, these sensations, though perhaps discomfiting in themselves, give rise to vague, mild but distinctly pleasurable feelings of languor and muscular release that arise from my sense of weak feverishness. Such feelings of bodily weakness are not experienced as a frustrating impotence of action but rather as a liberating, peaceful release from striving. Though it is very hard to describe, the kind of feeling is a relaxed, lazy, dreamy



sensation or mood, somewhat like the pleasurable, drowsy lethargy that I feel when I have slept unusually long and deeply (especially in an afternoon siesta) and am reluctant to break out of the seductive bonds of continued sleep. My illness feeling of pleasurable languorous weakness, however, is instead not marked by drowsy dullness but rather by heightened awareness to my bodily sensations. The reason for this pleasurable feeling, I believe, is that such felt somatic weakness, by detaching the individual from the world of action and by its clear association with the various bodily discomforts or pains of illness, provides a feeling of enhanced bodily awareness that allows me to savor more powerfully the pleasures of languor and repose that this weakness generates. Illness prompts us to pay greater attention to our somatic feelings because they are, for the most part, more disturbing than usual and because our somatic incapacity or weakness distances us from the realm of action that usually claims our attention. Merleau-Ponty seems to be aware of this point, when he describes the body as “la cachette de la vie,” “the place where life hides away” from the world, where I retreat, in illness, from my interest in observing or acting in the world and thus “become absorbed in the experience of my body and in the solitude of sensations,” where I can “lose myself in some pleasure or pain, and shut myself up” in these somatic perceptions.<sup>7</sup>

My second personal example involves the experiences of migraines that I occasionally suffer after several weeks of too much work, stress, and travel. The headache feels as if a heavy force were pounding and pressing on my brain, both from the outside and the inside, creating what might be described as a heavy, iron-spiked curtain or storm cloud of dark pain that fills my consciousness with aching pressure. By now, however, I also know the signs of the gradual passing or recovery from my migraines: these are feelings of increasing moments or waves of sensing the reduction of the

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 164–165. Merleau-Ponty, however, like most philosophers, is not really sympathetic to reflective attention to one’s somatic feelings; he regards such attention as a withdrawal from the world and one’s full personhood and into an impersonal bodily existence that “subtends [one’s] personal one” (ibid.). For a discussion of Merleau-Ponty’s critique of reflection on one’s somatic perceptions or feelings, see Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49–76.

painful pressure, increasing moments and longer stretches of lightness, clarity, and relief, like increasing patches of sunlight in an overcast sky. These feelings are steeped in a double pleasure: on the one hand, pleasurable sensations of relief; on the other hand, the pleasure of anticipation that further and final relief is on the way.

Let me now turn from Montaigne in sixteenth-century France to another great prose writer, one from twentieth-century England, in order to explore these ideas more fully.

III  
ENTERTAINING ENJOYMENTS  
OF EVERYDAY ILLNESS

Virginia Woolf suffered from mental illness throughout her adult life and eventually committed suicide by drowning herself in a river. But in the essay on which I focus here, “On Being Ill,” she concerns herself with everyday physical illnesses: fever, flu, tooth aches and headaches.<sup>8</sup> The essay begins by registering both surprise and critique that illness has not played a larger role as a topic of literature.

Considering how common illness is, how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to view, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise of temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted in us by the act of sickness, how we go down into the pit of death and feel the waters of annihilation close above our heads and wake thinking to find ourselves in the presence of the angels and the harpers when we have a tooth out and come to the surface in the dentist’s arm-chair and confuse his “Rinse the mouth-rinse the mouth”

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<sup>8</sup> The essay was first published in January 1926 by T.S. Eliot in his literary journal *The Criterion*. I cite from the version published in Virginia Woolf, *The Moment and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1976); hereafter BI.

with the greeting of the Deity stooping from the floor of Heaven to welcome us-when we think of this, as we are so frequently forced to think of it, it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love and battle and jealousy among the prime themes of literature (BI 9).

Woolf acknowledges, of course, that there are exceptions to literature's neglect of illness. She mentions De Quincey and Proust, and from our later perspective we should certainly note Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, published in 1924 but not translated into English until 1927, a year after her essay was published. Woolf suggests that part of the reason for literature's neglect of illness as a central theme "is the poverty of language" for clearly and vividly describing the various symptoms and dimensions of being ill. "English," she complains, "has no words for [describing] the shiver and the headache...The merest schoolgirl, when she falls in love, has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her; but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry" (BI 11).

Like Montaigne, Woolf insists that along with its discomfort and pain, illness brings certain benefits. Being "in the bed with influenza" can provide a "great experience...[of] how the world has changed its shape; the tools of business grown remote; the sounds of festival become romantic like a merry-go-round heard across far fields; and friends have changed, some putting on a strange beauty, others deformed to the squatness of toads" (BI 12). The combinatorial logic of this changing of the world through illness is the change in our perception that shapes our world and the change that illness effects in shaping our perception. In terms of familiar theories of artistic perception and creation, illness involves a defamiliarization of our normal world of experience because it changes the way we perceive and deal with things. There are different mechanisms for this change of perception. Woolf does not speak of the ways certain illnesses affect the bodily senses so as to change our perceptions in sensorial terms: the way lupus can cause blurry vision or the way a bad cold or flu can rob you of your sense of taste and smell. Instead she focuses on the changes of perception that come from the psychological shift that illness brings.

A key factor of such psychological change is the release from one's normal practical mentality of action and from the conventional conduct

that govern one's normal active life and its communicative behavior. When we are bedridden with illness, we have the excuse and indeed the compulsion to withdraw temporarily from the rat race of normal business and family responsibilities in order to care for oneself; one has the excuse to remove one's social masks just as one removes one's working clothes to lie and linger in one's bedclothes. This abandoning of business includes neglecting the normal duties of communication; we can turn off our computers and not consult our email messages; illness allows us to be responsibly irresponsible in not responding to people in ways that would be rude if we were healthy. As Virginia Woolf describes this change, but in her predigital world: "In health the genial pretence must be kept up and the effort renewed – to communicate, to civilise, to share, to cultivate the desert, educate the native, to work together by day and by night to sport. In illness this make-believe ceases...[and] we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters," so we become free to notice and dwell on other things than those that usually preoccupy us (BI 14).

Here Woolf gives the example of looking at the sky, which we typically hardly notice and ordinarily never focus on with sustained contemplation. "Ordinarily to look at the sky for any length of time is impossible. Pedestrians would be impeded and disconcerted by a public sky-gazer. What snatches we get of it are mutilated by chimneys and churches" and merely "serve as background" to the focus of our action and perception; we are too busy with business or social activities to find a place to stop and look intently at the sky (BI 14).

When illness compels us to lie in bed, however, we are in a different position, both literally and figuratively. We are figuratively in a different position by being psychologically free of our preoccupation with the world of action that entails locomotion and the focusing on practical matters. We are thus free to contemplate the sky, just as we are also free to close our eyes and focus on our somatic feelings. Moreover, in being in one's sick bed, one is literally in a different position than usual simply by having an uncustomary somatic posture for waking life. Normally in our waking-life sphere of practical action we are either walking, standing, or sitting. When we do lie down in everyday life, it is to sleep not to

contemplate. Bedridden with illness, however, we occupy an unusual somatic position for waking life – lying down. Moreover, the typical lying down position in bed–confined illness is usually a supine position which naturally leads us to gaze outward and upward – hence encouraging us to contemplate the sky or the trees or the birds that appear through the window, or indeed the paint, pictures, cobwebs of the walls and ceiling that enclose us and surround one’s bed.

Moreover, by disengaging us from our bodily habits of movement, standing, and sitting and thus from habitual thought patterns that accompany these bodily habits, the supine bedridden position has some distinct advantages for observing not only the soma’s surroundings but also its inner sensations. With our sphere of external action and observation significantly limited, we have a better opportunity to reflect on what is going on in the sphere of one’s soma. Moreover, lying in bed, we can close our eyes to concentrate on discerning our inner somatic sensations without the distractions of seeing our surroundings and without any fear of falling. Most people, however, do not take advantage of this opportunity. Instead, robbed of their ordinary distractions of activity, the sick fill their attention with other distractions: watching TV, reading the newspaper, leafing through magazines, speaking on the phone. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with distracting oneself when one is ill and immobilized. I would simply add that somaesthetic attention to one’s bodily feelings (including the actions of breathing) can also be a cognitively rich source of distracting entertainment from the boredom of lying in bed and of simply worrying about the significance of one’s illness’s pains and discomfort. Somaesthetic reflection can also, as I suggested above, provide a way of finding pleasure in such pain and discomfort, even if only the pleasures of discriminating cognition. The somaesthetics of everyday discomfort, illness, and pain should thus not be characterized as a wholly negative aesthetics nor a wholly positive one of beauty and pleasure. It is a melioristic aesthetics, occupying the middle realm, as we humans do, between the brutes we think we know and the perfect gods we imagine.

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## EPILOGUE

JOS DE MUL

### THESE BOOTS ARE MADE FOR TALKIN' SOME REFLECTIONS ON FINNISH MOBILE IMMOBILITY

*You can't be a Real Country unless you have a beer and an airline—it helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer.*

**Frank Zappa**

## ABSTRACT

On January 13–15 2005, a conference entitled *Aesthetics and Mobility* was held in Helsinki. On invitation of the organizers, Arto Haapala (University of Helsinki) and Ossi Naukkarinen (University of Art and Design Helsinki), I took part in this wonderful event. I knew Arto from the regular meetings of the International Association for Aesthetics and it was a great opportunity to get acquainted with his research project *Aesthetics, Mobility, and Change* and his international network of scholars. As it was my first visit to Finland, I also took the opportunity to get introduced to Helsinki and Finnish culture. Afterwards, I wrote down my impressions of the conference and my memories of the visit. On occasion of the Festschrift for Arto I've worked up these personal notes as a tribute to him, esteemed colleague and distant friend.

## AESTHETICS AND MOBILITY

I could have easily left my Eskimo-hat and gloves at home. Instead of minus 20 degrees, the digital thermometer in the Aleksanterinkatu in Helsinki indicates plus 7 Celsius. I was hoping for a winter wonderland, instead it rained incessantly. Even in this self-declared eco-paradise that is Finland the climate in January 2005 seems somewhat out of sorts.

Together with my Finnish host Ossi Naukkarinen and my American colleague Joseph Kupfer I walked from the University guest house to the stately main building of the University of Helsinki situated in the old town square. With Nokia's headquarters almost next door, the city of Helsinki seems to be the perfect location for a conference on *Aesthetics and Mobility*.<sup>1</sup> Only a few decades ago Finland was an agricultural society and yet it has now seen an explosive growth of mobility of people, goods and information. In 1960 the five million inhabitants of Finland owned less than half a million cars between them, while in 2005 the number of cars on the road has grown to five times that number. Over the same period the number of intercontinental flights taken annually by the Finns rose from 0,2 to over 8 million. And Nokia transformed itself in the same period from an ailing producer of wellington boots to the figurehead of the Finnish high-tech industry.

## MOBILISATION IS GLOBALISATION

Certainly, Finland is not alone in this. Mobilisation is globalisation. Resources, consumer goods and even waste are moved to and from all the time. The world's population is also constantly on the move because of labour migration, tourism and the flow of refugees. *Homo mobilis* not just travels longer distances but also does that with greater speed. Even those who stay put, keep up with the fast pace of life. They keep up the pace

<sup>1</sup> The proceedings of this conference, edited by Arto Haapala and Ossi Naukkarinen, were published in 2015 as a special issue of the online journal *Contemporary Aesthetics* (<https://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/journal.php?volume=13>)



at the fitness centre, or while lounging on the sofa, zapping through dozens of TV channels or unlocking numerous virtual and augmented locations when playing computer games. And at the same time we also manage to exchange billions of bits of information with each other via our mobile phone and the internet. Is this perhaps what the German writer Ernst Jünger referred to in 1931 when he wrote about the 'totale Mobilmachung' of our culture?<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly so, but nowadays we tend to use the English turn of phrase: Wherever we go, we go with the flow!

And this can also be said of the speakers at the conference. Tens of cultural academics and historians, architects, engineers, philosophers and artists have been flown in from all over the world to analyse the new experiences of beauty that go hand in hand with the mobilisation of culture. They are not the first to do so. Decades before Jünger the Italian futurists eulogised the beauty of mobility. In 1909 Marinetti wrote in his Futuristic Manifest, 'Up until now literature has glorified pensive immobility. We declare that the greatness of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: that of speed. A racing car, its bonnet decorated with thick tubes that look like fire-breathing snakes ... a car with a throbbing engine, looking like a machine gun when it moves and more beautiful than the *Nikè of Samotrace*.'

This statement certainly did not fall on deaf ears, as speaker Filip Geerts makes clear in his lecture on urban utopias that in the last century have been projected onto aviation. In Le Corbusier's *Ville contemporaine pour trois millions d'habitants* from 1922, airplanes fly to and fro between skyscrapers, thus erasing the distinction between city and airfield. These dynamics not only apply to aviation, as is shown by Pasi Kolhonen who talks of the maelstrom of moving billboards and images that surround and drive the inhabitants of the metropolises of today. And Mikko Villi argues how mobile phones with their inbuilt cameras have created a new phase in the mobility of the image. In contrast to the moving images on the billboards, which stay fixed on the spot, the photographic image

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<sup>2</sup> Ernst Jünger, 'Die totale Mobilmachung', in: *Krieg und Krieger*. Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1930, 9–30.

released from the paper now whizz back and forth between mobile phones. These are fleeting images, partly because the users do not save them on their phone. The mobile phone transforms the photograph from being a lasting record to a momentary message. Five years after this conference Snapchat turned this transformation of photography into a successful business model.

Anne Marit Waades gave a rather humorous lecture on hyper tourism, by referring to the TV programme Pilot Guides ([www.pilotguides.com](http://www.pilotguides.com)). We are shown an episode in which the hyperactive travel guide Ian Wright drags us through the tourist database of Brazil in under 10 minutes in a delirious vortex filled with planes, hang gliders, speed boats and race horses. Out of breath, we can then conclude that after such a condensation of time and space the real trip will be nothing but disappointing.

The hypermobile phenomena raise a mixture of fascination and repulsion in the speakers and audience alike. In that sense the mobilising technologies are very similar to a hard drug. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that one talks both of 'users' of narcotics and of new media. For both groups of addicts the kick quickly wears off and the need for more grows ever faster. And as is the case with each addiction, the most intriguing question remains who or what uses who or what.

## BEER SAUNAS

**A**nd as for traditional intoxicants, it is clear that many Finns don't know how to restrain themselves either, as I visit the Kotiharju's sauna together with Ossi that evening, located in one of the older districts of Helsinki. This is one of the last remaining traditional public saunas in Finland, as almost every household now has their own. Having got ourselves undressed in the rather dilapidated changing rooms, we enter a sauna with the size of a modest ballroom. In one of corners there is a wood-burning stove measuring a few metres tall. Everywhere on the wooden benches of the amphitheatre fat-bellied Finns sit quietly drinking

an incessant stream of Finnish beer – sold in half-litre bottles by the ticket seller – to stay off the dry heat. Even if only the names of the biggest drinkers live on, the Finnish people must have a huge collective memory.

It is impossible, however, to accuse the people of this country of excessive loquacity. Yet they enjoy self-mockery. The majority of Finns is able to be fluently silent in at least five languages, as Ossi assures us with a straight face. I remember the guest lectures I gave at the university a few days ago which had rather unsettled me. The students had looked at me with a silent gaze, hardly showing any inner life at all, let alone any interest in my explanation of the concept of ‘database-ontology’. Fortunately, the emails I received on my return home containing intelligent questions and commentary from the students reassured me that my lectures were appreciated alright, but it is a mystery how this reticence to talk can be squared with the success of the mobile phone in Finland. Or has it something to do with the vast expanse of the Finnish countryside and its endless woods and lakes and lack of land lines?

On the second day of the conference the American philosopher Joseph Knapfer reveals himself as a technological teetotaler. According to the best cultural pessimistic tradition he claims mobility technologies will inevitably lead to displacement. Thanks to the new means of transport and communication we can now go anywhere we want and at the same time be present anywhere we want, and yet we are nowhere any more. Detached from our physical contact with nature, we become estranged from each other and from ourselves. And not to forget the sacrifices we make because of mobilisation. While the world regularly grieves collectively when natural disasters or acts of war cause thousands of casualties, hardly anyone is aware of the million road traffic victims every year. This message is well received by many of the older Finnish participants. The younger generation at the conference seems to be less bothered by it, as is the case with young people all over the world. They don’t seem to miss spending long winter evenings sitting quietly round a wood-burning stove.

## KIRKKONUMMI

Even though I am not a fanatic nature lover, the next day I am bowled over by the nature in Finland, when Markku Hakuri takes me on a trip through the forests west of Helsinki. Markku is professor of 'environmental art' at the University of Art and Design (which used to be located in the old Arabia ceramics factory in Helsinki) and as a visual artist has achieved fame with his impressive ice and fire sculptures in the Finnish landscape, among other things. Today he is taking me along to the Hviträsk, which is a monumental villa built between 1901 and 1903 by the architects Herman Gesellius, Armas Lindgren and Eliel Saarinen, in national romantic style, located in a wonderful wooded area overlooking a lake near the village of Kirkkonummi. The three architects and their wives also designed the Jugendstil interior of the house which has been implemented down to the smallest detail. As we wander through this magnificent house, in awe of the ingenious panelling, the various dark pieces of furniture inlaid with several types of wood, and the stained-glass windows, the mobile culture suddenly seems so far away.

Afterwards Markku invites us for a late lunch in his house in a hamlet close to Espoo. It is three o'clock in the afternoon and dusk is already setting in around the old wooden house. Inside we sit near the wood-burning stove and enjoy the salmon and reindeer meat while Markku and his wife Kaarina, who is a music teacher, tell us about the rather tempestuous love relationships between the six residents of the villa Hviträsk. It reminds me of the films of Ingmar Bergman. Markku and Kaarina also adore his films, although, measured by their Finnish heart, they regard the Swedish film director as being a bit too frivolous. Time stands still when Kaarina takes out the blueberry pie out of the oven – the size of which defies any Aga – and despite darkness falling and the stillness all around us we quite simply feel happy in the Normankatu.

The next day I become fascinated yet again by Finnish immobility when I visit the exposition Monitoring Visual Landscapes in Finland at the University of Art & Design. The photographer Tapio Heikkilä explains

how since 1996 he has photographed the typical Finnish landscapes with regular intervals documenting the changes in landscape caused by modernisation. Spot the differences. No matter how hard I stare at the series photographs of continually the same landscape, except perhaps for the appearance and disappearance of a lone walker or roaming reindeer, I cannot see any development at all. I am probably already hopelessly corrupted by the aesthetics of speed. More senior Finnish visitors stand in front of the photo's shaking their heads, appalled by the rate at which the Finnish landscape seems to be disappearing.

And yet rural and urban areas in Finland appear to develop at different rates. Despite the fact that Helsinki seems provincial compared to many other capital cities in Europe, its architecture – of which Nokia's headquarters is a showcase, erected in highly modernist glass and steel – is hardly any different from what we see in other places. In the new, also hyper modern-looking Kiasma museum, with its many curves in the interior reminding me instantly of the Guggenheim in New York, I visit the exposition *Love me or leave me*, which gives an overview of the 'most loved, much-talked about and hated' works from its own collections. You can see the effect of globalisation here too; the exposition shows neatly the international trends and movements over the last few decades. I am not that impressed by the Finnish contributions to modern art brought together here, although there are a few exceptions. Jan-Erik Andersson's *The Triangle, the Square and the Circle. Meet the Fast-Food-Boat* from 1988 is a little gem. The installation consists of a floating snack bar, offering a very interesting menu. Behind the salesgirl a large number of pictures of dishes can be seen in which various icons from twentieth-century art are recombined. Anyone interested in Fusion Art can choose among other things between Malevich Flakes with Kiefer Sauce, a Keith Haring Herring and an A Sol leWitt Cube with Pollock dressing. Database art combined with an amusing mobile ontology.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed exposition of this database ontology and its impact on art and aesthetic experience, see my contribution to the conference, entitled 'From Mobile Ontologies to Mobile Aesthetics' (<https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=346>) .

## HOMO MOBILIS

One of the last lectures of the conference is given by my Helsinki-based colleague Arto Haapala, whom I have known for several decades now as a co-member of the International Association for Aesthetics. Haapala puts the contrast between mobility enthusiasts and prophets of doom in perspective. He distinguishes between three forms of identity: place-related, cosmopolitan and nomadic. As an example of the *place-related* type of identity Haapala refers to his grandmother, who – like my own grandmother – has not practically ever left the village in which she was born, during her entire life, let alone been abroad. Just like a tree in a forest she was rooted to her ‘spot’ and surrounded by familiar things. Whoever moves house is confronted with a new environment and needs to try and get settled, to find her or his way again.

In the mobile culture, where work and holidays keep us on the move all the time, this ‘feeling for being in a place’ starts to erode. The new form of identity related to this, and inspired by thinkers such as Deleuze, is called *nomadic*. However, according to Haapala, the name is not justified in most cases. People have an insatiable longing to create a familiar place for themselves. The modern-day *Homo mobilis* manages to do this by making sure that every environment looks the same. This explains the success of global hotel chains, fast-food restaurants and coffee shops such as Hilton, McDonalds and Starbucks. They are not very attractive buildings nor is the food or coffee particularly amazing (to put it mildly), but they offer a much-needed familiarity to the *cosmopolitan* citizen when he is abroad. Many travel companies offer tourists a similarly familiar environment, whereby they can go on excursions sampling exotic culture in small doses and are led by an experienced tour guide.

The popularity of the mobile phone, which stores our favourite music, offers personalised displays and ringtones and ‘virtual residence’ technologies, can also be explained by this ‘longing for home’, as it allows

us to access our personal documents and photos, no matter where we are. Such mobile technologies create a virtual home around us. Such bubbles allow us to move and stay put at the same time. Perhaps that is the reason why the immobile Finns have become so hooked on mobile technology. They have been caught up in a mobile immobility.

I focus again on Haapala. He finishes his argument by saying that being nomadic means being able to move about without having a home. Only a few manage to do that. Because even the most nomadic of people keep coming back to the same places. Perhaps that is a good thing.

It is 4.30 a.m. when my phone alarm wakes me. In two hours' time I will fly back to the Netherlands. While I am waiting for the taxi that will take me to the airport, the weather seems to have turned. The icy wind is carrying the first snowflakes to Vironkatu. It's still dark and the streets are deserted. I am longing for home.

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